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**HUMAN-ENVIRONMENTAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS IN
CONTEMPORARY ECO-FICTION: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF
BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S FLIGHT BEHAVIOUR**

Annotation

This article explores Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Flight Behavior* from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on how the text represents climate change and the complex relationship between human beings and nature. The study shows that Kingsolver presents environmental crisis not as a distant scientific issue, but as a lived experience that directly affects ordinary people. Through the image of the monarch butterflies and the personal journey of the main character, the novel highlights human responsibility for ecological imbalance and questions anthropocentric ways of thinking. The article argues that *Flight Behavior* encourages readers to rethink their attitude toward the natural world and recognize the deep interconnectedness between social, economic, and environmental problems. As a work of contemporary eco-literature, the novel plays an important role in raising ecological awareness and promoting environmental ethics.

Introduction

In recent decades, environmental problems such as climate change, global warming, and the destruction of natural ecosystems have become central concerns of the modern world. These issues are no longer limited to scientific research or political debate; they have also entered the field of literature. Many contemporary writers now use fiction as a way to reflect on humanity's relationship with nature and to question the consequences of human actions on the environment. As a result, ecocriticism has developed as an important approach in literary studies.

Ecocriticism focuses on how literature represents nature and environmental problems. It examines the ways literary texts shape our understanding of the natural world and influence our ecological values. Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*

(2012) is a powerful example of this type of writing. The novel addresses climate change through a seemingly small but striking natural event—the unusual migration of monarch butterflies to rural Tennessee. By connecting this global phenomenon to the everyday life of an ordinary woman, Kingsolver makes environmental crisis both personal and emotionally meaningful.

The purpose of this article is to analyze *Flight Behavior* through an ecocritical lens and to show how the novel raises awareness of environmental issues, challenges human-centered thinking, and emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

Ecocriticism as a Literary Approach

Ecocriticism emerged in the late twentieth century as scholars began to recognize the need to study literature in relation to the physical environment. Critics such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell argue that literature has the power to shape how people think about nature and their place within it. Unlike traditional literary criticism, ecocriticism places the natural world at the center of analysis rather than treating it as a simple background for human action.

One of the key ideas in ecocriticism is the critique of anthropocentrism—the belief that humans are more important than all other forms of life. Ecocritical texts often challenge this view by showing how human survival depends on healthy ecosystems. They also highlight the ethical responsibility humans have toward the environment. In *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver clearly adopts this perspective by showing that climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a social and moral one.

The Story and Its Ecological Context

Flight Behavior tells the story of Dellarobia Turnbow, a young woman living in a poor rural community in Appalachia. Her life is shaped by financial hardship, early marriage, and limited opportunities.

Everything changes when she witnesses a valley filled with millions of monarch butterflies—an event that initially appears miraculous. However, scientists later explain that the butterflies have migrated off course due to climate change.

This discovery connects Dellarobia's personal struggles with a global ecological crisis. Through her interactions with scientists, family members, and neighbors, the

novel explores different attitudes toward climate change, including belief, denial, fear, and misunderstanding. Kingsolver shows how environmental knowledge often clashes with cultural traditions and economic realities, especially in marginalized communities. One of the most striking features of *Flight Behavior* is the way nature is presented as an active and meaningful presence rather than a passive setting. The monarch butterflies are at the heart of this portrayal. Their beauty inspires wonder, but their displacement signals ecological danger. From an ecocritical point of view, the butterflies function as messengers, revealing the consequences of environmental imbalance. Kingsolver's detailed descriptions of landscapes, weather, and seasonal changes reinforce the idea that humans are deeply connected to the natural world. The instability of the climate mirrors the emotional and social instability experienced by the characters. In this way, nature becomes closely tied to human life, emphasizing mutual dependence.

Climate Change and Everyday Life

A central theme of *Flight Behavior* is the way climate change affects ordinary people. Rather than presenting scientific facts alone, Kingsolver shows how environmental change influences daily life, work, and family relationships. The character of Ovid Byron represents scientific knowledge, while Dellarobia represents the perspective of someone encountering climate science for the first time. Importantly, the novel does not portray climate change denial as simple ignorance. Instead, Kingsolver suggests that denial often grows out of fear, economic insecurity, and lack of access to education. This human-centered approach makes the novel more empathetic and realistic, encouraging readers to understand rather than judge.

Critiquing Human-Centered Thinking

Flight Behavior strongly challenges anthropocentric attitudes toward nature. Human activities such as deforestation, industrial farming, and reliance on fossil fuels are shown to have serious environmental consequences. Although these issues are not always discussed directly, they are present throughout the novel as underlying causes of climate change. Through Dellarobia's gradual transformation, Kingsolver suggests that awareness is the first step toward responsibility. As Dellarobia begins to see nature as something fragile and valuable in itself, she also

begins to question the choices made by society. This shift reflects an ecocentric worldview, where humans are seen as part of nature rather than masters of it. Gender, Poverty, and Ecology. Another important aspect of the novel is its attention to social inequality. The environmental crisis in *Flight Behavior* disproportionately affects poor rural communities that lack the resources to respond effectively. Dellarobia's experience as a woman further shapes her relationship with nature and knowledge. From an ecofeminist perspective, the novel links the exploitation of the environment with the marginalization of women. Dellarobia's growing ecological awareness becomes a source of personal empowerment, allowing her to imagine a future beyond traditional limitations. In this way, Kingsolver connects environmental justice with social justice. The monarch butterflies serve as the novel's most powerful symbol. Their fragile wings and mass migration create a striking visual image that stays with the reader. At the same time, their altered behavior represents the broader disruption of natural systems caused by climate change. Ecocritically, the butterflies symbolize both warning and hope. While their displacement signals environmental crisis, their survival also suggests the possibility of adaptation—if humans are willing to change. Kingsolver uses this symbol to make climate change emotionally accessible and morally urgent. One of the most meaningful aspects of *Flight Behavior* is the way it invites readers to think about their moral responsibility toward the natural world. Rather than treating nature as something that exists only for human use, Kingsolver presents it as a living system that deserves care and respect. Through this perspective, the novel quietly questions modern habits that value convenience and profit over environmental well-being.

The story shows that people respond to environmental change in very different ways. Some characters see the monarch butterflies as a miracle, others as a problem, and a few as scientific evidence of climate change. These reactions feel deeply human. They remind us that our attitudes toward nature are shaped not only by knowledge, but also by culture, faith, fear, and personal experience. Kingsolver does not judge these responses harshly; instead, she allows readers to understand why people struggle to accept uncomfortable ecological truths. A particularly

touching element of the novel is its focus on the future. Climate change is not shown as something that only affects the present moment, but as an issue that will shape the lives of the next generation. Dellarobia's growing concern for her children's future plays a key role in her changing outlook. Her awareness grows not from abstract theory, but from a very real sense of responsibility and care.

By placing ethical questions inside an ordinary human story, Kingsolver avoids moral lectures. She encourages readers to think, feel, and reflect. In this way, *Flight Behavior* gently reminds us that caring for the environment begins with empathy, attention, and a willingness to change.

Literature as Environmental Awareness

Flight Behavior demonstrates the important role literature can play in environmental education. By telling a compelling human story, Kingsolver makes complex scientific ideas understandable and emotionally engaging. This approach supports the ecocritical belief that storytelling can inspire empathy and reflection in ways that data alone cannot.

The novel encourages readers to reconsider their own relationship with nature and to recognize their responsibility within a shared ecological system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, an ecocritical reading of *Flight Behavior* reveals Barbara Kingsolver's deep concern for the environment and her belief in the power of awareness and understanding. The novel presents climate change as a human experience shaped by social, economic, and cultural factors. By challenging anthropocentric thinking and emphasizing interconnectedness, *Flight Behavior* calls for a more ethical and respectful relationship with nature.

As a work of contemporary eco-literature, the novel not only reflects the environmental crisis of our time but also invites readers to imagine change. Through its human-centered narrative and ecological message, *Flight Behavior* remains a significant and influential contribution to environmental literature.

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