



## UNRAVELLING ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *FLIGHT BEHAVIOR*

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### ABSTRACT

This Article, “Unravelling Environmental Consciousness in Barbara Kingsolver’s Flight Behavior,” explores the intricate relationship between literature and Environmental consciousness. In an era marked by growing ecological concerns, this study aims to explore how contemporary literature serves as a powerful medium for unraveling the complexities of human-environment interactions. Barbara Kingsolver’s novel, ‘Flight Behavior,’ stands as a central case study, offering a lens through which to explore the portrayal of ecological themes in a compelling narrative. The study will scrutinise the novel’s characters, plot, and thematic elements like environmental awareness, climatic conditions, deforestation, and migration pattern of the monarch butterflies. Through this exploration, the Research intends to contribute nuanced insights into how contemporary literature reflects and Shapes societal attitudes toward the environment. The findings are anticipated to enrich our understanding of literature’s role in fostering environmental consciousness and ultimately Promote a more profound connection between humanity and the natural world.

**Keywords:** Environmental Consciousness, Monarch Butterflies, Flight Behavior, Nature and Deforestation.

## **Introduction**

Environmental awareness consists of understanding the natural world and the impact of human actions on it. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of living organisms and their vital contributions to Earth's well-being. In the modern era, environmental consciousness is crucial given the pressing environmental challenges we face, such as global warming, habitat loss, contamination, species extinction, deforestation, and climate change.

Education plays a vital role in promoting environmental awareness. It empowers individuals with the knowledge to comprehend environmental issues, their causes, and potential solutions. This knowledge enables them to make informed decisions and engage in meaningful actions toward environmental protection. Environmental education can be integrated into school curricula, community activities, and public outreach initiatives. It enhances our understanding of the interdependence between the environment and social and economic systems, motivating us to work actively towards a sustainable future.

It's vital to make protecting the environment a priority today. We need to stop treating it as something we can use and start valuing it for what it is. To ensure a healthy future, we should use eco-friendly

methods, think about how our actions affect the environment, save different species of plants and animals, teach ourselves and others about the environment, and work for laws that protect it. As caretakers of the Earth, we must work together to keep it safe for ourselves and our future generations.

## **Environmental Consciousness in *Flight Behavior***

Dellarobia Turnbow, a weary 28-year-old wife, sets out on a clandestine journey uphill to meet a man she intends to have an affair with. Having entrusted her children to her mother-in-law, Dellarobia ascends the pasture, a surge of guilt and anticipation coursing through her. As she gazes down upon her family's land, she recalls the time when she and her husband, Cub, visited the same spot to pick raspberries while she carried their secondborn, Cordelia.

As she neared the meeting spot with Jimmy, a much younger man, the woman grapples with the possible repercussions of their planned affair. Her mind raced to cherished memories of her husband and children, a stark contrast to the life she'd embraced with Jimmy, a telephone man who lived with his mother.

As Dellarobia gazed upon the fiery spectacle, she realized it wasn't a wildfire but countless monarch butterflies. The trees glowed like flames, casting an ethereal



glow upon the forest. Drawn to the mesmerizing sight, Dellarobia cancels her plans to meet Jimmy. Captivated by this natural wonder, with a mix of complex feelings and guiltiness. “She felt shamed by her made-up passion and the injuries she’d been ready to inflict.” (Kingsolver, 30). Dellarobia returned to her humble home, leaving behind the enchanting Monarch Butterflies.

Unearthly beauty had appeared to her, a version of glory to stop her on the road for her alone. These orange boughs lifted, and these long shadows became a brightness rising. It looked like the inside of joy if a person could see that. A valley of light, an ethereal wind. It had to mean Something...She only wondered how long she could watch the spectacle before turning away. It was a lake of fire, something far more fierce and wondrous than either of those elements alone. The impossible. (Kingsolver, 21-22).

In this passage, the monarch butterfly symbolizes a turning point in Della’s life. Nature creates a significant change in the path of her journey. It realizes her life and escapes from the disaster that has taken place in her life. Nature’s influence empowers her with a newfound

purpose and protects her from past misfortunes. It guides her on a journey of self-discovery, fostering her analytical skills and igniting her passion for learning.

Following the completion of the shearing, Dellarobia received a call from her close friend, Dovey. They shared their mutual frustrations about being confined to their respective roles at work and home. Dovey attempted to inquire about Dellarobia’s recent affair, but Dellarobia declined to provide details. Later that day, Dellarobia discovered that Cub had collapsed due to exhaustion brought on by the intensive shearing. Cub expresses his weariness with farming, which he inherited from his parents but is arduous for him. He confides in Dellarobia that foreclosure looms over their farm, which Cub’s father hid until it was almost too late. To raise funds for payment, Cub was compelled to sell part of their land for timber to a logging company. Dellarobia is deeply upset by this situation, feeling betrayed and devastated by the loss. Faced with mounting debt, Cub felt overwhelmed and frustrated. The only viable solution he saw was selling the land to the logging company. However, Della was furious with Cub’s father, accusing him of neglecting his son’s well-being by leaving him with such a heavy burden.

Upon discovering the logging company’s plan to cut down the mountain

where she witnessed the “lake of fire” (monarch butterflies), Dellarobia persuades Cub, Bear, Hester, the Norwoods, and their spouses to accompany her.

Deforestation, the removal of large areas of forests, has severe consequences for wildlife and biodiversity. When habitats are destroyed, many species lose their homes and face the risk of extinction. This habitat loss is often driven by industrial activities such as farming, oil extraction, and paper production. For example, a man named Bear, facing financial difficulties, permitted a logging company to deforest his property.

However, she conceals her prior encounter with the butterflies, claiming instead that she had a vision of them. As they ascend the mountaintop, they witness a vibrant swarm of monarch butterflies. Bear proposes using DDT to exterminate them, but Cub objects, surprising Dellarobia with his defiance. In this place, young Cub possesses a strong environmental awareness. He voiced his opposition to his father’s plan to use insecticide that would harm monarch butterflies. Dellarobia was taken aback by Cub’s unexpected challenge to his father’s authority.

Heightened publicity about the monarchs and Dellarobia’s vision, spurred by a newspaper article, has fueled Hester’s

resentment towards Dellarobia. But “nobody was asking why the butterflies were there; the big news was just that they Were” (Kingsolver, 32). The article highlighted Dellarobia’s spiritual abilities and proclaimed her as “Our Lady of the Butterflies.” Conversely, Cub welcomes the attention that Dellarobia now commands.

Dellarobia meets Ovid Byron, a handsome African American man in his early forties, who arrives at her home to ask permission to study monarch butterflies on the Turnbow farm. Intrigued by Ovid, Dellarobia guides him to the mountain road. As soon as Ovid leaves, Dellarobia excitedly calls her friend Dovey to tell her about their encounter and invites Ovid to dinner at her house.

Due to severe flooding brought on by natural disasters in Mexico, the Monarch Butterflies have been forced to relocate to Tennessee. “Why did the one rare, spectacular thing in her life have to be a sickness of nature?” (Kingsolver, 204). This change in their migratory patterns has had a significant impact on the butterflies’ survival, as they are now forced to adapt to a different climate and ecosystem.

When Cub returns home and learns of Dellarobia’s invitation to Byron, he expresses disapproval, questioning her decision to bring a stranger into their home. However, Ovid promptly arrives, and the



trio engages in a thought-provoking conversation about the butterflies. Dellarobia shares her observations about their unexpected presence on the Turnbow farm, noting their shift in migratory patterns from Mexico to Tennessee. Ovid reveals that he is an entomologist from New Mexico who specializes in studying monarch butterflies. His primary research interest is deciphering the reason behind the changes in monarch migration patterns following environmental and weather-related disruptions in Mexico. According to his account, the Turnbow farm is the only known location where the butterflies have gathered outside of their native habitat in Mexico.

After agreeing to allow Ovid to remain on their land, Dellarobia and Cub provide him with the space to set up his research base. Two weeks later, Ovid arrives with a camper van and a team of three student assistants, Pete, Mako, and Bonnie, to support his investigations.

Hester visits Dellarobia to question her about Ovid. She expresses that both she and Bear are opposed to his presence and inquires about his religious beliefs. Uncharacteristically, Hester becomes emotional and sheds tears. After seeing the trees, Hester believes that Bear's contract with the loggers, which permits them to fall the trees regardless of the circumstances,

contradicts God's will. Due to his desire for self-interest and to avoid financial obligations, Bear destructively exploited the environment.

At the mountain, Pete, Mako, and Bonnie enlist Dellarobia's help in counting dead butterflies on the ground. They notice a tagged monarch, indicating that someone else has been tracking them. Pete and Ovid explain that climate warming has altered the butterflies' flight patterns. However, Dellarobia remains skeptical about climate change theories. Della asks why scientists consider the altered migration pattern harmful when it appears aesthetically pleasing. Ovid replies that "terrible things can have beauty" (Kingsolver, 203). Suggesting that the change in the natural order could have severe repercussions. Ovid suggests that the butterflies' presence on the mountain is not miraculous but a result of an environmental disaster caused by flooding. This highlights that seemingly ordinary or miraculous changes in nature can often be a sign of underlying disruptions that could have significant consequences for our earth.

During Christmas shopping, Dellarobia and Cub clash over Bear's logging decision. Dellarobia criticizes Cub for his lack of resolve in opposing his father, emphasizing the importance of protecting the butterflies that have given

her hope and joy. Their argument escalates as they navigate the store, with Dellarobia expressing frustration over their financial constraints and Cub's limited understanding of his children's preferences. Dellarobia and Cub have persistent disagreements, covering topics such as the cost of groceries, Bear's logging plans, and the perceived inadequacy of Preston's education, a concern that weighs heavily on Dellarobia.

Emboldened by Dovey's influence, Dellarobia disregarded Cub's reluctance and organized a Christmas celebration. She eagerly invited Ovid and his researchers, obtaining a festive tree and crafting intricate origami butterflies as decorations. However, Cub's arrival brought a clash. He challenged Dellarobia about her actions, but she skillfully avoided addressing his concerns. The chapter ends with a lingering sense of unresolved conflict.

On the following day, reporters Tina and Ron visit Dellarobia's home, requesting an interview about the butterflies. Despite her initial hesitance, Dellarobia accepts. As they drive to the mountaintop for footage, Dellarobia's nervousness prompts her to confide in Tina about her previous desire to escape her life. However, she soon regrets this revelation and asks Tina to remove it from the interview. The following night, Dovey

informs Dellarobia that CNN aired a clip of her encounter with the butterflies, implying she had intended to harm herself. The clip quickly goes viral, prompting concern from Cub that the community will blame him and Bear for the planned deforestation. Dellarobia's newfound notoriety spreads, with some individuals depicting her as a divine protector of the butterflies in online creations.

The next chapter begins with Ovid interviewing Dellarobia for the research assistant position. During the interview, they begin to discuss Dellarobia's high school education. She tells Ovid about the poor learning conditions at the local high school, where baseball and basketball coaches taught math and science. No math education went beyond elementary pre-algebra. Ovid is horrified and tells her that he had already been struggling to find local volunteers to help out with the project—a task that had been easy in other areas where he'd worked. Dellarobia grows angry and tells him about the lack of state attention and funds dedicated to their region. It is a poor agricultural part of the state where college educations are irrelevant, and few resources are available. They end things on a tense note, but Ovid still offers Dellarobia the position. He tells her they're under pressure since a winter storm could come and kill all the butterflies at any moment.



In their initial meeting, Ovid questions Dellarobia about her suitability for the research assistant post. Dellarobia shares her concerns about the substandard education she received in high school, where sports coaches were responsible for teaching subjects like math and science. Consequently, she needed math education beyond basic pre-algebra. Ovid is dismayed to learn of Dellarobia's inability to recruit local volunteers despite the ease of doing so in other areas. Dellarobia expresses her frustration over the state's neglect and lack of funding for their impoverished region, where education and resources are scarce. Despite the disagreement, Ovid offers Dellarobia the position, citing the urgency of the situation due to the potential threat of a winter storm that could decimate the butterfly population.

Ovid, Dellarobia, and Pete continue their conversation about the butterflies. Ovid describes her act as "this is a concern of conscience, not of biology. Science does not tell us what we should do. It only tells us what is" (Kingslover, 327). Ovid warns Dellarobia about the severe consequences of climate change and emphasizes the butterflies as a warning sign that is being ignored. Dellarobia expresses her concern, urging journalists to interview scientists. However, Pete responds skeptically, claiming that journalists are not interested

in actual news but in confirming what their audience already believes. He highlights Dellarobia's limited knowledge in the field as a reason for her appeal to journalists. Dellarobia resented the lack of support from her school. Unlike her classmates, she aspired to attend college and took the ACT exam. However, the school's inadequate preparation and her pregnancy hindered her from achieving a good score, cutting short her chances of higher education.

The next day, Dellarobia joins Pete and Ovid in their work. En route to the lab, she encounters student protesters against the logging and guides them to Bear's residence. Together with Ovid, Dellarobia analyses the butterflies, discovering parasitic organisms. While these parasites may be involved in the butterflies' altered migration patterns, Ovid remains uncertain whether they are symptoms or causes of the change.

A severe snowstorm strikes the area the following day. Ovid summons Dellarobia to the mountain, requesting her assistance with pillowcases. Ovid, Pete, and several young volunteers gather there. Driven by the incoming cold, they set up measurement equipment and began collecting butterflies, determined to maximize their data collection. Dellarobia volunteers to prepare soup for the team. Before departing, they resume their

conversation about climate change. Ovid reveals the alarming global consequences of the phenomenon, highlighting its immediate effects.

As the arrival of winter, the mountains were shrouded in fog. Ovid assigns Dellarobia to observe butterflies from afar using binoculars. He visits her and praises Preston, revealing plans for a project involving him. Dellarobia's curiosity about Ovid's personal life grows, notably why he lacks children. His fondness for Preston sparks a sense of affection within her.

The conversation shifts to butterflies, and they express concerns about the potential extinction of monarch butterflies. Ovid suggests that Cub aligns with those who dismiss climate change. Dellarobia counters by acknowledging that environmental issues are often disregarded by their community members, who believe such concerns are not for their social group. Despite initially criticizing Cub, Dellarobia unexpectedly defends him, highlighting how her choice to collaborate with the research team defied her community's social and gender-based expectations.

After Dellarobia and Ovid end their discussion, an environmentalist named Leighton Akins arrives. He attempts to convince Dellarobia to sign a Sustainability Pledge detailing changes to her lifestyle.

However, she realizes that these proposed actions are unfeasible or inapplicable to her reality. For instance, when Akins advises her to use Craigslist to buy used goods, Dellarobia responds that she needs a computer or knowledge of Craigslist. Similarly, when he urges her to "fly less," Dellarobia simply echoes the phrase, highlighting the absurdity of an urbanite instructing a rural woman who has never travelled internationally to reduce air travel.

Dellarobia assists Hester with tending to pregnant sheep; afterward, they venture into the forest to search for wildflowers. Along the way, they encounter a group of women from out of town who have gathered to observe butterflies and advocate against deforestation. These women create knitted replicas of monarch butterflies to raise awareness for their conservation. Hester finds their efforts amusing.

Dellarobia inquires about Bear's plans to log down the forest. Hester informs her of a planned prayer meeting with Pastor Ogle. During a conversation, Hester expresses disapproval of Cub and Dellarobia as a couple. She admits she didn't believe Dellarobia would remain in the marriage. Offended by Hester's low opinion, Dellarobia confronts her, demanding an explanation for not





expressing her concerns about their union earlier.

Dellarobia returns home, and a news team arrives at her doorstep; she attempts to hide but is found by Tina, a journalist she'd spoken to weeks earlier. Dellarobia reluctantly agrees to take Tina to Ovid's lab. Ovid hesitantly allows Tina and a cameraman inside but refuses to give her the desired information about the butterflies. Instead, he emphasizes their significance as a warning sign and urges Tina to focus on the broader issues of environmental degradation and climate change. Tina abruptly ends the interview, stating that discussing climate change would alienate their audience. Ovid stands his ground, refusing to alter his message, and they continue the interview, exploring the topic in more detail. During the interview, Ovid became increasingly agitated as Tina repeatedly asked indirect questions that downplayed the severity of climate change.

During an intense debate, Ovid condemns Tina's feeble reporting on climate change. "You're allowing the public to be duped by a bunch of damned liars." (Kingsolver, 509). Accusing her of pandering to advertisers and PR firms, he chastises her for ignoring her journalistic responsibility. Despite Tina's protests about the "intangibility" of climate change, Ovid

insists it's a dire threat. As the interview ends, he blames the media for enabling corporate deception and cover-ups. To their astonishment, after the crew leaves, Dovey reveals she secretly recorded the confrontation and posts it online, leaving Ovid unsure if it will be aired but surprised by Dovey's actions.

The following morning, the family, including Cub, Bear, Hester, and Dellarobia, went to church. Afterward, they met with Bobby Ogle to talk about Bear's logging deal. Bear stubbornly refused to change his mind, even when Bobby urged him to cancel the agreement. However, when Hester intervened and advised Bear to listen to Bobby, Bear surprisingly relented and agreed to preserve the mountain in its natural state. Subsequently, Bear, Bobby, and Cub set out for the mountain. Bobby Ogle's solid environmental ethics and unwavering commitment to preservation make him a vital advocate for safeguarding the mountain and its trees against the logging company's actions.

On their drive home, Hester confronts Dellarobia about the interview. She questions Dellarobia's statements, particularly those about suicidal thoughts. Dellarobia defends herself, stating that the video was manipulated. Dellarobia expresses frustration with Hester's lack of understanding of her marriage. However,

Hester reveals a secret that stuns Dellarobia.

During Bear's time in the Vietnam War, Hester was forced to give up her first son for adoption. This child was not to Bear's, and Hester was unsure of her feelings for Bear at the time. After the adoption, Bear Hester avoided talking about her past. Bear only agreed to marry Hester if they kept it hidden. Dellarobia inquires about Hester's son, and Hester reveals that he resides within the town. In a sudden realization, Dellarobia identifies Bobby Ogle as Hester's son.

Several days later, the unexpected snowfall created unusual conditions for the area. During this weather, one of the sheep experiences premature labor, prompting Dellarobia and Cub to rush to its aid. Despite their efforts, the sheep gives birth to a stillborn lamb. The distressing incident leaves Dellarobia overcome with grief, resulting in her breaking down in tears.

Dellarobia and Cub have returned home, and the Monarch butterflies have moved to the lawn, where new spring growth is emerging. As the butterflies awaken from their frozen state after last week's storm, Dellarobia and Preston observe them outside. Dellarobia surprises Preston with a smartphone, allowing him to explore and learn independently. However, she also informs him that they, along with

Cordelia, will be moving to Cleary, separating them from Cub. She reveals her plans to return to college and pursue a career in science.

The sky was too bright and the ground so unreliable she couldn't look up for very long. Instead, her eyes held steady on the fire bursts of wings reflected across the water, a merging of flame and flood. Above the lake of the world, flanked by the White Mountains, they flew out to a new Earth (Kingsolver, 597).

As the floodwaters ravaged the town, Dellarobia ventured outside. She was met with the sight of birds fleeing in the distance and a swarm of butterflies ascending from the mountain's foliage, their wings fluttering against the backdrop of the rising sun. Just as butterflies find solace in the arrival of spring, the transformative experience of Dellarobia brings a sense of purpose and meaning to her existence.

Understanding the importance of the environment empowers people to protect and conserve natural resources. It emphasizes the urgency for humans to respect and safeguard their surroundings, especially in light of global challenges like climate change, deforestation, and the extinction of wildlife caused by habitat loss. Education plays a crucial role in fostering



environmental awareness by highlighting the importance of protecting our planet for its continued existence. With rampant deforestation, animals lose their homes and struggle to survive. To preserve our planet, we must start with our families. Instilling the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle in children from a young age can help them understand the value of protecting the earth. By adopting these habits early on, our kids can play a crucial role in ensuring the future health of our earth.

### Conclusion

In this research, Dellarobia and Ovid Byron's environmental awareness is central. Dellarobia has a deep connection with nature, which transforms her life. She is passionate about protecting butterflies from environmental changes. The environment and Dellarobia, the main character, are closely intertwined. She has a strong interest in science, especially when it comes to learning about the monarch butterflies' situation. She eagerly absorbs Ovid's words to understand the reasons behind the butterflies' migration. The message of this study is the importance of environmental awareness in society. Kingslover's work serves as a powerful

statement against deforestation and human negligence towards nature.

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