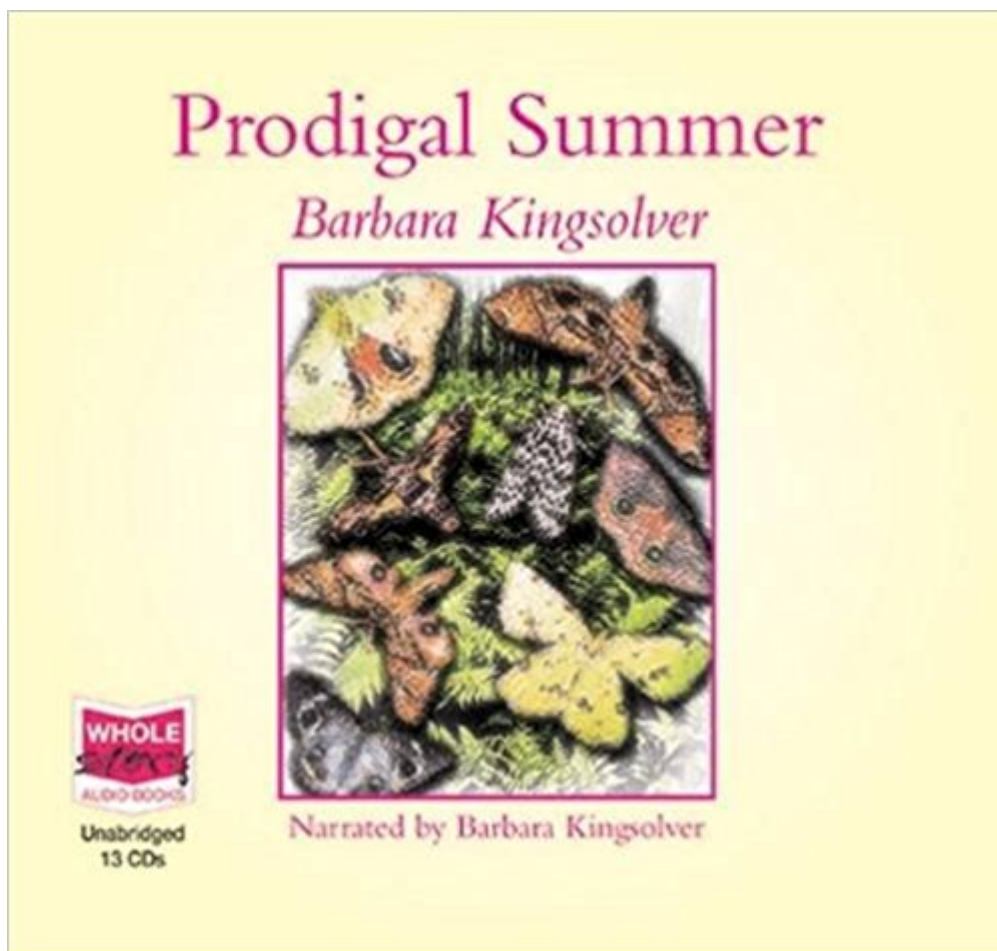


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# Prodigal Summer



## Synopsis

Barbara Kingsolver's fifth novel is a hymn to wildness that celebrates the prodigal spirit of human nature, and of nature itself. It weaves together three stories of human love within a larger tapestry of lives amid the mountains and farms of southern Appalachia. Over the course of one humid summer, this novel's intriguing protagonists face disparate predicaments but find connections to one another and to the flora and fauna with which they necessarily share a place.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There is no one in contemporary literature quite like Barbara Kingsolver. Her dialogue sparkles with sassy wit and earthy poetry; her descriptions are rooted in daily life but are also on familiar terms with the eternal. With *Prodigal Summer*, she returns from the Congo to a "wrinkle on the map that lies between farms and wildness." And there, in an isolated pocket of southern Appalachia, she recounts not one but three intricate stories. Exuberant, lush, riotous--the summer of the novel is "the season of extravagant procreation" in which bullfrogs carelessly lay their jellied masses of eggs in the grass, "apparently confident that their tadpoles would be able to swim through the lawn like little sperms," and in which a woman may learn to "tell time with her skin." It is also the summer in which a family of coyotes moves into the mountains above Zebulon Valley: The ghost of a creature long extinct was coming in on silent footprints, returning to the place it had once held in the complex anatomy of this forest like a beating heart returned to its body. This is what she believed she would see, if she watched, at this magical juncture: a restoration. The "she" is Deanna Wolfe, a wildlife biologist observing the coyotes from her isolated aerie--isolated, that is, until the arrival of a young hunter who makes her even more aware of the truth that humans are only an infinitesimal portion in

the ecological balance. This truth forms the axis around which the other two narratives revolve: the story of a city girl, entomologist, and new widow and her efforts to find a place for herself; and the story of Garnett Walker and Nannie Rawley, who seem bent on thrashing out the countless intimate lessons of biology as only an irascible traditional farmer and a devotee of organic agriculture can. As Nannie lectures Garnett, "Everything alive is connected to every other by fine, invisible threads. Things you don't see can help you plenty, and things you try to control will often rear back and bite you, and that's the moral of the story." Structurally, that gossamer web is the story: images, phrases, and events link the narratives, and these echoes are rarely obvious, always serendipitous. Kingsolver is one of those authors for whom the terrifying elegance of nature is both aesthetic wonder and source of a fierce and abiding moral vision. She may have inherited Thoreau's mantle, but she piles up riches of her own making, blending her extravagant narrative gift with benevolent concise humor. She treads the line between the sentimental and the glorious like nobody else in American literature. --Kelly Flynn

HA beguiling departure for Kingsolver, who generally tackles social themes with trenchantly serious messages, this sentimental but honest novel exhibits a talent for fiction lighter in mood and tone than *The Poisonwood Bible* and her previous works. There is also a new emphasis on the natural world, described in sensuous language and precise detail. But Kingsolver continues to take on timely issues, here focusing on the ecological damage caused by herbicides, ethical questions about raising tobacco, and the endangered condition of subsistence farming. A corner of southern Appalachia serves as the setting for the stories of three intertwined lives, and alternating chapters with recurring names signal which of the three protagonists is taking center stage. Each character suffers because his or her way of looking at the world seems incompatible with that of loved ones. In the chapters called "Predator," forest ranger Deanna Wolfe is a 40-plus wildlife biologist and staunch defender of coyotes, which have recently extended their range into Appalachia. Wyoming rancher Eddie Bondo also invades her territory, on a bounty hunt to kill the same nest of coyotes that Deanna is protecting. Their passionate but seemingly ill-fated affair takes place in summertime and mirrors "the eroticism of fecund woods" and "the season of extravagant procreation." Meanwhile, in the chapters called "Moth Love," newly married entomologist Lusa Maluf Landowski is left a widow on her husband's farm with five envious sisters-in-law, crushing debts and a desperate and brilliant idea. Crusty old farmer Garnett Walker ("Old Chestnuts") learns to respect his archenemy, who crusades for organic farming and opposes Garnett's use of pesticides. If Kingsolver is sometimes too blatant in creating diametrically opposed characters and paradoxical

inconsistencies, readers will be seduced by her effortless prose, her subtle use of Appalachian patois. They'll also respond to the sympathy with which she reflects the difficult lives of people struggling on the hard edge of poverty while tied intimately to the natural world and engaged in an elemental search for dignity and human connection. (Nov.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

One of Kingsolver's greatest gifts as a writer is the ability to weave different stories into one whole. In *Thornwood Bible* she keeps the voices of the sisters, including one ghost, all so distinctive that it takes only a sentence or two to know which sister is speaking as a chapter starts. In this book, she tells the story of Deanna, a National Park Service employee who lives alone in the woods and likes it. Her life is disturbed by the appearance of a young man, much younger than she is, who turns her tidy little world upside down. Lusa, a girl from the big city of Lexington, is forced to find her own way when her husband Cole is killed suddenly in an auto accident. Garnett, an elderly man, is fretted to death by his equally elderly neighbor, Nannie. As we learn more of these three, we learn how their lives intertwine. They are all three part of one story, and the revelations of their interconnection is masterly.

Barbara Kingsolver's exquisite *Prodigal Summer* is one of the best books I've ever read. But the Kindle version I just bought tonight (to enjoy reading it again, without having to unearth my long-unseen paperback) is atrocious. Not just bad; atrocious. In the first 18 pages, I found three serious errors where combinations of missing/extraneous words, missing/extraneous punctuation and/or incorrect paragraphing made it impossible to tell what text was intended and whether that text was supposed to be private thoughts of the narrator, spoken words by the narrator, or spoken words by woodsman Eddie Bondo. One example: On page 18, when Eddie Bondo asks the narrator, "How do you know it's breeding?", there follows a paragraph in quotes obviously containing her answer. Then comes the next paragraph: "Amazi Eddie Bondo." That's it. Nothing else. Presumably spoken words, because there's a beginning quote mark. But no ending quote mark, even though the next paragraph begins "Oh, it's not...." -- clearly a spoken contradiction of something before it, implying a change in speaker, so the previous speech must have ended already -- but how could it have ended without a closing quote mark? And what exactly is "Amazi Eddie Bondo" supposed to mean, anyway, regardless of whose voice it's in? The text has been garbaged. Unfortunately, this was part of an important interaction between two key characters that sets up the entire rest of the book. If I care (and why else would I be reading it?), I have to go find another copy of the book to pin

down what's actually going on here. And this was the third such example in just the first 18 pages. I quit. If I have to go locate my misplaced paperback to find out what the text was supposed to be, I don't need the Kindle version in the first place. A waste of money, and the loss of the delightful time I had hoped to spend tonight re-reading a treasured masterpiece., most of the last Kindle books I've read (and until now I've been a frequent buyer -- nearly 200 books in my library) have enough random errors that I have had to stop many, many times within each one to try to figure out what a particular section of the text should have been. Frequent mistakes in creating an electronic version disrupt reading pleasure in addition to generating reader dislike of the vendor. You need to do better if you want to continue to dominate the market. When you perform this badly, you provide an incentive for others to invest in taking your market share by doing properly what you're making a mess of. For shame. I continue to love for many, many things. Alas, though, I will now think an awfully long time before buying any Kindle book I can do without -- because as of now, I just don't trust you. Too bad. Hope you can turn the present quality control problems around. Meantime, I will be seeking a credit for the purchase price of this book because of the errors in just the first few pages and will be happy to document the other two early ones to Customer Service if required. P.S. While the quality is this bad, , why don't you at least provide an easy way for your customers to call your attention to places that need to be fixed? You could crowdsource this, you know! (and customers might not be so upset with the errors if they could instead engage in a positive action to help correct them).

I wanted to like this. I did. But I just thought it was so boring. I didn't care about the characters at all; I didn't care what happened to them or their problems or the people around them. The book plodded along and I prefer a book with a faster pace. It was a very naturey book, so perhaps those kinds of people would like it. I tend to prefer very character driven stories so because I didn't care about them, the book died for me. I almost always finish every book I read. Not this time.

I don't know much about biology, so it took me a while to get into the book, but by the third chapter, I was hooked. The author has a deep appreciation for nature. The book reminded me of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* at times, but wrapped in a story featuring characters that each had their own reasons for living in the rugged, remote mountains of southern Appalachia. Kingsolver's wonderful depictions of the wildlife (beautiful moths and butterflies, rodents, snakes, wild vines, old forest hickory trees etc) inhabiting the forest made the place come alive for me. The characters were unique, interesting, and believable, age of 8 to 80, each with their own age-appropriate struggles. I

feel blessed to have found Barbara's book, and will certainly be reading more in the future.

Very enjoyable read. You probably need to be a rural dweller or an urban dweller with a strong hankering for the country to really enjoy it. Strong into the need for conservation though given with a light touch. There are three main story lines, two more substantial than the third - though the third adds some additional humour. All the characters are interconnected but only connect in indirect ways. The strong characters are all women of (nearly) different generations who all have solitary existences either chosen or not, and they cope with life in their own individual ways.

Kingsolver does a masterful job of weaving together the personal stories of three "couples." These six, not necessarily married, are or become deeply involved and the consequences of their relationships are unpredictable and fascinating. The author respects all her characters but the women are strong and admirable, each in different ways. There is an environmental bias incorporated regarding man's proper place in nature. This thread is not only current but scientifically informed and hopeful. Taken as a whole, the work is credible, well crafted and very impressive.

Beautiful lovely restful beautiful happy charming .. I can't say enough good things about this. Gentle and mesmerizing far and away her most consistently lovely work.

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