

The Climate Change Fiction with Special Reference to Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*.

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Abstract: In the 21st century, a new genre of Anglophone fiction has emerged—the climate change novel, often abbreviated as “cli-fi.” Many successful authors of literary fiction, such as Margaret Atwood, Paolo Bacigalupi, T. C. Boyle, Michael Crichton, Ian McEwan, Amitav Ghosh, Barbara Kingsolver, Ursula Le Guin, Lydia Millet, David Mitchell, Ruth Ozeki, Nathaniel Rich, Kim Stanley Robinson, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Marcel Theroux, have contributed to this new genre’s efforts to imagine the causes, effects, and feeling of global warming. Together, their work pulls the issue-oriented and didactic approach of activist fiction into contact with the intensive description and site specificity of Romantic nature writing. Cli-fi knits these tendencies together into a description of the effects of a dramatic change in the Earth’s climate on a particular location and a vision of the options available to a population seeking to adapt to or mitigate those effects. *Flight Behaviour* is Kingsolver’s exemplar creation that embodies her unique way of converting experiences into insights, i.e. science through fiction.

Key Words: Cli-fi, Anglophone fiction, global warming, activism

1. INTRODUCTION:

Global warming is the most critical and controversial issue focusing the world in the twenty first century. Global warming is the term used to describe a gradual increase in the average temperature of the Earth’s atmosphere, a change that is believed to be permanently changing the earth’s climate. In 1896, scientists concluded that human activity contributed to the effect, warming the planet further. And yet here we find ourselves in 2017 still wrestling with manmade climate change like it’s a new phenomenon. The greatest challenge facing climate change science today is not understanding the causes and consequences of climate change, nor even knowing how to moderate those causes and mitigate the consequences. One tool for coming to terms with climate change and perhaps conceiving ways to personally adapt to the new realities- might be one of our oldest human practices: storytelling. Story telling has the power to give climate change a human focus by translating complex and evolving scientific concepts into tales reimagining human interactions with the world.

The new genre Cli-fi or Climate Change Fiction or Climate Fiction deals with climate change and global warming. Not necessarily speculative in nature, works of Cli-fi takes place in the world as we know it or in the near future. The term Cli-fi is popularized by journalist and climate change activist Dann Bloom. Dann Bloom came up with the word “Cli-fi”, hoping to convert the dull phrase climate fiction into something compelling. He wanted to come up with a catchy buzz word to raise awareness about global warming. According to Dann Bloom a central function of the climate novel is to examine the climate change debate at an emotional level.

2. Kingslover’s *Flight Behaviour* as a climate change fiction:

Barbara Kingsolver is a contributing author of the genre Cli-fi. Her works often focuses on topics such as social justice, biodiversity, and the interaction between humans and their communities and their environments. Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behaviour* is a successful realist example of Cli-fi that confronts climate change directly. It explores environmental themes and highlights the potential effects of global warming on the Monarch butterflies. The novel engages to weave social and environmental factors together to arrive at a comprehensive view of climate change. It focuses on the effect of climate change on a single butterfly species; yet this refined scope does not resist the narrative it quickly become apparent how this event is related to the wider human and nonhuman community. Kingsolver made clear in an interview, her intention to alert the public to the risks posed by climate change through her writings. By personalizing the experience of global warming and dramatizing its consequences she seek to bring it alive and help readers to image the future.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL:

The story is told through the eyes of Dellarobia Turnbow, a young mother with a yearning for something more in life. *Flight Behaviour* links Dellarobia’s desire to escape grinding poverty and disappointing marriage to the butterflies’ evens more desperate escape from a habitat no longer suitable for their biological requirements.

Flight Behaviour is Kingsolver's exemplar creation that embodies her unique way of converting experiences into insights, i.e. science through fiction. She dares to tear the logging climate convictions in both real and fictional world. Kingsolver's extreme concern for the natural world is quiet apparent in her novels where she blows so much life to the natural world which makes one feel nature as one among the chief characters in her literary creation. *Flight Behavior* visualizes one such spectacle at the arrival of monarch butterflies in the rural Tennessee as "Unearthly beauty....a vision of glory...." (15). The butterflies in the novel are not just meant for their symbolic presence but to explicitly expose the human over nature dominance.

Flight behavior gets readers to empathize with a believable protagonist trying to trying to understand the topic of climate change. Dellarobia Turnbow, the central figure, is a farmer's wife in the southern Appalachians. A bright and attractive 28-year-old with a gentle, passive and unambitious husband, she is trapped in claustrophobic rural poverty and the drudgery of life as a mother of two small children. Breaking out in desperation from her unfulfilling everyday existence, she is on her way to an illicit assignation with a young telegraph engineer in a hunting hut on the mountainside above the farm. The would-be adulterer is stopped in her tracks by the sight of a forested valley seemingly alight with a cold orange flame. Dellarobia's experience is described in terms bordering on the miraculous: The forest blazed with its own internal flame.

4. CLIMATE CHANGES IN THE NOVEL:

The novel deals with a major issue, the ignorance of climate change and lack of eco-centric vision. By locating the narrative within a small close-knit community, Kingsolver is more able to show the disruptive effects of an ecological event. Climate change skepticism underpins the majority of this community. King solver catalyzes the major conflict of the novel, that is, the lack of eco-centric vision among humans. Everyone in *Flight Behavior* from religious fundamentalists to the rating conscious media frames the phenomenon, arrival of the Monarch butterflies, to suit their own interests. The residence of the Feather Town considers the arrival of the Monarch butterflies as a rebirth of Lord, or a symbol of resurrection. Whereas to some of them are the objects of annoyance. To Bear and Hester Turnbow, Dellarobia's in-laws, the butterflies are means to allure tourists and eco-sights seers through which they can gather money to pay their debts. To the media people like Tina Ultner, the butterflies meant nothing but the current talk of town with which they can promote their channel and extend their advertisements.

Kingsolver presents the most important issue, lack of knowledge of climate change in the behaviour of the characters. The lack of seriousness in conserving the nature can be seen in Bear Town. Bear Town irresistibly logs and destroys the trees for him considered the forest as "just trees" and not "gold mines" to be preserved, but keeps cursing the failed rain without bothering to think about the significance of the woods for rain. Apart from that he had also planned to wipe out the over wintering Monarchs that stands in between the logging plan using DDT.

As a biologist herself, Kingsolver introduces Ovid Byron, a scientist, who arrive the town to investigate about the miracle (Monarch butterflies), as her mouth piece or recount the genuine truths of the real world like global warming. *Flight Behaviour* presents a particularly detailed portrait of climate denial. Kingsolver pulls no punches in exposing the "blindness" of Appalachian farmers and small town communities in America's Bible Belt to the dangers of anthropogenic global warming. She nevertheless depicts their mental world with sympathy and understanding. Political and commercial interests are present in the background, but rather than making the machinations of lobby groups responsible for environmental apathy, or even the media, she focuses on the everyday worries of people without higher education, bordering on poverty.

Kingsolver makes extensive use of analogy as a structuring device in the novel. Blindness to environmental change, referred to as "looking without seeing" (52), is multiply paralleled by Dellarobia's suppression of her grief over the loss of her first pregnancy, her mother-in-law's life of quiet desperation and denial (which as we learn at the end of the book derives from having had to give her first, illegitimate child up for adoption in order to be accepted by her husband), and public refusal to face up to the consequences of smoking. "I think people are scared to face up to a bad outcome.

Butterflies are of course the central symbol in the novel. *Flight Behaviour* celebrates the beauty of the Monarch species (*Danaus plexippus*) and expresses admiration for the extraordinary intricacy and sophistication of the instincts which enable it to migrate annually over thousands of miles between Mexico and Canada. The individual butterflies die on average after 6 weeks, but they pass on their genes to descendants, who complete the journey northwards. Others again fly back south and congregate at their winter gathering place in Mexican Anganguero (146). In the first instance, the bright orange butterflies, which are reproduced (albeit in abstract form, as small golden leaf shapes swarming above bare treetops) on the book's dustcover, symbolise the fragile, transient beauty of nature and the risk from global warming. However, their association in folk belief with the souls of dead children is also referred to at several points (359). The threat to their survival thus serves as a poignant reminder of the fate of future human generations facing the consequences of climate change. In the final pages of *Flight Behaviour*, the belated arrival of spring triggers a snowmelt which engulfs Dellarobia's home, in a scene reminiscent of the Biblical flood, suggesting

divine punishment. However, the onset of the exodus of the surviving butterflies merges flood and flame in a reprise of the opening scene of the book, suggesting that violent change may also bring rebirth (420).

In the analysis of *Flight Behaviour*, literary critic Axel Goodbody notes that the story and particular its ending move away from apocalyptic rhetoric and instead resemble more “a narrative of an individual’s awakening to environmental risks and simultaneous realization of the potential as an active member of society”(48). As Dellarobia invents herself a new life leaving her unhappy marriage and going to university and the butterflies are flying off to find new grounds, geographical as well as socio cultural borders are crossed and new habitats created. It is then not too late to envision better and more sustainable new earths.

5. CONCLUSION:

The open end of the novel is Kingsolver’s way of offering a choice whether to encounter a disaster or to choose flight at last. Presenting the dire circumstances of the novel as such, Kingsolver tries to deploy second thoughts to seek an immediate change that needs to be implemented in a real world. *Flight Behaviour* voices the need for a consciousness the preservation of natural world. The blend of science and creativity in the novel blatantly documents how human beings welcome their own devastation by causing continuous threats to natural world. The novel also stress on the need for reconstruction harmony between the human and non-human world so as to bring back the harmony on Earth. Kingsolver merges both the scientific and ecological facts in her novel one after the other and reinstates Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology that “everything is connected to everything else” and to an extreme she provides alternative perspective that even science is possible through fiction.

The great gift of literature is its ability to provoke empathy across distant spaces, and also distant times. This is one of the reasons why Cli-fi or Climate Change Fiction is important. Cli- fi is more relevant in the contemporary society.

The genre is helpful in waking up people and serving as as alarm bell for the issue of climate change and dangers of global warming. The emotional Cli-fi narratives move people to action for more effectively than a string of scientific data projection. Cli-fi uses real scientific data to translate climate change from the abstract to the cultural, enabling readers to experience threats and effects they might be expected to encounter across their own life.

Literature can play a part in the process of creating awareness; it is perhaps above all in helping the public imagine climate change and related risks. Novelists retrieve, interrogate, and experiment with the assembly of cultural tools relevant to debates on climate change risk, thereby enhancing their readers’ competence in facing the challenge it poses. Globalization has magnified the challenge of maintaining a sense of citizenship, empowerment, and commitment to a moral community. The narratives evoke consciousness about the complex issue of climate change and it emphasizes an understanding and togetherness between the human and non-human world is important to survive on Earth. The genre has an emotional appeal and it makes us think about the human behavior that exploit earth and natural resources for selfish motives and the human actions like fossil fuel burning, deforestation and coral burning affect the environment. These novels evoke awareness about these issues and make us think that, ‘it is time to change our attitude towards nature’ and also provides a hope that it is not too late and we can save our environment by changing the mode of approaches to environment.

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