

# INTERSPECIES MOTHERING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: DISCOURSE OF TRANSCORPOREALITY AND MATRICENTRICITY IN CHARLOTTE MCCONAGHY'S *MIGRATIONS* AND BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *FLIGHT BEHAVIOUR*

*LA MATERNIDAD ENTRE ESPECIES EN EL ANTROPOCENO: EL DISCURSO DE LA TRANSCORPOREIDAD Y LA MATRICENTRICIDAD EN LAS MIGRACIONES DE CHARLOTTE MCCONAGHY Y LA CONDUCTA DE VUELO DE BARBARA KINGSOLVER*

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**Received:** December 5 2023 **Revised version accepted:** November 16 2024

**How to cite** Janane, V., & Rebecca, S. Christina. "Interspecies mothering in the anthropocene: discourse of transcorporeality and matricentricity in Charlotte McConaghy's *Migrations* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*." *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies*, vol. 31, 2024, e8488. <https://doi.org/10.17561/grove.v31.8488>

## Abstract

This research paper reconsiders the dominant anthropocentric notions of motherhood that focus on the multigenerational praxis of human to human relationships by shedding light on interspecies mothering. Interspecies mothering accommodates diverse relationships between women and the more than human, which unlike 'non-human' debunks anthropocentrism and is inclusive multispecies communities. It consists of a hetero-

patriarchal reading which challenges anthropocentric personhood and transitions towards the motherhood in anthropogenic narratives—namely, Charlotte McConaghy’s *Migrations* (2020) and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behaviour* (2012)—that perceive motherhood as multispecies inclusive and transcorporeal. The two novels deal with ecological mothering of the female characters that ensure survival and sustenance of the monarch butterflies in *Flight Behaviour* and Arctic Terns in *Migrations*. The mothering presented by women in climate narratives radically debunks the processes of ‘othering’: that denies agency and power to the non-human nature. The characters recenter the human by putting forth ‘other-mothering’ (Collins and Michaels) that promotes cohabitation and multispecies justice. This paper will further involve a perceptual shift from anthropocentric personhood to multispecies kinship through the emotional and ecological praxis of motherhood amidst the anthropogenic toxification of global warming, species extinction and relocation. The “motherhood environmentalism” in Dellarobia’s *Flight Behaviour* and the protagonist in McConaghy’s *Migrations* will be examined as a call for kinship and multispecies justice.

**Keywords:** ecological mothering, multispecies motherhood, anthropogenic crisis, climate justice.

## Resumen

Este artículo de investigación tiene como objetivo criticar las nociones antropocéntricas dominantes de la maternidad que se centran en la praxis multigeneracional de las relaciones entre humanos y proponer nociones nuevas de maternidad ecológica, que den cabida a diversas relaciones entre las mujeres y lo “más que humano”. Contiene una lectura heteropatriarcal que desafía la personalidad antropocéntrica y las transiciones hacia la maternidad en narrativas antropogénicas como *Migrations* and *Flight Behavior*, donde la maternidad se entiende como multiespecie inclusiva y transcorpórea. Las novelas tratan sobre la maternidad ecológica que permite tanto a las madres como a sus hijos (los charranes árticos en *Las migraciones* y las mariposas monarcas en *El comportamiento de vuelo*) la supervivencia y el sustento. La maternidad representada por las mujeres en las narrativas climáticas desacredita radicalmente el proceso de “otredad” de lo “más que humano” al proponer una “otra-madre” (Collins y Michaels) que promueve la cohabitación y la justicia climática y multiespecie. El artículo investigará más a fondo la praxis emocional y ecológica de la maternidad en el centro de la toxificación antropogénica del calentamiento global, la extinción de

especies y su reubicación. El ecologismo de la maternidad de Dellarobia en *Flight Behavior* y la protagonista, Franny, en *Migrations* serán examinados como una llamada al parentesco multiespecie y la justicia climática.

*Palabras clave:* maternidad ecológica, maternidad multiespecie, crisis antropogénica, justicia climática.

## The Role of Climate Fiction

*Climate fictions* have been urged to “go beyond apocalyptic rhetoric” as the complexity of climate change inspires writers to provide “a more nuanced approach to this multifaceted environmental problem” (Mehnert 34). The discovery of such an approach to address the Anthropocene has led to the crafting of plots that encompass the tenets of affective ecocriticism, which extends affect theory to comprehend the issues of climate and social justice as emotional responses are one of the predominant factors in propelling action and formulating ideologies that address the environmental issues of the Anthropocene. The theoretical turn of affective ecocriticism to address issues of climate justice extends “beyond anthropocentrism, insisting that we consider nonhuman actors” (Bladow and Ladino 6). Such storylines emphasise the role of community engagement, kinship, and transactions between the human and the more than human. The depiction of such relationships thrives on emotional exchanges and affective studies, wherein the emotional transformations of characters shape the climate action that is undertaken.

Climate change has turned the planet into a site of series of mobilising events and displacement with and without movement. Clark uses the term “*terra incognita*” to describe such a volatile condition of anthropogenic transformations. The planet is potent enough to not only move and produce changes through tides, shifts in weather patterns and landslides, but also can produce shifts that are “forceful enough to bring about new forms of life, and indeed, an entirely new earth” (as quoted in Baldwin et al 292). Such geological force that has the potential of altering the futurity of the species (human and the more than human) leads to the need for a multifaceted approach to climate justice that depicts, comprehends and provides culpable solutions.

As the term suggests, the “Anthropocene” denotes how “human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of nature” (Clark 1) and thereby propels the responsibility of humans as the primary geological force. This becomes not only accountable for causing

the climate crises but also for taking up collective action to rectify the same. *Animals in the Anthropocene: Critical Perspectives on Non-Human Futures*, edited by the Human Animal Research Network Editorial Collective (2006) puts forth how the Anthropocene has elevated the human species as “the God species, a force more powerful than nature, capable of transforming Earth itself. As such, the apocalyptic tenor that has long sounded in environmentalists’ warnings becomes here more intense and complex – ‘we’ are both problem and solution” (Animal Research Network Editorial Collective Human xviii). In this light, taking up accountability requires “forging new forms of place based community and planetary solidarity; along with a commitment to justice” (Abram 9).

### **Kinship and Multispecies Communities**

In *the Promise of Multispecies Justice*, Sophie Chao unites writers into a multispecies tradition in the age of ecological degradation. Anna Tsing shares a notion of “arts of noticing”, one which “involves paying attention to charismatic forms of life – like plants, birds, and butterflies—as well as creatures that are often disregarded or actively targeted for destruction like mushrooms, bacteria, rodents, and beetles” (Chang 2). Such an approach breaks down the “obliviousness to nonhuman nature” that is “held in place by ways of speaking that simply deny intelligence to other species and to nature in general” (Abram 26). Chao’s approach decentres the hierarchy of “placing humans above other species” by promoting “intersectional alliances emerging among diverse peoples and species on planet Earth, and even the possibilities of transformative justice in extra-terrestrial realms” (Chao 3). The writers from this tradition shed light on species inclusiveness and coexistence found in writing and livelihood.

The need for species inclusiveness has significance in the Anthropocene as it is also called the age of the species’ loneliness. In *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming*, David Wells showcases how in the Anthropocene, humans function as the geological force that has bullied and brutalized “every other species into retreat, near extinction, or worse.” “E.O Wilson thinks the era ought to be called the *Eremocene*—the age of loneliness” (Wallace-Wells). Climate fictions that decentre the human by depicting human characters as co-agential in determining the future of multispecies communities play a pivotal role in battling species loneliness. Richard Powers also addresses this kind of despair, “species loneliness” and defines it as “the sense we’re here by ourselves, and there can be no purposeful act except to gratify ourselves”

(Wallace-Wells). He then suggests “a retreat from anthropocentrism that is not quite a withdrawal from modern civilization: we have to un-blind ourselves to human exceptionalism. That’s the real challenge” (Wallace-Wells). The selected climate fictions decentre the human and instead focus on the more than human agents. The term ‘more-than-human’ is used as it decentres the human and instead focusses on the collective wellbeing of the ecology and the multispecies communities. Addressing the multispecies communities of plants, animals and other species as ‘non-human’ leads to the anthropocentric binary of ‘human’ and the ‘non-human’ which has been the main reason behind the age of the Anthropocene.

The female characters in the climate fiction develop to understand the “copious folds of nonhumans, without which we would not exist.” The primary challenge the characters go through to become multispecies mothers “is to displace the centrality of the human” (Hartigan). Climate fictions like *Migrations* and *Flight Behaviour* by the women novelists Charlotte McConaghy and Barbara Kingsolver, respectively, undertake literary constructions that are woman centric and indulge in an extrapolation of motherhood and how the mothers extend their mothering towards the multispecies communities. The concept of mothering species other than human creates a kinship that surpasses anthropocentric boundaries and truly exemplifies the planetary. The parenting offered by the female characters to the community of Arctic Terns and Monarch Butterflies promotes the continuance of the species. The novels testify that “Anthropocene is a need to imagine new futures, including a futurity with non-human animals” (Animal Research Network Editorial Collective Human xx) through their portrayal of non-human agents.

*Migrations* by Charlotte McConaghy is situated in the near future of the anthropogenic collapse. Through tracing the migratory pathway of the Arctic Terns, it sheds light on the nature of drastic transformations that the arctic terns and other species will undergo. The novel juxtaposes mobility and displacement. The characters move as a means to venture into diverse locations for life improving opportunities. Therefore, mobility by choice is juxtaposed to the displacement *sans* movement or choice by the environment. The environment undergoes displacement without movement, wherein the human and the more-than-human agents experience pangs of *solastalgia* as the ecology that had sustained them in the past can no longer care for them in the present. The novel deals with the emotions of personal grief undergone by the female protagonist with the ecological grief suffered

by the species of Arctic Terns. The protagonist's sorrow when losing her child through miscarriage becomes sublimated through "interspecies mothering" of the Arctic Terns. This promotes their survival, leading to redemption from personal and ecological grief.

*Flight Behaviour* by Barbara Kingsolver revolves around the Turnbow family and the rare occurrence of the Monarch Butterflies' "transnational and multigenerational migratory system, migrating north to Canada and South to Mexico that is carried out in a multi-sequential pattern (Jalan 4). Dellarobia, the protagonist of the novel; moves to the mountain to end her life, but the butterfly phenomenon propels her to continue living and leads her towards her purpose. The species of the monarch butterflies function as a medium through which she expresses her pent up personal grief of losing her child through miscarriage, her dysfunctional marriage and her life of restricted mobility. By taking up the role of mothering the butterflies, the characters become agents of climate activism through kinship and coexistence.

### **Interspecies Mothering in the Anthropocene**

This article aims to compare the two novels and their depictions of the interspecies mothering offered by the female characters and attempts to interpret it as a kind of motherhood environmentalism that promotes climate action. It tries to challenge the established notion of motherhood that restricts women to domesticity and service to human off springs by putting forth interspecies mothering that promotes multispecies justice in the face of climate change. Psychoanalytic theorists have examined the mother's actions and her attachment to the children, sociologists have traced the mother's experience of child rearing by analysing the role of society and culture, and they "have been concerned with the subordination of women in the mothering role and have offered impassioned and often contradictory ways of thinking about motherhood" (Pascoe 1). In Anthropocene narratives, motherhood is analysed not only with respect to same-species child-rearing but it also accommodates questions of intergenerational climate justice. In *Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram looks at "sensory reciprocity" (26) and the barriers between species in perception and engagement, which would dissolve after a shift in perception on the "basic structures of the life world that are shared, elements that are common to different cultures and even, we may suspect, to different species" (34). In the selected novels, despite a diversity of backgrounds, the female characters embark on the shared spaces of species solidarity through mothering that transcends the boundaries of

species and anthropocentric constraints. The role of interspecies climate justice and kinship when leading to motherhood environmentalism becomes the primary focus of the selected climate narratives.

Gendered perspectives have been excluded from environmental justice discourse. Domestic scale and its nuances have also been excluded and “remain an under examined site of environmental harm and gendered burden.” Motherhood environmentalism takes into account the realm of domesticity and its impact on ecological sustenance. Early environmental justice activists put forth “a community-oriented notion of motherhood that encouraged advocacy outside of the home” (Cousins 2). This mobilization of motherhood needs to become duplicated in the present to address the apocalypse of climate change.

Motherhood in the Anthropocene can be perceived as more radical and inclusive than the motherhood of the pre-Anthropocene era. Feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir believed that motherhood “signalled that women were twice doomed: biologically, during pregnancy when they lacked control over their bodies, and socially, when children restricted them to the home” (Pascoe 5). On the contrary, in the selected climate narratives, motherhood empowers women by helping transcend the barriers of domesticity, restriction and subservience through an embankment of life, sustaining mobility and multispecies justice.

Multispecies motherhood in the Anthropocene functions as a liminal space “where identity and perspective are challenged, lost, or reinforced” (Thomas 176). The depiction of motherhood in the select climate fiction “is a ripe potential space to re-order anthropocentric worldviews and tune-in to the more-than-human world.” (Thomas 176) In a climatically altering environment, identities constantly shift and change, and thus, personal identities such as ‘parent’ or ‘child’ collide with other –environmental– identities such as climate refugees or climate victims. Eventually, they become inseparable from each other. This transaction “makes motherhood a potentially fruitful time to reassess, reflect, and rework ideas or roadblocks in perception of the more-than-human world” (Thomas 176). The theory of the Interspecies Mothering provided by Franny and Dellarobia offers a re-conception of the role of humankind in reverting the climatic consequences faced by the more-than-human.

Motherhood environmentalism in the face of climate change is considered to be a type of multifaceted environmentalism that takes into account the woman’s identity “as a mother and the associated meanings and

responsibilities she assigns to this social position” (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred 141). In climate fiction, the role of the women’s identity as mothers, coupled with their gender identity as females, operates as a catalyst to becoming agents of environmental change and climate action. The maternal responsibility reflected in the characters through the tending to the needs of the Terns and the Monarch Butterflies heal grief, and promote continuance of species.

*Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* by Suzanne Simard puts forth a mothering by trees, as they shelter squirrels, birds and other species. Simard characterises trees as “multispecies mothers”, signifying the “practiced by human and more-than-human beings alike and how mothering’s effects reach beyond their offspring. Mothers tend to their own kin, to be sure, but also beings who take quite different forms and lead rather diverse lives” (Barnett 2).

## **Ecological Grief and Solastalgia**

The characters in the selected climate fictions are primarily overtaken by feelings of intense ecological grief over the loss of the environment. In *Migrations*, the protagonist shares an intimate bond with the more than human. She becomes a mother to the crows first, before she becomes pregnant with her baby. She mothers these birds by feeding, nurturing and loving them like her own children. The crows would come to her house every day, “perch in the willow and watch for [her] crumbs” (McConaghy 59). She expresses the “arts of noticing” as evidenced in the multispecies tradition, and she recalls how the crows were not stray birds that she fed but were companions and a display of genuine friendship:

The crows began to follow me. If we walked to the shops they would fly alongside and perch on the roofs of houses. When I trailed the stone walls into the hills they circled above. They followed me to school and waited in the trees for me to finish my day. They were my constant companions, and my mother, maybe intuiting that I needed them to be a secret, pretended all along that she didn’t notice my devoted dark cloud. (McConaghy 59)

Despite her dysfunctionally familial ties with her mother, the crows bridged the gap as if she were a friend and sibling, as well as a mother to the crows. The crows were not portrayed as passive entities but were depicted with agency and intelligence as they appreciated the favour and to her



surprise, “the crows began to bring me gifts in return” (McConaghy 60). The bond that connected them transcended the human and the non-human binary as they were in the cusp of interspecies mothering relations; they shared communication, and their presence nurtured each other.

The crows’ intelligence and communication with her is communicated through the exchange of food and their tokens-gifts:

Little stones or shiny sweet wrappers were left in the garden or dropped near my feet. Paperclips and bobby pins, pieces of jewellery or rubbish, sometimes shells or rocks or bits of plastic. I kept each in a box that year by year had to grow bigger. Even when I forgot to feed the birds they brought me gifts. They were mine, and I theirs, and we loved each other. (McConaghy 60)

The protagonist is described as a wanderer, who yearns to be constantly on the move and cannot live rooted in a place for life. She seeks the wild, the untameable, and a life of adventure. She leaves her home and wanders off, not only from her mother but also from the crows she refers to as her “twelve kindred spirits” (McConaghy 61). She alludes to pain from homesickness, as even in the present she dreams “of them waiting in that tree for a girl who would never come, bringing gift after precious gift to lie unloved in the grass.” (McConaghy 61)

The entire episode of her mothering the crows and proceeding to do the same with the Terns does not put forth a modern, radical notion of motherhood but “simply [remembers] what it feels like to love creatures that aren’t human” (McConaghy 61).

*Flight Behaviour* also brings to light the intimacy of the female protagonist with the butterflies and other natural beings. Dellarobia does not support the decision of her family to deforest their farm; reflecting her love for nature. She goes to the mountain to attempt suicide as she “craved the collapse, with an appetite larger than sense” (Kingsolver 2). But the butterfly phenomenon appeared to her like a vision that made her continue living, as she says: “I couldn’t live it anymore. I wanted out. So I came up here by myself, ready to throw everything away. And I saw this. This stopped me” (Kingsolver 288). Dellarobia did not reveal the sight she witnessed and instead “carried this vision inside herself for so many days in ignorance, like an unacknowledged pregnancy” (Kingsolver 72). Right from witnessing the event, Dellarobia’s emotional connection to the butterflies is also depicted as a mother-child relationship. Similarly, they did not comprehend the brutality

of dislocating the butterflies as a part of the climatic unfolding of events in the Anthropocene. Unlike scientists, climatologists and other educated people around her, she could not understand the reality of the butterfly event and still earned the title “Our Lady of the Butterflies” (Kingsolver 106). She inherently believed “that animals behaved with purpose. Unlike people.” (Kingsolver 57). Her attempt in figuring out the purpose of the butterfly phenomenon through emotional cognition earns her not only the title but the role of mothering the species: “Why did the one rare, spectacular thing in her life have to be a sickness of nature? These butterflies had been hers. She found them, she’d showed them to her son, in her name they were becoming beloved and important. They seemed to matter, like nothing she’d ever possessed” (Kingsolver 205).

Her attachment to the butterflies has shifted her perception of a climatically altered event as a site for display of interspecies motherhood. The female protagonists from both novels go through the child-loss from miscarriage. The *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood* (2010) brings out how “Women who grieve the loss of their baby through miscarriage do not want judgement; they want acknowledgement of what their loss means to them” (Reilly 176). None of these female characters are given the space to vent, grieve and mourn the loss of the children they did not birth.

## Personal Grief and Motherhood

The characters are in the cusp of motherhood but faced with grief and loss before its manifestation. They struggle to transcend the process from grief to mourning and instead suppress it until butterflies and terns call to the motherhood within them. In *Flight Behaviour*, Dellarobia went through a miscarriage when she was seventeen and she speaks about how “Nobody talked about it. Cub and I didn’t. You don’t get to feel sad about a baby that never had a name and doesn’t exist” (Kingsolver 266). The grief that is caused by almost becoming a mother and not being able to hold the child that they have been waiting for, evokes a grief that may seem ineffable.

Abortion has always been linked with grief and despair. Most texts and artifacts bring out how “grief has always been a common reaction to miscarriage, and ritual part of the process of legitimizing grief” (Reilly 177). The characters found in this process face their personal grief as they mourn for the ecological death of their home. The butterflies are considered to be messengers from heaven with the souls of dead children (Kingsolver 536). Juliet expresses the age-old belief that people think “they’re the souls of dead

children” (Kingsolver 536). The interweaving of personal grief and ecological grief bridged by collective healing astonishes Dellarobia “by connections unforeseen” (Kingsolver 536).

Despite having children after her miscarriage, Dellarobia cannot overcome the grief as she envisions the future she could have had if the child were alive and she says: “He’d be turning *eleven* today. If the child had lived, he’d be that old now. We’d be having a fifth-grader birthday party here. I can’t find any possible way to make that real in my head” (Kingsolver 269). Most women who have undergone miscarriage “choose burial and or have a ritual recognizing their child’s existence” (Reilly 176). Dellarobia practices such a ritual to remember and mourn the life of the lost child as she goes to the “grave, no stone” (Kingsolver 583). She had not introduced the baby she never had to her son Preston, but after mothering the butterflies, she channels her personal grief along with ecological grief to heal, grieve and mourn the lost life. She takes Preston to the grave and introduces the two of them: “but see, Preston, that was your brother. He came first, a long time before you. So you should know about him” (Kingsolver 583).

In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton perceives the Anthropocene as “a time for grief to persist, to ring throughout the world” (185). Although the process of experiencing environmental loss causes grief, it is essential to channel it through mourning, understanding and climatic action. The reality of the impending ecological collapse leads to the unstrapping of anthropocentric pride and makes the characters prioritise the lives of animals over those of humans, as Franny says: “I wonder if this matters. I wonder if there is meaning in any death, ever. There has been meaning in the deaths of the animals, but I am no animal. If only I were” (McConaghy 180).

In *Migrations*, Charlotte McConaghy also intertwines ecological and personal grief. She expresses solastalgia for the environment that has been constantly under change. She goes to Yellowstone National Park which had turned out to be:

one of the last pine forests. It is an empty place now, not as it once was. The deer have all died. The bears and wolves went long ago, already too few to survive the inevitable. Nothing will survive this, Niall says. Not at the current rate of change. There is no birdsong as I walk among the trees and it is catastrophically wrong. I regret coming

here, to where it should be more alive than anywhere. Instead it is a graveyard. (McConaghy 207)

The species loneliness characteristic of the Anthropocene does not limit to the more than human, but also accommodates the solastalgia and despair undergone by humans. The ecological grief in the human species includes not only a “God Species” complex but also “a profound sense of loathing for what we are, all of us, and the poison of our species” (McConaghy 167).

In *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief* (2017) Cunsolo and Landman discuss ecological grief that is caused due to solastalgia, degradation and loss of livelihood. Ecological grief is multispecies inclusive and mourns for the losses, both: tangible and intangible. It mourns the artificial or climate related separation “between bodies that can and cannot be mourned. It is about asking what counts as a mournable body (and what does not).” (Cunsolo and Landman 3) The concept of ecological grief in the Anthropocene, especially in the selected novels, sheds light on the grievable and mournable losses of the non-human. The depiction of characters who notice the brunt of the climatic crisis feel sorrow for the lost butterflies and terns, and take up climate action, accordingly, to promote their survival. This action comes from the concept of coexistence put forth by Cunsolo: “as it decentres subjectivities, heals traces of ecological grief and promotes living connectivity and interdependencyn” (Cunsolo and Landman 3).

*Migrations*, by Charlotte McConaghy, features a female protagonist who also goes through a miscarriage. Despite being a wanderer reluctant to build relationships or offer commitment, she becomes pregnant with a child that she only grows attached to after the miscarriage. Niall, her husband, understands that the child has been a cage, locking her down and forcing her to spread her roots. Niall understands that her wife’s wandering nature does not make her any less of a mother as she has the ability to be a mother in the presence or the absence of a biological child:

She loves this child, and it’s her cage. I think she only agreed to keep it because she wanted me to be left with something when she breaks free. The thing that calls to her, whatever it is, will call again. But she has forgotten my promise. I wait, always. Our daughter will wait with me. And maybe one day she too will leave, off on an adventure. And then I will wait for her, too. (McConaghy 243-44)

Despite being right about predicting the future, Niall remains short sighted as he could not comprehend the intensity of grief she would bear after the loss. Though she did not appreciate bearing the child at the beginning, after the miscarriage she could not fathom the burden of the loss. The miscarriage haunts her, as she expresses her situation through the lens of motherly grief and void:

...it's my daughter, the child I never wanted, the child I fought a battle to be rid of, the one I feel deeply, catastrophically in love with, the one I lost. It's the littlest one, Ferd, her fingers around my neck and her hot breath against my ear, she has cracked me open and now my own littlest one is in my arms once more, a too-still thing, a most precious thing, breathless and without warmth, and no matter how often I try to leave it behind there will never be an end to this ache, this pain, the feel of her unbearable weightlessness in my hands. (McConaghy 122)

Niall also goes through the loss of having a child and the personal grief from childlessness, but he sees it as a tool to heal the ecological grief that persists in the world. When he dies “there will be nothing of [him] left behind. No children to carry on [his] genes. No art to commemorate [his] name, nothing written down, no great acts. [He] think[s] of the impact of a life like that. It sounds quiet, and so small as to be invisible” (McConaghy 93).

Sharing the planet and its resources in the Anthropocene also encompasses the collective role that has to be performed by human beings as mentors, caretakers, guardians, and activists for ecological wellbeing. In both novels, the female characters perform such an impactful role by extending their mothering to other non-human species. The role of interspecies mothering plays a significant part in the transformation of the quality of life of the beings. In the age of climatic collapse, a reification of the lost kinship and “re-remembering the common bond of materiality” shared between “earthly bodies” with the more than human “is crucial to continuing to exist together on the planet” (Thomas 176).

The mothering role of the ecological caregivers is brought out after a healthy transgression of their grief and overcoming the short sightedness of their victimhood to acknowledge “our own responsibility and complicity in the changes now unfolding” and to evaluate “the morally simpler calculus of pure victimhood” (Wallace-Wells). In *Migrations* Franny had mourned over the victimhood of her position as a daughter who witnessed her mother's

suicide and had “repressed that memory to the point of needing to constantly look for her” (Murray 4).

### **Climate Grief and Climate Consciousness**

The novel focuses on how “A life’s impact can be measured by what it gives and what it leaves behind, but it can also be measured by what it steals from the world” (McConaghy 93). It promotes a way of living that moves towards coexistence and less corruption of the planet’s resources. The impact left by humans has been hoards of garbage being dumped, as there is “an enormous island of plastic, and there are fish and seabirds and seals dead upon its shore” (McConaghy 179).

Niall often remarks how humans have been “a plague of the world” (McConaghy 207). Climate consciousness is coupled with the revelation of accountability of climate debt and the responsibility to take up climate action. Throughout the novel, Niall emphasises the urgency to radically decentre the human in favour of the binary of human and non-human. Breaking away from this binary and transitioning towards the more-than-human is likened to the whites and non-whites, as exemplified by Susan Leigh Star. She evaluates the dichotomy and how the term “non-human implies a lack of something” (Kirksey and Helmreich 555). The term non-human is a site of contestation and contradiction in the Anthropocene, as it is “grounded in human exceptionalism” (Kirksey and Helmreich 555). The female protagonists of both the novels acquire climate consciousness by crossing over emotional and intellectual thresholds, thus destroying the dichotomy of the human and the non-human and acknowledging kinship and multispecies motherhood. In *Flight Behaviour*, Dellarobia’s shift in climate consciousness occurs as “the relationship between developing human consciousness and the growing threats of climate chaos” (Gillespie 28).

Franny and Dellarobia do not succumb to climate inaction that stems out of climate grief but instead indulge in mothering the species that are victimised by the impact. They perform the role of mothers who foster the species, offer nutrition and protection until they are able to venture into the new world of the anthropocene by themselves. They act as responsible mothers who understand the torment of isolated children left in a climatically altered world and who may experience solastalgia. In *Ghost Species*, Bradley reflects on a similar maternal note, of how “she does what mothers have done since the beginning of time, since before we were human: she draws filaments from the darkness and

weaves them together to create meaning, purpose, shape, arranging the elements to reveal the world, or perhaps to make a new one” (Bradley). Dellarobia and Franny try to do the same for the butterflies and the terns as they carve a niche for their survival and rehabilitation. Dellarobia overcomes the barrier of domestic constraints, judgements from the local community, attention from the media and her personal confinements to extend her motherly support to the butterflies. She views them as a poetic species from the perspective of a mother as she goes through an emotional upheaval throughout the novel and wonders how scientists are able to view and assess the butterfly phenomenon objectively. It is through affective ecocritical renewal that Dellarobia battles climate denial and steps into the foray of motherhood environmentalism. Franny rejects a life of comfort, security and familiarity to venture out into the Arctic. There, she watches the migration trajectory of terns as she assigns a purpose to their pathway and survival.

The belief that the Terns brought her husband and her together in the past and the certainty of how spreading his ashes amidst their presence will provide salvation for the dead and the alive stirs emotions of motherhood within her. Franny invites the Arctic Terns to be part of her personal and emotional journey of grief and towards salvation. In *Migrations*, Franny and Niall go through loss and redemption to understand that mothering is not biological, but intentional and exclusive to multispecies. They find a crow’s egg when these had been declared extinct; he believes that a human’s touch can only cause destruction, but she educates him on the path of interspecies mothering by stating how they can be a nurturing antidote to the often poisonous human presence in the world (McConaghy 252). Franny overcomes her personal sadness to understand the urgency of the climate alarm and the need to nurture what is left, as read in her words: “We are not here alone, not yet. They haven’t all gone and so there isn’t time for me to drown. There are things yet to be done” (McConaghy 254). Dellarobia overcomes her personal grief after realising that butterflies are also children of the planet that need to be protected and nurtured. Her mothering, as she says, is like taking care of a loved one in their last days, wherein “you do everything you can and can’t” (Kingsolver 441). She becomes an interspecies mother who views the global as planetary and begins to view the butterflies as her children. She shows Cub how one of the “babies” is theirs (Kingsolver 583).

## **Motherhood Environmentalism**

Lawrence Buell introduces the notion of “motherhood environmentalism” and its course in affective ecocriticism studies through an “ecofeminist environmental ethics of earth care” (Buell 75). Dellarobia and Franny’s displays of activism can be viewed as a reflection of motherhood environmentalism, as the activist measures they adopt can be viewed as their expression of motherly emotions to the more-than-human environment. In *Beyond Mothering*, MacGregor analyses the dichotomy prevalent in ecofeminist narratives interpreting women’s activism as a mothering role. Women’s “meaningful connections between their mothering roles and their engagement in ecopolitical and grassroots activism” must not be diminished as a narrative of care, but as “democratic potential of ecofeminist politics” (MacGregor 217). The concept of motherhood has historically been included in the discourse of nature and excluded from feminist politics or ecofeminist discourses. The perception of motherhood activism in the Anthropocene breaks down the barriers of domesticity and simultaneously engages in ecofeminist conversations by “honouring the astounding possibilities of having a woman body” (Thomas 177).

## **Conclusion**

The various discourses on motherhood in the Anthropocene are a testament to the decomposing heteropatriarchal viewpoints of the female body and matricentricity. In the age of the Anthropocene, motherhood acquires a position of power, wherein “painfully colonized, patriarchal motives bound up in diverse moral codes” (Thomas 177) are deconstructed and female bodies and motherly experiences are termed as co-agential in determining the planetary future. In the perilous age of the Anthropocene, motherhood acts as a site of interrogation that ventures into an “animist existence” that signals “what it is to have a living birthing body and form a heart-aching kinship with other mother bodies that make babies” (Thomas 177).

Multispecies motherhood as seen in Dellarobia and most biological mothers in general is a twofold notion as, firstly, it is “funnelled into the effort to protect and preserve the land, air, and water for our children” (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred 142) and secondly, they concede the “natural connection between their mothering and environmental activism”. Despite being childless, Franny channels the qualities that came to her through her gender identity and biological roles of giving, protecting, nurturing, and sustaining life to care for the terns as her attempt at undertaking significant climate action.



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