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Man as a sighted hypocrite in a world of absolute wonders - understanding Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*

Roger J

Full-Time PhD Research Scholar, Department of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli- 620002.
sisterrojer@gmail.com

Dr. V.L. Jayapaul

Assistant Professor, Head, Department of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous),
affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli-620002
Jayaapaul@gmail.com

Abstract:

All living beings are conscious of nature and its transformations except human beings. The whole ecosystem is getting affected when little damage has been caused even to the smallest insects and at the same time, even the smallest insects are affected when there are slight changes in the environment. Everything and everyone are interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated. Barbara Kingsolver is a Northeastern Kentucky writer, environmentalist, and political activist. The major purpose of any literary text can serve, enlighten, inspire, redefine, reform, and instruct humanity to be a better one. Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* is also such fiction known as a cli-fi fiction and it is a revelation to the readers about environmental issues. The whole book revolves around butterfly issues such as their unusual migration or their sudden relocation to Tennessee due to climate change, the movement of butterflies after their migration, and so on. Kingsolver's passion for saving monarchs from bad temperatures and human's indifferent nature toward non-human nature is highlighted in the novel. Man is not superior to nature and he is part of the ecosystem but he considers that he is superior to everything in the universe and reigns against non-human nature by using insecticides, cutting down trees, and being indifferent to the needs of nature. As a result, nature is being wounded by man but he ignores it intentionally without thinking about the future generation. Human tends to depend more on material things than on nature and so they fail to understand the ecosystem and its function. In this novel *Flight Behaviour*, monarch butterflies are keen observant when the climate change affects Mexico and they change their roosting place from Mexico to Tennessee. This paper is devoted to analyzing Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* in the hypocritical nature of humankind in the world of absolute wonders through an eco-critical perspective.

Keywords: Ecosystem, environment, environmental issues, migration, climate change, global warming, hypocritical nature.

Barbara Kingsolver is a biologist, poet, essayist, social activist, and great novelist. Being grown up in a rural area, Kingsolver is closely associated with nature and her writings focus on man's relationship with nature. She is a living author and her life now is being one with nature and its surroundings. She is an icon for the lover of nature for her enthusiasm and endless determination to protect any forms of natural elements. *Flight Behaviour* by Barbara Kingsolver is the best-selling novel in which butterflies play a vital role. According to her,

nature does miracles when it gets proper recognition from human beings but man chooses to be a hypocrite to the needs of nature, and as a result, nature is being destroyed.

Ecocriticism is the study of the connection between any literary work and the physical environment and is a general definition given by any ecocritics. Dealing with the perspectives of nature and nature-related issues in any literary text is known as ecocriticism in literature. Many things are discussed in ecocriticism as we examine feminism from the perspective of gender consciousness and Marxism from the perspective of economic class in the society and so ecocriticism deals with its earth-centered method in any literary texts by creating awareness and consciousness in the minds of the people. Suresh Frederick, an Indian writer of ecocriticism in his book *Ecocriticism: Paradigms and Praxis* signifies, "Ecocriticism is a critical study of literature from a biocentric view. It has given the critical tools to study literature from nature's perspective. It assumes that all life forms are interrelated." (1) He also affirms that ecocriticism raises its voice for the voiceless earth. The world now requires this theory for it is facing unimaginable global warming, lack of natural resources, unusual migration of birds, landslides, soil erosion, and so on.

The novel *Flight Behaviour* is an ecocriticism novel in which human beings are part of both the living and non-living beings written in its earth-centered approach. It portrays the bond humans have with nature. The local issue in the Appalachian Mountain range about the migration of monarchs becomes a global issue known as global warming. Thus, the novel is earth-centered in its approach as mentioned above.

Generally, many researchers are interested in researching feminism, gender studies, and racism but we choose to ignore the study of a literary text from an eco- perspective. It is an idea Cheryll Glotfelty mentions in her *The Ecocriticism Reader* that any researcher of the late twentieth century could be interested in choosing hot topics such as race, gender, and class but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress (XVI) It is a need of the hour to research nature and its degradation. This fiction *Flight Behaviour* should be viewed critically by any reader for its message to the whole of humanity about marching towards ecological consciousness.

Climate change has become a major theme in literature. *Flight Behaviour* is a Cli-Fi fiction that deals mainly with environmental issues. The migration of the king billies (monarch butterflies) is a major issue vastly focused on in this novel. The loss of trees causes climate change, global warming, landslides, and flooding. No one has ever talked like Kingsolver about climate change and its significance and cutting down trees and its consequence in a fiction form. She depicts the mindset of the people who try to log the trees deliberately after knowing the consequences. Cub says, "Whatever's too little to cut up for lumber, he said they can grind into paper" (54) Cutting down the trees causes landslides, global warming, soil erosion, and flooding, and this statement is affirmed by Barbara Kingsolver from the above statements made by her character Dellarobia. She also brings forth the accurate example of Mexico in the words of Della, "When you clear-cut a mountain it can cause a landslide(...) They clear-cut the mountain, and a flood brought the whole thing down on top of them." (235) Through the words of Dellarobia one can understand clearly that logging of trees is the root cause of landslides, flooding, and other natural disasters.

People are aware of what will happen if they cut down trees but still, they do so as they are blind to the needs of nature and they act as if they aren't aware of what is happening around them. Because of global climate change, the monarchs changed their resting place from Mexico to Tennessee since the former one is destroyed because of climate change. In the novel, Kingsolver illustrates the impact of climate change in Mexico through a small

child Josefina, “Everything is gone! The water was coming and the mud was coming on everything.” (140) Ovid Byron, the biologist who visits Appalachian to research on monarchs also assumes that the main reason for the monarch's migration can be the issues of climate change.

Naomi Klein gives a detailed description of climate change that no one ever stated in her book *This Changes Everything*, according to her early blooming of a particular flower, an unusually thin layer of ice on a lake, the late arrival of a migratory bird is associated with the issues on climate change. (159) and she also states that observation of these little unusual changes in nature needs communion and also needs deep knowledge about the place. Based on the observations stated by Naomi Klein one could assume that people in Appalachian are aware of the arrival of the monarchs but their knowledge about the migratory birds and their oneness with their native land sometimes lacks their love for nature. They fail to understand the reason for their migration. They do not realize why the monarchs change their roosting place. They also fail to recognize the seasonality changes or global warming.

When something unusual happens to nature, the world simply ignores it or makes it into a different issue. When at first Bear notices the butterflies' arrival he is intolerant and he stands against them by saying they aren't good for logging. The arrival of the butterflies is the saddest thing that ever happened in Bear's life. His idea of logging the trees is ruined because of the monarchs' arrival. Bear doesn't bother the monarchs but he thinks only about logging his trees. Instead of acknowledging the butterflies and their issues, he chooses to ignore them and thinks only about logging his trees. Kingsolver also depicts through Dellarobia that people fail to care about nature when it undergoes suffering. When Dellarobia is on her way to find her lover, she notices that something is happening to the trees on the mountain. She tries to escape from this situation and she doesn't wish to know what happened to the trees. Since she is not able to understand she assumes that the new thing might be a fungus, a new disease, corn flakes, orange blaze, new pests, etc.

People are very conscious of pesticides or insecticides yet they use them without considering their side effects. Kingsolver portrays the attitude of the people who are totally against the arrival of the monarchs. Bear says, “We are going to spray these things and go ahead. I have got some DDD saved back in the basement.” (FB-75) But Cub is against his dad Bear. “DDT, Cub told him. Dad, that stuff has been against the law for more than my whole life. No offense, but it must be something else you have got stored.” (FB-75) Cub is conscious of the usage of DDT, known as Dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane, an insecticide used in agriculture. DDT persists for a long time in the atmosphere which harms the physical environment more. Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* cites the words of Rachael Carson by saying that DDT, aldrin, and dieldrin known as new organic pesticides are the real culprits in controlling pest insects. (Garrard- 2)

In the introduction to *Silent Spring*, it is stated by Racheal Carson, “these chemicals were potentially harmful to the long-term health of the whole biota...she felt compelled to bear witness against.” (Carson 18) Instead of finding ways to protect the monarchs, they find ways by using DDT to destroy the flock of butterflies who seek refuge in an unknown land. Without thinking about the consequences of insecticides, preceded by their temporary need to log the trees, people try to use DDT-like pesticides to destroy the monarchs.

According to Kingsolver the arrival of the monarchs bring agitation to some people. The mindset of the people when they get exposed to a different or new atmosphere will be changed and they are not ready to accept when it is something new easily. It is also the same

in people like Bear's life. He is totally against saving monarchs and his focus is only on lending his woods to the logging company.

For the natives of Appalachian, the butterflies' arrival is just a mere advertisement, tourist spot, profits, disturbance, local issue, and a thing of wonder but for a foreigner, it is a thing for research that changes the whole humanity to think globally. Ovid Byron, an entomologist from the island of St. Thomas has a lot of enthusiasm for saving the lives of monarchs than people of the native.

Quoting the words of a great theologian and philosopher, Albert Schweitzer "Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth" man has lost his sense of nature though everything around him is visible he chooses to be an invisible one to the needs of nature. Humanity is an urge to stand for environmental issues. "One of the aims of ecocriticism is to make sense of the messes we have made, with some societies being more guilty than others in this regard." (Rangarajan 108) Thus Kingsolver describes how human beings degrade nature and how despite knowing the fact a man lives without noticing any destructive events that are happening to nature. He chooses to be a sighted hypocrite in the world of wonders.

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