



Representation of Climate Migration in Contemporary Climate Fiction: A Comparative Study of *Flight Behaviour* and *Migrations*

Dhivyaharshana B.G¹ & Dr. B. Pavithra²

¹ PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

² Associate Professor, Department of English, PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

Climate change is one of the most pertinent issues in the twenty-first century affecting not only the planet's ecosystems but also the habitats of humans and other species, prompting Migrations as means of adaptation. In recent times, climate fiction literature has reflected these changes in the environment providing imagination of ecological transformations and displacements. The current paper will examine the phenomenon of climate migration presented in *Flight Behavior* written by Barbara Kingsolver and *Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy, two representative works of contemporary climate fiction literature that deal with environmental issues in terms of migration. *Flight Behavior* represents the changed migration of monarch butterflies because of climatic changes while *Migrations* describes the last migratory flight of Arctic terns in the world full of extinction of species and biodiversity loss. Using ecocriticism theory, the paper will analyze these works of climate fiction literature from the viewpoint of migration as the reaction on environmental instability and symbolic representation of the fractured relationship between human being and nature. From the comparison of the two novels, the study reveals how climate migration becomes both the material result of climate change and a literary technique through which the reader is made to emotionally grasp the environmental crisis situation. Finally, the two novels reveal how human and non-human lives are interdependent and urge the need for ecological consciousness in view of the increasing climate change. Through this study, contributions have been made to ecocriticism in the contemporary age through the revelation of how climate fiction reshapes migration in the context of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Climate Migration, Climate Fiction, Ecological Grief, Environmental Displacement, Anthropocene.

Article History: Received: 10 June 2026. Revised: 20 June 2026. Accepted: 10 August 2026. First published: 31st August, 2026.

Copyright: © 2026 by the author/s.

License: Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Published by: Adrija Press, India.

Citation: B G, Dhivyaharshana. (2026). Representation of Climate Migration in Contemporary Climate Fiction: A Comparative Study of *Flight Behaviour* and *Migrations*. *Newliteraria Journal* 9:1, 28-35. <https://dx.doi.org/10.48189/nl.2026.v09i1.004>

Introduction

Global warming has become one of the most important environmental issues of the current century as it changes the ecology of the planet, its weather conditions, wildlife, and people's way of living. Higher temperatures, increased water levels, natural disasters, destruction of habitats, and lack of resources have increasingly led to displacement of people and non-human creatures due to climate changes. This process is known as climate migration and has become an important issue in environmental research, political debates, and the humanities. Although when it comes to climate migration people usually think about human displacement caused by the environment, today literature broadened the scope of this concept as the migration of animals and disruption of ecological balance. In literature, climate fiction has become a popular genre known as "cli-fi" that addresses issues related to the environmental, sociological, and psychological impacts of climate change. In contrast to scientific articles and policy documents, climate fiction makes use of environmental facts and figures and converts them into personal and social stories to help readers understand climate crises better. With the use of personal, communal, and ecological experience of characters influenced by the environment, climate fiction helps to develop ecological consciousness and reflect on humanity and its connection with nature. Some examples of prominent climate fiction novels are *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver and *Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy.

Kingsolver presents the unusual appearance of monarch butterflies in the Appalachian part of Tennessee in *Flight Behavior* as a consequence of the changes in climate. The changed migration path of these butterflies is used to illustrate the disturbance of ecological balance and becomes the basis for discussing issues of climate denialism, environmental consciousness, and connectedness between humans and animals. In a similar fashion, the story of the novel *Migrations* by McConaghy revolves around the final journey of the last flock of Arctic terns made by Franny Stone against the backdrop of mass extinction of different species and environmental catastrophe. Even though the two novels have different styles of narration and settings, the novels utilize migration as the primary frame of depicting the effects of climate change. Migration of migratory animals not only becomes a biological process but also serves as an illustration of the effects that climate change brings about on the environment. Through the use of migrating species, Kingsolver and McConaghy defy anthropocentric notions of climate change migration. The current paper looks into the issue of climate migration as portrayed in *Flight Behavior* and *Migrations* by means of the ecocritical approach. In particular, it pays attention to how the novels represent the effects of climate on the migratory patterns, vulnerability of species, ecological displacement, and environment losses. Besides, this research seeks to reveal how the stories about migration disclose the interconnections between people, animals, and ecosystems in times of rapid transformation of the planet. Through comparative analysis of these novels, this article seeks to prove that climate migration is a strong tool to communicate the truth about environmental crisis.

1.1 Climate Migration as Ecological Disruption

Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* and *Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy provide some insightful examples of climate migration through the depiction of animal migration in the context of environmental changes. While conventional notions of climate migration imply displacement of people due to rising sea level, droughts, floods, or shortage of resources, this literary interpretation of the term suggests that climate migration is an event that can involve migration of animals because their existence becomes under threat due to climate instability. Thus, the novel *Flight Behavior* shows how migration patterns of monarch butterflies have changed while the story of *Migrations* ends with the migration of Arctic terns.

The sudden arrival of millions of monarch butterflies in rural Tennessee, instead of their

usual hibernation sites in Mexico, is used in the novel *Flight Behavior* as a physical example of global warming. The displacement of the butterflies is symbolic of a disturbance to the natural rhythm of nature, which has been evolving for several years now. The author uses migration as a form of environmental warning, showing how the increase in temperature and changes in weather affect the behaviour of different species. In the same way, the novel *Migrations* describes a world where climatic changes have led to the extinction of several species. The arctic terns followed by Franny Stone are among the last migratory birds alive. Migration in the story is characterized by uncertainty because of the unstable conditions brought about by the destruction of the environment on Earth. McConaghy's description of migration reveals the precarious nature of ecological systems and the vulnerability of species whose survival depends on predictable climatic conditions.

1.2 Migration Beyond Anthropocentrism

Another key contribution by the two authors is that they counter anthropocentric views. In environmental issues, human experience tends to be emphasized while the effects of climate change on other species are ignored. In *Flight Behavior* and *After the Ice Age*, Kingsolver and McConaghy draw the focus to animals showing that the migration due to climate change is not only affecting humans but other forms of existence as well. In *Flight Behavior*, the monarch butterflies are not just used as passive creatures within the story, but they become an integral part of it because of the changes they bring in the migration process.

Similarly, the novel provides symbolism to the Arctic terns. While the plot revolves around Franny Stone's individual story, the birds play an important role in conveying the novel's ecological message. The flight of the birds symbolizes survival and fragility. The birds themselves are symbolic of the nature that is disappearing, thus reminding the readers of the fact that environmental destruction affects not just humans but the entire ecosystem.

This way, the two novels highlight the lack of hierarchy between human and animals. Climate migration becomes a collective response to the ecological crisis in both the cases.

1.3 Species Vulnerability and Environmental Uncertainty

Migration vulnerability is another thematic element that runs through both novels and connects them. Changes in climate alter habitats, sources of food, and paths for travel; as a result, species that rely on a stable environment find themselves threatened in such conditions. Kingsolver's butterflies are examples of species vulnerable due to climate changes. Although their migration to Tennessee seems like something extraordinary and almost divine at first, scientific explanation shows that it is rather a consequence of changes in the environment. Thus, their chances of surviving are reduced since the butterflies migrate in the wrong direction and end up in the wrong place. Thus, Kingsolver demonstrates how climate change disrupts biological adaptations that took years to develop in species. Similarly, McConaghy explores how extinction has become a norm by the time her story unfolds. In the post-apocalyptic future, Arctic terns have survived in the midst of a world where most species have already gone extinct. Their migration takes place in scarcity and death, highlighting the dangerous nature of survival in such an unstable environment. Thus, both authors show that due to climate change, migration has stopped being an adaptation strategy, but turned into an act of desperation.

1.4 Ecological Grief and The Emotional Dimensions of Climate Migration

The other notable commonality between the two books is the element of ecological grief that they present to the readers. Migration is not only presented as a biological aspect, but it is also shown as an emotional process involving elements of sorrow, pain, and uncertainty.

Flight Behavior describes how Dellarobia Turnbow begins to realize the importance of the butterflies in the environment and the effects of climate change. The author uses the characters to express the feelings and emotions that people feel when they see changes taking place in the environment, which they cannot predict.

In *Migrations*, ecological grief takes center stage. Franny Stone's travels along with the Arctic terns are influenced by the element of extinction. The birds in the book represent the lost biological diversity, and their migration can be described as a last remembrance of the lost world. Franny's feeling towards the birds also shows her grief about the lost environment. Emotional storytelling is employed by both writers to render climate change visible to the reader.

1.5 Human Nature Interconnectedness

Both novels highlight the interconnectedness of climate migration and human/nature relationship. Rather than presenting environmental change as an independent issue, the authors show the dependence of human life on environmental stability.

Climate change and its consequences in *Flight Behavior* are linked to the social, cultural, economic situation of the Appalachian community. The agriculture, livelihood and identity of the community members are linked to the environmental factors. Involvement of the community into the changes related to the butterflies' arrival demonstrates that the ecological change cannot fail to have an impact on people. Thus, the author refutes the idea of the independence of environmental issues from the social ones.

Likewise, in *Migrations*, there is a depiction of the world in which ecological disaster transforms human life. Extinction of species is a sign of general disruption in human society. The example of Franny and her journey demonstrates the influence of the environmental problems on personal identity and understanding of belonging.

He said our lives mean nothing except as a cycle of regeneration, that we are incomprehensibly brief sparks, us as the animals are, that we are no more important than they are, no more worthy of life than any living creature. That in our self-importance, in our search for meaning, we have forgotten how to share the planet that gave us life. (McConaghy, 198)

The focus on interconnectedness makes the novels deny the idea of human exceptionalism. Climate migration becomes the proof that humans and other species share the same ecological destiny.

1.6 Migration as A Narrative Strategy

Migration is not just a theme but also a means through which the two authors tell climate change stories in their narratives. Both authors use migration as a tool for structuring their narratives and creating engagement around the issue of environment. Migration of the monarch butterflies triggers the events in *Flight Behavior* and contributes towards the environmental awareness of the characters in the book. The butterflies' migration makes an otherwise ordinary rural scene a place with ecological significance. As such, Kingsolver manages to incorporate climate change issues in her novel without losing her general audience by using the migration narrative structure.

The novel *Migrations* revolves around the theme of movement in its narrative structure. The search of the Arctic terns by Franny takes her through oceans as she follows the migratory journey. In this way, the migratory path gives readers an opportunity to engage with issues of

ecological displacement, species extinction, and climate uncertainty in a more relatable manner.

1.7 Climate Migration and Environmental Ethics

Additionally, these novels raise essential moral questions regarding human responsibility towards nature. Displaced animals presented in both of these works are not responsible for climate change their vulnerability is caused by human interference into ecosystem and climatic system processes. Kingsolver exposes climate denials and complacency toward environmental problems by showing consequences of ignoring ecological warnings. Monarch butterflies serve as a symbol of environmental responsibility, prompting people to accept the reality and think about moral aspects of environmental pollution.

In a similar way, McConaghy draws attention to human responsibility by showing extinction in terms of human intervention into ecological processes and not as a natural phenomenon. Arctic Terns function as an example of the price for ignoring ecosystems. Both works encourage readers to reflect upon their responsibility for conserving nature. Therefore, in both texts, climate migration is assessed from the perspective of environmental ethics.

1.8 Divergent Representations of Climate Migration

Although both *Flight Behavior* and *Migrations* use the concept of migration to discuss issues of climate change, they vary widely regarding their depiction of climate migration. This is in regard to their scope, meaning, and role in the narratives. In this regard, the two novels present different styles of approaching climate change in terms of environmental crisis and ecological displacement within climate fiction.

In *Flight Behavior*, climate migration is depicted through the migration changes in monarch butterflies. The appearance of the monarch butterflies in Tennessee is due to climate change that affects existing ecological cycles. It can be noted that Kingsolver presents the concept from the current context of climate change and stresses the impacts that the changes have on the behaviour of different species. The concept of migration is used as an ecological indicator that shows how invisible impacts of climate change affect the environment. On the other hand, the setting of *Migrations* entails climate migration in a future world that is experiencing extensive ecological destruction and mass extinctions of species. The migration of the Arctic terns is not only disrupted but faces the danger of extinction.

It never stops moving around the world. It edges its way slowly down from the polar region, and some of it forms into ice. Some of it gets saltier and colder and starts to sink. The water that sinks into the deep cold makes its way south along the ocean floor, through the black twelve thousand feet down. It reaches the Southern Ocean and grazes the icy water from the Antarctic, and then it gets flung across into the Pacific and the Indian. Slowly it thaws, warmer and warmer and rising to the surface. And then at last it turns for home. North again, all the way to the mighty Atlantic. Do you know how long it takes the sea to make that journey around the world? (McConaghy, 94)

In comparison to *Flight Behavior*, where migration represents an adaptation process to the environmental changes, in *Migrations*, migration represents the last efforts of the organisms saving themselves in the face of ecological deterioration. Therefore, migration in *Migrations* can be perceived as a melancholic narrative of extinction due to climatic changes. An important difference between the two novels is the emotionality associated with migration. In *Flight Behavior*, migration leads to knowledge. Monarch butterflies create awareness and understanding and promote the need to learn more about climate change. While the novel

recognizes the vulnerability of ecosystems to ecological changes, it maintains some degree of optimism concerning the potential of environmental education. On the other hand, the idea of ecological grief and mourning is integral to *Migrations*.

The monarchs had to leave the Mexican roost sites earlier every year because of seasonality changes from climatic warming. She wondered whether any of this was proved. Climate change, she knew to be wary of that. He said no one completely understood how they made these migrations. Hundreds of factors came into play. Fire ants, for example, had now come into Texas, where the monarchs were vulnerable. Ants ate the caterpillars. (Kingsolver, 120)

The novels are also different in regard to the temporal scale. While *Flight Behavior* deals with the first signs of climate disruption in a familiar contemporary environment and shows the reader how ecological disruptions may indicate bigger environmental troubles, *Migrations* takes place in the future where most people do not heeded the warnings of the past and now suffer from the extinction of the majority of species. Therefore, together the two novels make the timeline of climate migration narratives: Kingsolver represents migration as a sign of upcoming ecological crisis, while McConaghy represents migration as a reaction to an already devastating ecological crisis.

Hence, even though both novels employ migration to illustrate the consequences of climate change, Kingsolver concentrates on disruption, awareness, and ecological warning, while McConaghy is interested in extinction, ecological grief, and survival. It would help to create diversity within the genre of cli-fi and provide different perspectives of migration in connection with the environment. This sub-section is ideal for placement either after your talk on species vulnerability or before the discussion on ecological grief since it brings balance through comparison.

Conclusion

Climate change has led to the emergence of migration as one of the key environmental phenomena of the modern world, impacting not just human populations but also innumerable non-human species whose existence requires stable ecological circumstances. In portraying the disruptions caused by the climate-induced changes to the migration patterns of various organisms, both Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* and Charlotte McConaghy's *Migrations* showcase how modern climate fiction expands the existing perceptions of climate migration from the displacement of humans to the ecological and environmental aspects of the subject matter.

In comparing the two novels, it can be seen how migration is used as an environmental literary device for drawing attention to the challenges of climate change. *Flight Behavior* portrays migration as an ecological alarm that alerts people about the first symptoms of climatic disruptions and encourages people to pay attention to the ecological problems of the world around them. *Migrations*, however, uses migration as a means of demonstrating the challenges of surviving in an ecosystem suffering from ecological collapse. Both books highlight how climate migration is not an isolated issue but a part of the wider environmental changes impacting humanity.

In addition, the study shows how the authors' texts highlight the problem of the anthropocentric approach by highlighting the plight of migratory species. In doing so, their stories reveal the connection between man, animals, and the environment, and that environmental disasters are not limited to particular species. Through ecological grief, vulnerability, displacement, and adaptation, the two texts allow for a reassessment of human

interactions with nature, and also of the impact of climate change on both humans and animals. Overall, both *Flight Behavior* and *Migrations* make important contributions to climate fiction literature as they provide a new vision of migration, both as an ecological phenomenon and an interpretative tool of environmental changes. The way they portray climate migration helps to realize the vulnerability of ecosystems in the Anthropocene age, as well as increase ecological awareness.

References

- Almulhim, A. I., Alverio, G. N., Sharifi, A., Shaw, R., Huq, S., Mahmud, M. J., Ahmad, S., & Abubakar, I. R. (2024). Climate-induced Migration in the Global South: An in Depth Analysis. *Npj Climate Action*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44168-024-00133-1>
- B. Aarthi, & K. Suganthi. (2025). Ecological Grief and Revive in Charlotte McConaghy's *Migrations*. *BODHI International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science*, 10(1), 313–316. <https://doi.org/10.64938/bijri.v10n1.25.oct054>
- Baldwin, A., Fröhlich, C., & Rothe, D. (2019). From climate migration to anthropocene mobilities: shifting the debate. *Mobilities*, 14(3), 289–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1620510>
- Boehm-Schnitker, N. (2024). Trails of Erasure: imagining the reality of co-Migrations in contemporary climate fiction. *Green Letters*, 28(3), 160–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2024.2354165>
- Brzoska, M., & Fröhlich, C. (2016). Climate change, migration and violent conflict: vulnerabilities, pathways and adaptation strategies. *Migration and Development*, 5(2), 190–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2015.1022973>
- Cipollina, M., Luca De Benedictis, & Scibè, E. (2024). Environmental migration? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the literature. *Review of World Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10290-024-00529-5>
- Death, C. (2022). Climate Fiction, Climate Theory: Decolonising Imaginations of Global Futures. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 50(2), 030582982110639. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298211063926>
- Kelman, I. (2020). Does climate change cause migration? *Refuge in a Moving World*, 123–136. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13xpwtw.15>
- Kingsolver, B. (2012). *Flight Behavior*. Harper.
- Mcconaghy, C. (2020). *Migrations*. Flatiron Books.
- McLeman, R. (2017). Thresholds in climate migration. *Population and Environment*, 39(4), 319–338. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-017-0290-2>
- Moore, T. T. (2011). CLIMATE CHANGE AND ANIMAL MIGRATION. *Environmental Law*, 41(2), 393–405. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/43267496>
- Piguet, E., Pecoud, A., & de Guchteneire, P. (2011). Migration and Climate Change: An Overview. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 30(3), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdr006>

Bio-note

Ms. Dhivyaharshana B.G is currently pursuing her PhD in English Literature at PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore. Her area of interests in the research domain include; Environment & sustainability, climate change, and poetry. She has qualified UGC-NET and TN SET and K-SET Examinations.

Email Id: dhivyaharshana@gmail.com

Dr. B. Pavithra is an accomplished professional with a remarkable 21 years of teaching experience as an Associate Professor of English. Her extensive teaching career has been marked by a commitment to academic excellence and a passion for fostering a deep understanding of the English language and literature. Dr. Pavithra's contributions extend beyond the classroom, as she has actively engaged in research, further enriching her understanding of the field. In addition to her distinguished career as an Associate Professor, she has also made significant contributions as a Co-Editor of a book and as an Associate Editor for a reputed online journal. Her involvement in editorial roles reflects her commitment to advancing academic discourse and knowledge dissemination.

