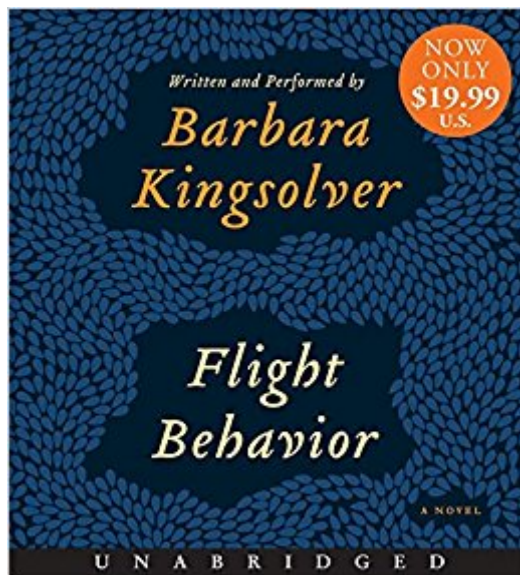


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# Flight Behavior



## Synopsis

Dellarobia Turnbow is a restless farm wife who gave up her own plans when she accidentally became pregnant at seventeen. Now, after a decade of domestic disharmony on a failing farm, she encounters a shocking sight: a silent, forested valley filled with what looks like a lake of fire. She can only understand it as a cautionary miracle, but it sparks a raft of other explanations from scientists, religious leaders, and the media. As the community lines up to judge the woman and her miracle, Dellarobia confronts her family, her church, her town, and a larger world, in a flight toward truth that could undo all she has ever believed. *Flight Behavior* takes on one of the most contentious subjects of our time: climate change. With a deft and versatile empathy Kingsolver dissects the motives that drive denial and belief in a precarious world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, November 2012: In what may be the first novel to realistically imagine the near-term impact of “global weirding,” Barbara Kingsolver sets her latest story in rural Appalachia. In fictional Feathertown, Tennessee, Dellarobia Turnbow--on the run from her stifling life--charges up the mountain above her husband’s family farm and stumbles onto a “valley of fire” filled with millions of monarch butterflies. This vision is deemed miraculous by the town’s parishioners, then the international media. But when Ovid, a scientist who studies monarch behavior, sets up a lab on the Turnbow farm, he learns that the butterflies’ presence signals systemic disorder--and Dellarobia’s in-laws’ logging plans won’t help. Readers who bristle at politics made personal may be turned off by the

strength of Kingsolver's convictions, but she never reduces her characters to mouthpieces, giving equal weight to climate science and human need, to forces both biological and biblical. Her concept of family encompasses all living beings, however ephemeral, and *Flight Behavior* gracefully, urgently contributes to the dialogue of survival on this swiftly tilting planet. --Mari Malcolm

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Kingsolver proves an excellent reader of her own work, perfectly conveying both Dellarobia's gossipy, accented smalltown neighbors and the distinctive Jamaican accent of intellectual Ovid, the butterfly scientist. | This is a beautifully realized audio version of a compelling and fascinating novel. (Publishers Weekly) [Kingsolver] balances the fictional and scientific characters with her usual skill and performs the audio version with a true feel for the characters and their sense of the butterflies. VERDICT Highly recommended as a timely and informative book on a significant current issue. (Library Journal)

When I first heard the title to Barbara Kingsolver's seventh novel, I thought of airplanes. Such is the orientation of the 21st century. Well, prepare to step into the rural, economically depressed farming and shepherding town of Feathertown, Tennessee, where the shepherds flock on Sundays to commune with Pastor Bobby Ogle, their beloved and kind preacher and spiritual leader. This is the kind of repressed, technologically challenged community who believes that climate change is determined by God, not explained by science, and that the past year's flooding was decreed by the heavens and can only be reversed by prayer. In this story, the survival techniques of the Monarch butterfly, those bright orange, delicate but hardy creatures, and that of a diminutive, flame-haired young woman are inextricably intertwined and analogous. The Monarchs have had an atypical flight behavior this year. Floods and landslides led to felled trees everywhere in their usual roosting place in Mexico. Subsequently, they migrated to Feathertown to overwinter. Why Feathertown? That's the big question that one team of scientists comes to examine. However, they are challenged by the residents, who are skeptical of science-based answers to climate-based questions. In the meantime, residents of Feathertown need to fill their coffers. Dellarobia Turnbow, 27, has her own kind of flight behaviors, spurred on by too much domestic confinement too soon, and now she is primed to flee, restive--flying from pillar to post, as her mother always said. Unlike the rest of the townspeople, she wasn't as inspired by religion. "She was a...911 Christian: in the event of an emergency, call the Lord...Jesus was a more reliable backer, less likely to drink himself unconscious or get liver cancer. No wonder people chose Him as their number one friend. But if the chemistry

wasn't there, what could you do?" Married in a shotgun wedding ten years ago, she lost a preemie before having two more children. Her husband, Cub, is a large, docile and complacent man, controlled and essentially managed by his mirthless parents. Dellarobia knows that to live in this town is to be under a microscope; she was the untamed child once, and that wildness is rearing its head again, her dormancy coming to an end. The first chapter, "The Measure of a Man," is the catalyst for both Dellarobia's evolution and the arc of the story. (If you want to experience it fresh and unspoiled, avoid reading the jacket blurb.) Kingsolver's time-honored talent for yoking the struggle and turmoil of man with the flux and beauty of nature is vividly drawn. She builds the final, dramatic scene of the chapter to a man/nature composition that is at once distilled and dynamic, serene and dramatic. Abundant, also, are Biblical allusions that reflect the community's ethos. Kingsolver is an agent of social change. She established the Bellwether prize in literature in order to award writers who effect change for the good of humanity. She is also a scholar with postgrad degrees in biology and environmental science. You are going to encounter a stout measure of activism in her writing, covering such issues as the degradation of the planet and its natural resources and the contentious class system of society. If her political evocations have bothered you in the past, they are likely to bother you here, too. Nevertheless, the author weaves in her social issues with finesse, for the most part, and her vivid portrait of Feathertown is sympathetic and informed. Initially, she seems to lampoon the pious, science-fearing populace, but she gradually tenders the reader to an understanding of the religious community. She slowly develops dialogue between urban, rural, and academic minds and concerns. The biblical allusions are also ripe and fitting, relevant to the inhabitants of Feathertown and the way they see the "miracle" of nature. Dellarobia represents a connection between both worlds. This is the second book I have read that highlights the migratory patterns and survival modes of the Monarch butterfly, and braids in the journey of self-actualization and coming to terms with loss. *SANCTUARY LINE*, by Jane Urquhart, is also socially and environmentally conscious, and is an apt companion piece to this book. The clash of family, science, religion, media, politics, and environment takes Dellarobia on a quest beyond the emotional and intellectual borders she has known all her life, on a journey of discovery and transformation. Like a butterfly out of the chrysalis, she must follow the path of her future.

Barbara Kingsolver's novel *FLIGHT BEHAVIOR* is the sort of book you would expect from this gifted novelist, whose story combines climate change with religious faith and traditional values. Set in Southern Appalachia, protagonist Dellarobia's life is turned upside down when a swath of Monarch butterflies nests in her mountain, carpeting the landscape with their bright colors. This has never

happened before, and leaves people seeking various explanations from religion and science. What is so wonderful about this book is the sensitive portrayal of people who have so little money and access to resources that they are imprisoned by the kind of inertia that is brought about by lack of opportunities. My favorite scene was the one between Dellarobbia and the man with the questionnaire, designed to find out how big your carbon footprint is. The questions were so not relevant to Dellarobbia's life, it was hysterical. And sad. What was not so good were all of the innumerable descriptions of Dellarobbia's life with her children. If you have young children and live in a part of the world that resembles rural Appalachia, you will probably wonder why I complain about this. And in the first part of the book, when Dellarobbia has such a delightfully opinionated voice, this problem was not noticeable. But after she realizes the extent of the problem represented by the butterflies, after the novel becomes much more somber in tone, her voice flattens out and loses its emotional punch. A stronger editorial hand was needed. Four stars.

Flight Behavior is a work of fiction based on scientific truths. The characters are entwined with secrets and unspoken feelings as well as small town gossip and assumptions.. The book begins with the flight behavior of Dellarobia fleeing her marriage and circumstances, which rapidly changes into a magic like transformation. She returns home to face criticism and acclaim. This quickly turns into TV reporters, videos, and social media, in addition to strangers assailing her home. When the "miracle" she encountered on the mountain is revealed as a mass migration of Monarch butterflies in a poor Tennessee town, a scientist whose life work has been dedicated to researching the migratory flights of Monarchs turns up with some post graduate students to study the phenomena, she is hired to work on the project. The reader has already seen the intelligence in Dellarobia and she becomes a valuable asset to the team. As her world view widens so does that of her in-laws behavior and secrets. Her in-laws are cold, even to her children, but hold she and her husband responsible to service the debt on the farm. Her father in-law sees the trees on the mountain above "Cub" and her home as an asset to be clear cut; the means of clearing his debt. The weather of unrelenting rain has made a mire of the farm and surrounding area. The scientist, Dr. , whose study of Monarch butterflies sets up his lab in their barn and sets his trailer next to it. He connects this unknown behavior of the butterflies ss directly accountable to changes in the climate. There are real surprises based on the relationships between people in this book and fact based scientific evidence.

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