

# An Analysis of Flight Behaviour as a novel depicting climate crisis in the anthropogenic age

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## Abstract

Climate change a global man-made and complex threat has brought many millions of livelihoods and ecosystems around the world at risk. It is high time we realize that we are living on a human dominated planet imposing a lot of pressure on the systems on earth. The main reason for global warming since the early 20th century is considered to be the emission of fossil fuels as result of Industrial Revolution in the late 1970's. Correspondingly, in literary studies and in literature climate change is of course emerging as a dominant theme and many authors have dealt with this theme in their work. This prevalence of climatic change or climate crisis in literature has therefore brought about a greater involvement in literary studies, notably the branch of studies related to the environment called ecocriticism.

**Keywords;** *Climate Change, Global warming, Industrial Revolution, Ecocriticism*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the major and highly debatable subjects of the contemporary age: climate change, by analyzing one of the novels by Barbara Kingsolver – “Flight Behaviour”. It is a fact to be noted that the novel (2012) readily deals with the important changes of climatic conditions by keeping track of the interactions between the planetary and local surroundings. As the text proceeds we are prompted to study the small geographically related human experience and memory – within the large context of the Anthropocene. The subject of climate change has become a challenge to any novelist as it has become one of the pressing issues of the present day.

## II. FLIGHT BEHAVIOUR AS A CLIMATE CHANGE FICTION

Flight Behaviour works as a very good example of a novel dealing with a lot of climatic issues, doing a lot of justice to both climate crisis – and climate

change. Moreover it also shows the intensity of the climate change debate through thought provoking conversations of its characters which seem intelligent, without adapting to sarcasm or cynicism. It is clear that with her powerful novel, Kingsolver delivers literary fiction that conveys an urgent social message or a warning call about climate change, too intelligible and clear which cannot be ignored by anyone. Washington Post a major American daily newspaper has said that “Kingsolver has written one of the most thoughtful novels about the scientific, financial and psychological intricacies of climate change and her abilities to put these silent, breathtakingly beautiful butterflies at the center of these calamitous and noisy debate is nothing short of brilliant”. Kingsolver introduces her central character, Dellarobia as an ordinary person leading a family life which almost bores her to the core. Having found no meaning in her mundane life of being a farmer's wife and a young mother takes her first flight to meet her lover in the woods one fine morning. On her way she accidentally comes across

a sea of oranges, and totally mesmerized at the sight, she decides not to proceed further and returns home instead. The sight of these oranges which leaves a volley of questions in her mind turns out to be a gathering of Monarch butterflies, not at all familiar to the region where she belonged to, almost a very uncommon and endangered species. Throughout her narrative the author takes the reader on a splendid journey – of Appalachia as a sense of place, of global climate change and what it means to the humans and the natural world. The butterflies sudden appearance as magic in the Appalachian mountains gives way for the changes in the environment taking place all around the world, and the changing patterns of weather the regions were affected with.

### **III. DELLAROBIA UNDERSTANDS THE FACTS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE**

Dellarobia poses a challenge to the problems dealing with climate science by her sensible conversations with the scientist - Ovid Byron who is keen on researching on the monarch butterflies. Their conversations on climate science is not merely about believing or disbelieving. From her conversation it is understood that Dellarobia cannot be predicted as a person who does not disbelieve, but rather a person who can comprehend the realities and the full complexities of the environmental changes going on around her through their debate. In his discussions or argument with Dellarobia Ovid says “Drought and floods are not worries for farmers?” “You think any of this is often supported information? Come on, who really chooses?” “Information is all we have,” “Ovid stared at her, “Everyone chooses,” he said, “A person can face up to a difficult truth, or run away from it.” is all we have. The environmental crisis the world is facing today is centered on a thoroughly cultural debate determined by background as well as education, and not merely about science or measurements.

The novel employing climate change as its major theme thereby attempts at showing the reality of

existing poverty, division of class, change in social values and above all the impact of climate change on the daily lives of ordinary working people. Dellarobia’s life is totally transcended by the arrival of millions of monarch butterflies bringing about a radical change in Dellarobia’s life. Decades ago when the world was calm and silent unaffected by the impacts of climate change these butterflies were used to their routine migration patterns but later it was totally disrupted by drastic environmental changes. This impact of climate change was the main reason for the unusual sight of these butterflies in the Appalachian region. The scientists’ have to work with the fear that a frost could totally wipe out the entire monarch community roosting in the Appalachia as they have not made to their normal roosting grounds in the south. Butterflies are further compared to a valley of fire and the author uses this comparison to show the effects of climate change on the individual species.

It is well observed that the book has been scientifically well researched. When we start realizing that there is a continuous change in man-made global warming, it becomes a moral problem. Her literary style brings together complex science, human drama, and how circumstances can lead to unexpected consequences. This in a way helped the author to see or capture life as an ecologist, and also to share just how amazing the trans-continental migrant butterflies are. The butterflies are compared to fire in the book. “The flames now appeared to lift from individual treetops in showers of orange sparks, exploding the way a pine log does in a campfire when it is poked. The sparks spiraled upward in swirls like funnel clouds. Twisters of brightness against grey sky”.

Through their mysterious and majestic appearance the butterfly migration forms the crux of the novel and becomes the reason for Dellarobia to gain popularity over the internet as a person who has discovered a phenomenon that transcends the understanding of human beings. A change in the seasons owing to climatic changes and pollution has

brought about the migration of these butterflies in Mexico and in fact their survival becomes questionable. The public are unaware of the situation and assume that the arrival of these monarchs is a message from God. But this is not the case with Ovid Byron an Entomologist, scientist and a gifted African-American researcher who knows the reality of the behavior of these butterflies. He concludes that this unexpected phenomenon was the result of a rather very different agent called climate change. Byron hires Dellarobia to assist him on gathering more information about these butterflies and during the process of learning about them she gains a self-confidence that was missing in her because of her lack of education and poverty. After making a thorough research on these butterflies Byron tells Dellarobia that the appearance of these butterflies is a symptom of man-made global warming and not something people believe to be a great miracle.

The book in fact has been embedded in Biblical metaphor and allusions. For example the phrases "the monarch butterflies transform the land as if "trees have turned to fire, a burning bush"; lambs are raised for slaughter, the Turnbows' principal business as farmers; and ultimately the onset of spring soaks the land in a flood of Old Testament associations. But it would rather be a difficult task for people of this region to come out of their biblical assumptions and understand the reality that the world is getting warmer and warmer day by day because of a change in the climate conditions. Kingsolver therefore reveals a very grave truth that the arrival of millions of monarch butterflies not only brings about a radical change in Dellarobia's family life but in due course she is made to understand that the appearance of these creatures signals the degradation of a biological system. It is to be noted that the massive coverage that these butterflies have received due to the environmental changes, is not given to the humans who are at the verge of destruction in the valley. There are a lot of natural changes happening around Dellarobia and

her family. They experience heavy rainfall ever recorded in memory which have destroyed their crops and also, safeguarding their sheep throughout winter from the extreme cold has become difficult for them.

It is an undeniable fact that it is really hard for the butterflies to change their behavior which has kept them alive for ages and this is what is killing them, but this is not the case with human beings who can very well change the way they live and make the planet they exist on a better place to live in.

The novel is an admirable work as it is well-observed and well written. The entire family of Dellarobia is portrayed as individuals outlined with perfect balance and respect. However the issue relating to climate change is left untouched and unspoken and it is finally Ovid Byron who gives it more meaning. He is annoyed by the behavior of the TV Journalists when they ask him to give more explanation on the butterflies unusual appearance in the mountains and he gets angry when Dellarobia has a wavering mind on whether global warming could be real and says that the deniers of climate change may be right in their opinion. Byron screams at her saying "What you are doing is unconscionable. You are allowing the public to be duped by bunch of liars". This gains a big publicity on the internet. Kingsolver thus gives an affirmative statement that if some more scientists started raising their voice on Television and radio the whole humanity might get a chance to put an end to the calamities that they were going to face.

By the end of the novel it is very clear that the author's passionate voice and her ability to portray the fragility of the natural world, and why we should care about it, are as strange as ever.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, on a concluding note it may be said that Barbara Kingsolver has done great justice by addressing her fear of global warming and climate change in her novel Flight Behaviour. Though many

writers have touched upon this issue in their novels highlighting climate change, it is an undeniable fact that people are ignorant of the changes that happen around them. It is evident that the world may experience extreme weather conditions more than anticipated, as human induced climate change has contributed to changing patterns of weather across the globe, with severe climatic conditions. Man is becoming an enemy to his own self. By enjoying the technological benefits we fail to understand or realize that we are leaving a polluted and hazardous environment to our future generation. It is high time that we start thinking of putting an end to our carbon emissions and plan for living in a safer environment.

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