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Bakalářská práce

The Marsh Girl Myth, A Human Individual as
a Part of the Natural World in the work of
Delia Owens

Dívka z močálu, mýtus o dospívání v srdci
přírody v románu Delii Owens

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Poděkování

Tímto bych ráda poděkovala vedoucí mé bakalářské práce PhDr. Alici Sukdolové, Ph.D. za cenné rady, odborné vedení a ochotnou pomoc poskytnutou při zpracování této práce.

Abstract

The bachelor thesis is to explore and analyze the theoretical level of the coming-of-age story, the connection between nature, landscape, and person, who stands on the margins of society and is not included in the social structure. Based on theoretical sources, the work will try to analyze the myth of the found child and his ability to adapt to natural conditions during adolescence in contrast to the problem of subsequent inclusion of the individual in local communities, education, and employment in adulthood. Literary analysis of the romance genre will focus on the emotional relationships of an individual who grows up in social isolation and, at the same time, is closely connected with nature and the landscape. The work further characterizes the space and natural conditions in the locality, in which the novel *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens is situated and analyzes the behavior of the main characters against the background of the criminal investigation, which the "marsh girl" is a subject to.

Anotace

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce je teoretická rovina příběhu o dospívání (coming-of-age story), sepětí přírody, krajiny a člověka, který stojí na okraji společnosti a není zařazen do sociální struktury. Na základě teoretických pramenů se práce pokusí o analýzu mýtu o nalezeném dítěti a jeho schopnosti se přizpůsobit přírodním podmínkám v období dospívání v kontrastu s problémem následného zařazení jedince do místní komunity, systému vzdělání a pracovního uplatnění v období dospělosti. Literárněvědná analýza žánru romance se zaměří na citové vztahy jedince, který vyrůstá v sociální izolaci a zároveň je těsně spjat s přírodou a krajinou. Práce dále charakterizuje prostor a přírodní podmínky v lokalitě, do které je román *Kde zpívají raci* D. Owenové situován, a provede analýzu chování hlavních postav příběhu na pozadí vyšetřování zločinu, ze kterého je obviněna "dívka z močálu".

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Introduction

Where the Crawdads Sing, a significant masterpiece written by contemporary American Southern writer Delia Owens, is a murder mystery and a coming-of-age story set in the marshlands of North Carolina in the 1950s-1970s. The novel was published in 2018, became an instant bestseller worldwide, and won several awards, such as Bookseller Award in Japan or British Book Award (Page Turner).¹ Delia was not a well-known writer, but when she was 69 years old, this breathtaking story definitely made her celebrated among different age groups.

There might be some kind of suspicion that the novel is based on a true story, but it is not, even though Delia and her ex-husband were connected to a real-life murder in the 1990s when they were the suspects in the shooting in Zambia.²

Where the Crawdads Sing can be classified as a literary fiction novel and a coming-of-age story. Both literary fiction and coming-of-age novel will be defined in the first two parts of the thesis. The book falls upon (contemporary) southern literature, which will be closely introduced in the third part, southern writers such as William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Carson McCullers and contemporary southern writers such as Cormac McCarthy, Ann Beattie, Wendell Berry, and Jericho Brown will be mentioned at the end of the third part too. The following part will comment on Delia Owens, her biography, writings, and their division into two parts related to the particular genre: novels (*Where the Crawdads Sing*, 2018) and memoirs (*Cry of the Calahari*, 1984; *The Eye of the Elephant*, 1992; *Secrets of the Savanna*, 2006). Human-nature relationship and wilderness, as the main aspects of the *Where the Crawdads Sing*, will be the centre of the fifth part. The core of the thesis will be the detailed analysis of *Where the Crawdads Sing*, concerning mainly the life of Kya, the abandoned child living in the marshlands of North Carolina, where the marsh slowly became Kya's mother against the background of the criminal investigation. In addition, the thesis

¹ News & Reviews. *Delia Owens* [online]. © Delia Owens 2018—21 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.deliaowens.com/news-reviews/category/Awards+%26+Honors>

² GARRISON, Anna. 'Where the Crawdads Sing' Is a Gripping Book, but Is It Based on a True Story?. *Distractify* [online]. © Copyright 2022 Distractify. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.distractify.com/p/where-the-crawdads-sing-true-story>

outlines the main characters and their behaviour, natural conditions in the locality, main themes, and symbols.

1. Literary fiction

As I mentioned above, *Where the Crawdads Sing* can be classified as a literary fiction novel.

The category of Literary Fiction has overlapped with a couple of genres for the last few decades. Even though the “Literary Fiction” definition is a wide target, it has its own characteristics. As we all know, genre fictions such as Romance, Dystopian horrors, and many others, are plot-driven, on the other hand, Literary Fiction is character-driven.³

If we take a closer look at differences of genre fiction and literary fiction, genre fiction appeals to a wider audience, must keep specific rule (for example young adult stories have to embrace the protagonist aged something between 12-18, romances must include love story), it uses ordinary storytelling (such as *Boy fell in love with a girl. The girl left the boy.*). Genre fiction stories often add entertaining adventures to make readers laugh and it is also supposed to have a happy ending.⁴

On the contrary, literary fiction does not follow any rules, which means that anything can happen, which is both exciting and upsetting as for the reading. It uses creative storytelling and explores the human condition, which can be difficult for some readers. Last but not least feature of literary fiction is that we can often find a bit of ambiguity in endings, which can lead to readers’ confusion.⁵

The main point in literary fiction is that the author does not take responsibility for the truth of the elements of his story. The term ‘fiction’ expresses the author’s responsibility for the relationship between the elements of the story and specific elements (persons, objects, events) in reality. Moreover, fiction does not outline that every aspect in the book is fictional, only that a reader ought to treat them as if they were. Which parts of the story are real or not is the author’s own concern and none of

³ What Is Literary Fiction?. *Celadon Books* [online]. © 2018–2022 CELADON BOOKS. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://celadonbooks.com/what-is-literary-fiction/>

⁴ What is Literary Fiction?. *NY Book Editors* [online]. © 2022 NYBE [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://nybookeditors.com/2018/07/what-is-literary-fiction/>

⁵ Ibid.

the reader's. From this, a simple definition could be formulated: *Literary fiction means a text in which the reader is expected to treat the content as if it were fictional.*⁶

1.1 Types of Literary Fiction

Elements, which set Literary Fiction apart, are character-driven stories, social and political themes, and irreverence for storytelling norms. As for the types, Literary Fiction can be divided into four different kinds related to mentioned elements.⁷

Regarding the first one, *Contemporary Literary Fiction*, as the name suggests, deals with timely social issues and political moments. *Realistic Literary fiction* contains coming-of-age stories and biographical novels. On the other hand, the purpose of *Experimental Literary Fiction* is to challenge storytelling conventions. Novels can be a mixture of poetry, visual art, and self-consciousness prose. Very often, reading of the book itself is a part of the story as well because it makes readers self-conscious of what they are bringing to the text.⁸

1.2 History of Literary Fiction

In terms of history, from the 1930s to the 1970s, both academy and the high-culture divided contemporary fiction into “literary” and “genre”. On one hand, literary fiction was taken as cultivated and serious. On the other hand, genre fiction, consisting of science fiction, romance novel, fantasy, crime novel, children's and young adult fiction was considered formulaic, popular, and entertainment. According to this division, critics, writers, and readers of both these genres wanted to establish the seriousness of the study, creation, and production of this genre and did not want to take it for granted. They successfully won these arguments, pointing out the depth, significance, and value of genre fiction. What is more, they debated literary value and canon, the purpose of literature – what it is or should be and this played a very special role in uncovering unquestioned forms of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice in highbrow life.

⁶ FARNER, Geir. *Literary Fiction: The Way We Read Narrative Literature* [online]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014 [cit. 2022-03-20]. ISBN 978-1-6235-6025-6. Dostupné z: <https://books.google.cz/books?id=U5DFAgAAQBAJ&dq=literary+fiction&hl=cs&lr=>

⁷ What Is Literary Fiction?. *Celadon Books* [online]. © 2018–2022 CELADON BOOKS. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://celadonbooks.com/what-is-literary-fiction/>

⁸Ibid.

Questions determining the literary value and the canon are a space where political and aesthetic matters must be connected.⁹

2. Coming-of-age novel

As the whole story suggests, this book is a distinctive example of a coming-of-age story.

The centre of coming-of-age novels is the growth of the main protagonist of the story as it focuses on the process of becoming an adult. This genre has been here for centuries, and we can find it predominantly everywhere – not only in classic literature, contemporary novels, or children's stories but also in movies and televisions.¹⁰

We mostly observe the protagonist's journey and his physical, psychological, and spiritual transformations, which can be considered as the main characteristic of the coming-of-age novels. Another one could be the change in perspective. As the child becomes an adult in the story, we can watch his changes in the world view.¹¹

Other famous stories that fall under this genre can be for example *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë or *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens.¹²

⁹ O'GORMAN, Daniel a Robert EAGLESTONE. *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literature* [online]. Abingdon: Routledge, 2019 [cit. 2022-03-24]. ISBN 978-1-315-88023-5.

¹⁰ What is a Coming of Age Story?. *Study.com* [online]. © copyright 2003-2022 Study.com. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/coming-of-age-novel-definition-examples-quiz.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² TEMPLE, Emily. The 50 Greatest Coming-of-Age Novels. *LITERARY HUB* [online]. © LITHUB, 2019 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://lithub.com/the-50-greatest-coming-of-age-novels/2/>

3. Southern Literature

Literature of the US South is being defined by both cultural vibrancy and widespread poverty. It is marked by the complex history of cultural exchange, migration, slavery, and trade. The nineteenth century was a notably boisterous time as the region experienced the rise and the fall of slavery during the military loss in 1865 that left there a devastated country and a decimated generation. Against these political, social, and economic changes, a lot of works of literature arose, which, for example, pointed and imagined a different future for African Americans.¹³

First of all, the very important question comes when defining where the South is. The eleven states that formed the Confederacy, the states that voted for Jefferson David, are Southern. Moreover, there are certain border states such as Missouri and Kentucky included.¹⁴

Southern literature reveals the interlock of the US South and the expressive art. It is simply recognizable as a contingent upon particular identifiers: geographic, cultural, social, political, historical, and mainly linguistic fortuities that determine what we know as “the South”.¹⁵

In terms of the southern genre definitions, it is needed to say that southern literature is the genre itself. The first critical pronouncements appeared at the time, when the South, as the part of the United States, was about to understand itself regarding cultural and political differences. One of the most important statements, that southern literature was supposed to do, was to announce one of the first literary journals and that was *Southern Literary Messenger*. As the 1830s came, Northern readers and writers started to be

¹³ HINRICHSEN, Lisa Hinrichsen a Michael PITTS. *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* [online]. Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Literature., 2017 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.298>

¹⁴ Procházka M., J. Quinn, C. Wallace, H. Ulmanová, E. S. Roraback, P. Veselá a D. Robbins. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2011. ISBN 978-80-246-1996-5

¹⁵ MACKETHAN, Lucinda. Genres of Southern Literature. *Southern Spaces* [online]. North Carolina State University, 2014 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature/>

boldly unsatisfied with the South's differences. That is why southern writers and readers started to define themselves against the North as different from.¹⁶

3.1 Key Characteristics of Southern literature

One of the key features of Southern literature is the strong sense of tradition. After the loss of the noble Southern life, which was only noble if you had a lot of money, some southern writers started to glorify the traditions of chivalry and the elevation of women's innocence.¹⁷ Another influential characteristic of Southern literature is the strong sense of history. Southerners never want to digress too far from history. Furthermore, some characters hold to the ideas of the past as they believe that their fathers and grandfathers were war heroes. In terms of history, it goes undoubtedly hand in hand with the place and that place has been the South, specifically the small town and the countryside.¹⁸

Furthermore, fiction in the classic American traditions – Herman Melville, James Fennimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, and Ernest Hemingway – tends to celebrate a separate hero that is breaking out from a restrictive community into the world of unexplored freedom. Nevertheless, Southern fiction celebrates those who do not leave the community but incorporate themselves into it while still keeping their individuality and dignity.¹⁹ Something that is closely associated with the community is another key feature of Southern literature and that is the importance of a family. The family members must get on with each other very often as a part of the plot. These connections are sometimes important way after the children grow up and go their separate ways.

¹⁶ MACKETHAN, Lucinda. Genres of Southern Literature. *Southern Spaces* [online]. North Carolina State University, 2014 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature/>

¹⁷ Characteristics of Southern Literature. *FL16VI6 ENG2233H1AA American Literature 2* [online]. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://hindscc.instructure.com/courses/214021/pages/characteristics-of-southern-literature>

¹⁸ BRINKMEYER, R. H., *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Even now, it is hard for most Southerners to understand how a brother could vanish and never come back.²⁰

Another important element of Southern literature feature is a sense of grotesque; however, it is hard to define Southern grotesque in terms of the accuracy. As Flannery O'Connor says: "...in the North everything which comes from the South is considered grotesque, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is considered realistic."²¹ The humor can be divided into three categories – character humor, which is connected with the frequent occurrence of handicapped people both in Southern life and in Southern literature (for example Flannery O'Connor grew up in Milledgeville, Georgia, where people from all over the state imprisoned their handicapped relatives). The second one is situational humor, which usually arose from the distinction between words and actions and between ideals and reality. Last but not least, the purely linguistic humor – it co-exists with both character and situational humor.²²

The use of Gothic elements is another key feature of Southern literature. There is no place in the United States, where the Gothic elements are more present than in the American South.²³ Main characteristics of Southern Gothic literature are for example freak characters, violence, crime, death, decay, discrimination, imprisonment, and isolation.²⁴

²⁰ Characteristics of Southern Literature. *FL16V16 ENG2233H1AA American Literature 2* [online]. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://hindscc.instructure.com/courses/214021/pages/characteristics-of-southern-literature>

²¹ Procházka M., J. Quinn, C. Wallace, H. Ulmanová, E. S. Roraback, P. Veselá a D. Robbins. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2011. ISBN 978-80-246-1996-5

²² Ibid.

²³ ÆRVOLD BJERRE, Thomas. *Southern Gothic Literature* [online]. Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Literature., 2017 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.304>

²⁴ Southern Gothic | Definition, History, Characteristics & Famous Writers. *Elif Notes* [online]. © 2022 Elif Notes [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://elifnotes.com/southern-gothic-definition-history-characteristics-famous-writers/>

Not least of all features of Southern literature is the tense relationship between black and white people.²⁵ In this case, it is assuredly needed to mention American educator, author, and orator – Booker T. Washington, who “...*espoused a gradual acceptance of black Americans into arenas of power and knowledge. He called for Southern blacks to submit to white rule in payment for guaranteed access to basic education and due process in law. In this way, he supported and outlined a strategy for blacks to gradually attain political, civil, and educational rights.*”²⁶

3.2 Southern Writers

Modern literature of the South was created by William Faulkner who recreated his birthplace of Oxford into Jefferson, the center of Yoknapatawpha County, where the majority of his novels take place. Faulkner not only breaks with traditional chronological structure as most of his characters but in addition, he destroys the linear development of a detective story and lets every hero experience their own sense of time.²⁷

Nowadays, he is well-known for his *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).

William Faulkner was followed by another noticeable generation including for example Flannery O'Connor. What is worth mentioning about her work is that religion stands at its center. We can see it in her titles of short stories as they have religious connotations. Moreover, each of her works also surprises readers with the possibility of religious explanation.²⁸ Her first novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), tells a story about a preacher's grandson, Hazel Motes, who returns from military service to his hometown after losing his faith and then moving to another town full of false prophets and itinerant loners.

²⁵ BUCKNER ARMSTRONG, Julie. *Southern Literature and the Civil Rights Era* [online]. 2018 [cit. 2022-07-04]. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.650>

²⁶ HINRICHSEN, Lisa Hinrichsen a Michael PITTS. *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* [online]. Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Literature., 2017 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.298>

²⁷ Procházka M., J. Quinn, C. Wallace, H. Ulmanová, E. S. Roraback, P. Veselá a D. Robbins. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2011. ISBN 978-80-246-1996-5

²⁸ Ibid.

This work is supposed to point out religious imagination and the flair for the absurd that were to characterize Flannery's work.²⁹

Another influential Southern Catholic writer is Walker Percy. As for his works, Percy's protagonist is always an upper-middle-class white man from Louisiana, who consistently tries to find something meaningful in his life. What we can find furthermore in his works, are some signs of anti-utopia. For example, in Percy's *Love in the Ruins* (1971), there are outlined the tense relationships between black and white people in connection with the exploitation of faith and religion. Here, the only thing that makes sense is love, marriage, and children.³⁰

Considering female writers in southern literature, there are several reasons to highlight Carson McCullers, in my opinion, mainly for some of her statements, in which many people can find themselves, such as "*How can the dead be truly dead when they still live in the souls of those who are left behind?*" or "*Maybe when people longed for a thing that had the longing made them trust in anything that might give it to them*" from the first novel of hers, *The Heart is A Lonely Hunter* (1940), which was the outgrowth of her own character and suffering of loneliness.³¹

3.2.1 Contemporary Southern Writers

Modern Literature of the American South is a genre that has been lasting for several decades of years. This genre has shown us a number of common issues and cultural distinctions regarding family, community, religion, and social class. The American South has experienced an increased incursion of immigrants, industrialization, and economic growth, which led to drastic changes not only in literature. Typical themes, which were once the main topics of Southern literature, are in the background these

²⁹ Flannery O'Connor. *Britannica* [online]. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Flannery-OConnor>

³⁰ Procházka M., J. Quinn, C. Wallace, H. Ulmanová, E. S. Roraback, P. Veselá a D. Robbins. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2011. ISBN 978-80-246-1996-5

³¹ Carson McCullers. *Britannica* [online]. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carson-McCullers>

days. What is contemporary, are topics dealing with globalization, changes in the demographics of the people and migration.³²

One of the most interesting developments in contemporary Southern fiction is that many Southern writers have in a sense become New Westers, inventively forsaking Dixie for West, especially Montana, bygone era of cowboys, Indians, and gunfights. Authors from the South, who have looked up to the West, are Doris Betts, Barry Hannah, Cormac McCarthy, Chris Offutt, Frederick Barthelme, Clyde Edgerton, Dorothy Allison, and Tim Gautreaux.³³

Focusing on Cormac McCarthy, he explores the violent origin of westward expansion which has been removed from the national myths that celebrate the victory of civilization over barbarism. Cormac's Western landscape is a vast wasteland with several scattered towns marking humanity's presence.³⁴

Regarding other Southern writers to read nowadays, Ann Beattie must be mentioned for she has enjoyed huge worldwide success. Ann is a novelist and short-story writer born in Washington D.C. Her most recent works are *The Stare We're In: Maine Stories* (2015), *The Accomplished Guest* (2017), and her latest novel *A Wonderful Stroke of Luck* (2019). Beattie's characters are usually passive people, who cannot escape from their unsatisfying lives.³⁵

Wendell Berry is an essayist, novelist, poet, and farmer, who explores the intersections between agriculture and individuals. Berry's popular novels, *The Memory of Old Jack* (1974), *Jayber Crow* (2000), and *Hannah Coulter* (2014) are settled in a fictional

³² Modern Southern Literature Today. *Deep South Magazine* [online]. Copyright 2016 Deep South Media [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://deepsouthmag.com/2019/04/15/modern-southern-literature-today/>.

³³ BRINKMEYER, R. H., *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ann Beattie. *Britannica* [online]. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ann-Beattie>

Kentucky town. Moreover, the human responsibility to the earth is present in these works as well.³⁶

It is also necessary to mention another American poet and the writer Jericho Brown, mainly for his latest collection, *The Tradition* (2019), which was a National Book Award Finalist in 2019 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2020. *The Tradition* questions why and how we have become used to terror; whether it is in the bedroom or at the workplace.³⁷

4. Delia Owens and Her Work

Delia Owens is a contemporary American writer and zoologist, currently living in Idaho. Delia was born in southern Georgia, where she used to ride horses in the wood around Thomasville. Delia's mum, also an outside-girl, played a very special role in her life because she encouraged Delia to explore more about the oak forests while she kept saying: "Go way out yonder where the crawdads sing". Delia has been taught of nature as a true companion and one of her best friends since her childhood. These very close relationships and connections with nature have influenced her studies and works. Delia has also a special attachment to the beautiful places of North Carolina, where she spent some of every summer with her family and that is also why *Where the Crawdads Sing* is set in the marshlands of North Carolina.³⁸

In terms of her studies, she wanted to become famous in science instead of literature by the time she started university. Delia received a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from the University of Georgia and a Ph.D. in Animal Behavior from the University of California in Davis.³⁹

³⁶ Wendell Berry. *Britannica* [online]. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wendell-Berry>

³⁷ Jericho Brown's *The Tradition* Wins 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. *Copper Canyon Press* [online]. © 2022 Copper Canyon Press [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.coppercanyonpress.org/jericho-browns-the-tradition-wins-2020-pulitzer-prize-in-poetry/>

³⁸ About the Author. *Delia Owens* [online]. © Delia Owens 2018—21 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.deliaowens.com/about-the-author>

³⁹ Ibid.

As for literature and her writing, she started to write at an early age. In the sixth grade of her grammar school, she won first place in a writing competition, and from that moment, she felt this meant her life would be dedicated to writing.⁴⁰

Delia Owens spent some years in Africa with her husband while conducting scientific research in some of the most remote areas. Delia and her ex-husband, Mark Owens, drove overland into the Central Kalahari of Botswana in early 1974. In an area, the size of Ireland, they arranged the campsite where they were observing lions, elephants, and others. Mark and Delia also studied the elusive brown hyenas, who came into the campsite almost every night. Based on these adventures and expeditions, she co-authored three internationally bestselling books about her life as a wildlife scientist.⁴¹

4.1. Owens' Novels

Novels are narrative works of prose fiction, which tell stories about specific human experiences over a considerable length/word count. There is often created a closer, more complex portrait of this character and the world he or she lives in. The most clearly defining characteristic of a novel is the fictional or semi-fictional subject matter, fictional content, and individualism. It is not usually just the story itself that is personal but very often reading it as well.⁴²

Delia's first novel is *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018).

4.2 Owens' Memoirs

A memoir is a form of creative nonfiction, in which an author writes about his own (important) experiences. It usually takes a form of a narrative. The memoir is very often conflated with autobiography, but there are several visible differences. An autobiography is written from the author's perspective. The story mostly begins with

⁴⁰ About the Author. *Delia Owens* [online]. © Delia Owens 2018—21 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.deliaowens.com/about-the-author>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² PRAHL, Amanda. What Is a Novel? Definition and Characteristics. *ThoughtCo* [online]. 2019 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-novel-4685632>

childhood and ends with the author's present life. Whereas in memoirs, authors choose a certain moment in their lives and try to recreate the story through storytelling.⁴³

Delia's first memoir is *Cry of the Kalahari* (1984), which has won the John Burroughs Award for nature writing and has become a *New York Times* bestseller. The story is about two Americans, Delia and Mark Owens, who caught a plane to Africa, bought a third-hand Land Rover, and drove deep into the Kalahari Desert. Delia and Mark lived here for seven years, in an unsearched area with no people, no roads, and no source of water. In this boundless wilderness, they saw animals that had never met humans before and would wake up next to the lions sleeping near them. Other regular visitors to their camp were also leopards, brown hyenas, and giraffes. On the other hand, nothing is as amazing as it may sound, Mark and Delia were continuously threatened by wildfires, drought, violent storms, or the animals they studied and fell in love with.⁴⁴

After writing this noticeable bestseller, Delia and Mark set off on another African journey in search of a new breath-taking wilderness with the name *The Eye of the Elephant* (1992). This time, they found it in a remote valley of Zambia, where they were watching hippos swimming in the river just below their tents, lions stalking the bush, and the elephants walking into camp to eat marula fruits. This harmony was unexpectedly disturbed with gunfire and both of the Americans were drawn into a struggle to save not only the lives of the wild animals but also their own.⁴⁵

The third memoir, called *Secrets of the Savanna* (2006), which has become a Los Angeles bestseller, carries the story about couple's continuing crossing bridges over swollen rivers and battling swarms. Delia and Mark tried to help the villagers to find alternative jobs rather than their poaching until the shooting of elephants ended. Delia

⁴³ What Is A Memoir?. *Celadon Books* [online]. © 2018–2022 CELADON BOOKS. [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://celadonbooks.com/what-is-a-memoir/>

⁴⁴ Other Books. *Delia Owens* [online]. © Delia Owens 2018—21 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.deliaowens.com/other-books>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

went back to her camp on the banks of the Luangwa River, where she studied the recovering elephant herds.⁴⁶

5. Human – nature relationship and Wilderness

Wilderness and human – nature relationship are the main aspects of *Where the Crawdads Sing*, especially Kya's relationship to nature because the whole story accompanies us on this topic and how nature became Kya's mother and that sometimes, nature can teach us more about people than people themselves.

5.1. Human – nature relationship

Taking into consideration the human – nature relationship in general, I find it inspiring to mention the article *The Distinction between Humans and Nature* by Joanne Vining, Melinda S. Merrick and Emily A. Price that has sought to detect if people in USA think of themselves as a part of nature or separate from it. This research asked respondents of three separate surveys administered in 1997, 2003, and 2005 in the United States. The task was to find out if they see themselves as the part of the nature or not – and why. They were also asked to give lists of words connected with the natural and unnatural.⁴⁷

The questions were as follows:

1. Do you consider yourself as part of or separate from nature? Explain.
2. What words come to mind when you think of a natural environment?
3. What words come to mind when you think of an unnatural environment?

Participants were randomly selected residents of Cook and DuPage Counties in Illinois, Chippewa National Forests in northern Minnesota (and also Minnesota people living in Minneapolis), and students of University in Illinois.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Other Books. *Delia Owens* [online]. © Delia Owens 2018—21 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.deliaowens.com/other-books>

⁴⁷ VINING, Joanne, Melinda S. MERRICK a Emily A. PRICE. *The Distinction between Humans and Nature, Human Perceptions of Connectedness to Nature and Elements of the Natural and Unnatural* [online]. © Society for Human Ecology, 2008 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <http://www.apjh.humanecologyreview.org/pastissues/her151/viningetal.pdf>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The result of this research was that most of the respondents see themselves as part of the nature, smaller part of respondents considers themselves either separate from nature or both part of nature or separate from it. Only one participant felt like he or she is neither part of nature nor separate from it. Participants were also asked to justify their statements. Many reasons for feeling of being part of the nature were independence, connectedness, shared essence and habitat, and closeness. As an example, we can point out one respondent's saying:

*"I consider myself part of nature without a doubt. Physically speaking, nature is surrounding us. Trees, animals, the environment outside, etc... But within all of the animals and plants we as humans make up the environment as well; we are a vital part of nature. Everything we use and eat comes from the animals, and the trees and the things outside around us. Also, we all as humans come from each other. We are born from our parents, who came from their parents. We are all part of a cycle of nature that evolves through time."*⁴⁹

Those, who stated that they were both part of the nature and separate, said that they were part of the nature because of elements such as connectedness and interdependence and separate because of the fact that they lack the contact with nature, cited:

*"Separate because I feel I can artificially survive in today's world without much of nature affecting me; Part of, because, in reality I can't really survive without it at all."*⁵⁰

Last but not least, those who saw themselves as separate from nature almost wholly discussed their place of residence as a reason, cited:

*"Separate. I live in a climate controlled home, drive a climate controlled car on human built surfaces, and buy food pretreated and packaged in a human built store."*⁵¹

⁴⁹ VINING, Joanne, Melinda S. MERRICK a Emily A. PRICE. *The Distinction between Humans and Nature, Human Perceptions of Connectedness to Nature and Elements of the Natural and Unnatural* [online]. © Society for Human Ecology, 2008 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <http://www.apjh.humanecologyreview.org/pastissues/her151/viningetal.pdf>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

As it has been already mentioned, another task of this research was to give a list of words connected with the natural and unnatural. Regarding to natural environment, the most frequently mentioned words were *never touched or altered by humans, peaceful, satisfying, quiet* and many others. On the contrary, words associated with unnatural were: *busy, noisy, jarring, tainted* and many more.⁵²

To sum it all up, many people thought of themselves as a part of the nature mainly because of the connectedness with it and their feelings while being in nature. Smaller number of participants believed that they are separate from nature because as a result of lack of contact with nature or not living near it.⁵³

5.2. Wilderness

A wilderness is a land area that has been broadly untouched by modern human development. This type of areas usually lacks buildings, highways or even roads. It is the best natural environment for many animal and plant species, and it allows scientist to study healthy ecosystems. There are wilderness areas on every continent. It is good to know that we can restore and reclaim the wilderness which, of course, depends on how it is managed.⁵⁴

The WILD Foundation sees wilderness as two possible dimensions. One could be that it is a place mostly biologically intact and, the second dimension sees it as a place legally protected so that everything connected with this area remains wild and free of industrial infrastructure.⁵⁵

⁵² VINING, Joanne, Melinda S. MERRICK a Emily A. PRICE. *The Distinction between Humans and Nature, Human Perceptions of Connectedness to Nature and Elements of the Natural and Unnatural* [online]. © Society for Human Ecology, 2008 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <http://www.apjh.humanecologyreview.org/pastissues/her151/viningetal.pdf>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Wilderness. *National Geographic* [online]. © 1996 - 2022 National Geographic Society [cit. 2022-06-15]. Dostupné z: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/wilderness>

⁵⁵ What is a Wilderness Area. *The WILD Foundation* [online]. © 2003-2012 The WILD Foundation [cit. 2022-06-27]. Dostupné z: <https://archive.ph/20121204162126/http://www.wild.org/main/about/what-is-a-wilderness-area/#selection-555.0-555.25>

The beauty of the wilderness is that people can form a relationship with wild nature, it does not matter if it is created by recreational or traditional use as long as the relationship is based on fundamental respect for wild nature.⁵⁶

As we all know, people are living with nature for several decades and just as the human contribution to the wilderness can be positive, so it can be negative. Nowadays, there is a big problem with climate change, which can simply lead to limiting the growth of native plants and, conversely, the growth of non-native kinds of vegetation. Water and air pollution can also threaten the areas of wilderness – for example, animals may stop migrating because of that.⁵⁷

6. Where the Crawdads Sing

Where the Crawdads Sing (2018), Delia's first novel, is undoubtedly Owens' turning point in her career. This significant piece of art won several awards such as the Bookseller Award in Japan or the British Book Award (Page Turner).⁵⁸ The story is set in the marshlands of North Carolina and contains two timelines. The first one describes the life of an abandoned child Kya, living in the marshlands of North Carolina, where the marsh slowly became Kya's mother against the background of the criminal investigation, which is the second timeline.

Where the Crawdads Sing will also have its movie version, which is coming to the theatres on July 15, 2022. The movie is directed by Olivia Newman and produced by Laura Jeanne Reese Whitherspoon. With reference to the starring of main characters, Kya is starred by Daisy Edgar-Jones (Jojo Regina as a younger iteration of Kya), Taylor John Smith as Tate Walker (Luke David Blumm as a younger iteration of Tate), Harris

⁵⁶ What is a Wilderness Area. *The WILD Foundation* [online]. © 2003-2012 The WILD Foundation [cit. 2022-06-27]. Dostupné z: <https://archive.ph/20121204162126/http://www.wild.org/main/about/what-is-a-wilderness-area/#selection-555.0-555.25>

⁵⁷ Wilderness. *National Geographic* [online]. © 1996 - 2022 National Geographic Society [cit. 2022-06-15]. Dostupné z: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/wilderness>

⁵⁸ News & Reviews. *Delia Owens* [online]. © Delia Owens 2018—21 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.deliaowens.com/news-reviews/category/Awards+%26+Honors>

Dickinson as Chase Andrews, Michael Hyatt as Mabel, Sterling Macer, Jr. as Jumpin', Garret Dillahunt as Pa, and Ahna O'Reilly as Ma.⁵⁹

If we have a look at other books similar to this one, we can mention *Beats of Extraordinary Circumstances* (2017) written by Ruth Emmie Lang, which tells story about orphaned Weylin Grey living in seclusion and is very close with nature. She is living in a forest with her pig named Merlin. Another similarity can be found in Donna Vanliere's *The Good Dream* (2012), in which the story takes place in the South in 1950's as well and the story is about a maid living in a farm on her own. Her life is completely changed when she meets a young boy, who is trying to steal food from her garden.⁶⁰

6.1 Plot

The first timeline starts in August 1952 with Kya's mother leaving the house. She did not come back that day, but Kya still waited for her all day. Jodie, Kya's brother, tried to reassure her that mommy would be back soon, but Kya was not naive and knew he was just trying to soothe her. Her dad did not even seem to notice and none of her four siblings talked about it at all. Within the next few weeks, the other siblings including Jodie, also leave because they have had enough of father's violent behaviour. Before leaving, Jodie gives Kye advice on how to take care of herself, where to hide and what to do. Since then, Kya is overwhelmed with feelings of loneliness and does not understand why no one took her with them and why they left her there with an aggressive father. She tries to avoid her father, to stay out of the way and not be seen, which was very easy because sometimes, father does not come home for several days in a row. Kya teaches herself how to buy food with the leftover money her dad gave her, to cook and take care of the shack and that was the best way to get along with the father, at least for a while.

⁵⁹ What to Expect From Where the Crawdads Sing, Daisy Edgar-Jones's Poignant Next Film. *Vogue* [online]. © 2022 Condé Nast., 2022 [cit. 2022-07-03]. Dostupné z: <https://www.vogue.com/article/where-the-crawdads-sing-daisy-edgar-joness-what-to-expect>

⁶⁰ HARDY, Liberty. Swamp and Circumstance: 11 Books Like Where the Crawdads Sing. *Book Riot* [online]. © 2022 RIOT NEW MEDIA GROUP, 2019 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Dostupné z: <https://bookriot.com/books-like-where-the-crawdads-sing/>

Kya was six years old, so she had to start school. One day, a truant officer came to the marsh and told her that she had to go to school. Kya was determined not to go until the lady told her that she would have lunch at school and because Kya was hungry, she agreed. She was at school for one day, but because of the kids laughing at her and calling her a “swamp rat”, she refused to go back there and was never seen at school again.

Father disappeared again for a few days and Kya decided to take a trip on dad's boat and got lost. Although this may seem like a bad decision, the opposite is true. It was on this day that she met Tate, her first love, as he showed her the way home. Since then, Kya thought about him very often. At this time, Kya's relationship with father improves noticeably, but it does not take long before everything returns to normal when a letter from her mother arrives, which upsets father. Unfortunately, Kya does not find out what it says because she can't read. Things are getting worse again and when Kya is 10 years old, dad leaves and never comes back. In order to earn some money for food, Kya starts collecting seashells and sells them to Jumpin', a man who owns a gas station, where Kya goes to get gas. Jumpin' turns out to be a very good person who helps her throughout her adolescence.

Around the time when she is 14, Tate leaves bird feathers by the tree as a present for Kya. Kya appreciates it and leaves him some of her collection in return. Over time, their relationship develops as he teaches her to read and count, brings her books, and awakens in her an even greater interest in the marsh. They fall in love and spend a lot of time together. Tate suddenly informs Kya that he will have to leave for college soon but promises to be back on the 4th of July. He broke his promise as he did not come back, and Kya is again drowned in feelings of loneliness and abandonment. One day when Kya is still waiting for Tate, she notices the female fireflies sending out wrong signals to attract the males and then eat them. In this time, Kya realizes the essence of the wilderness, how it can arrange everything according to herself.

Shortly after that, she meets Chase, a well-known boy from Barkley Cove, and they start dating. Kya is happy to spend some time with someone again, although she is unsure about her feelings for Chase as she still does not know who she can trust or who will leave her again. He tries his best to get closer to Kya by giving her gifts, playing the harmonica, and filling her heart with empty words about marrying her one day. In

return, she gives him a shell necklace, which Chase wears around his neck until the very end.

After several years, Tate returns home from college to apologize to Kya, telling her that he should not have left her, but Kya sends him away. Nevertheless, Tate ends up visiting her shack to check Kya's nature collection and offers her to publish her own book about the marsh. Fortunately, Kya agrees. He also does not forget to mention that he saw Chase in town with another woman.

Still continue to date Chase, one day, Kya goes into town and meets Chase with another woman. Moments later, she buys a newspaper, from which she discovers that the woman, Chase was holding by the shoulder, is his fiancée and Kya breaks up with Chase immediately by hiding from him in the marsh. Year after, Chase comes again, but their meeting ends with him trying to rape Kya, but she defends herself and says that if he ever comes to see her again, she will kill him.

During the time between, Kya becomes very successful as her books sell in large quantities and she uses the money she earns to repair the shack and to officially buy the land the shack is on. She is also visited by her brother who informs her that their mom died but that she never forgot them and was trying to get them back to her. Jodie promises her that he will never leave her again and he keeps it. In addition, he begs her to forgive Tate by saying that he is a good boy and that he deserves forgiveness.

In late October 1969, at the time of Chase Andrews' death, Kya is invited to the nearby town named Greenville to meet with her editor to arrange the publication of another book.

The second timeline begins on the 30th of October 1969, when two boys from Barkley Cove find the dead body of Chase Andrews laying under the fire tower in the swamp. From the beginning of the investigation, it is not sure who did it or if Chase killed himself, but most people automatically blame Kya aka "marsh girl" for it.

After several stages of the investigation, when the sheriff concludes that Kya is really guilty, the community of people is divided into two groups. One group, including for example Chase's mother or the fishermen, who claim that it was Kya who killed Chase and another group of people who do not blame her. Chase's mom assumed that because she noticed that Chase Andrews' dead body was missing the shell necklace that Kya had

given him and that he was still wearing. The fishermen assumed so because they claimed that they saw Kya riding the boat away from the fire tower where it happened on that night Chase Andrews died. The other group was a group of people who had seen Kya in Barkley Cove, leaving on a bus to Greenville to meet the editor.

In 1970, Kya is locked up in a cell and subsequently put on trial. Tom Milton, Kya's lawyer, is very capable and is able to convince the jury with his arguments that Kya is not guilty due to the lack of evidence. He also does not forget to point out that people are very biased about where Kya grew up and came from and that is why they judge her.

At the end of the book, we find out that Kya and Tate got back together and got married. The whole story ends when Kya is dying. Evening after the funeral, Tate tries to find her birth certificate for the notary public but what he finds changes the whole perspective of the story. Tate discovers Chase's shell necklace and a poem called Firefly that Kya wrote, from which we learn that it was Kya who killed Chase Andrews.

6.2 Main characters

The main characters of *Where the Crawdads Sing* are Kya, Kya's mother (Ma), Kya's father (Pa), Kya's brother (Jodie), Tate Walker, Chase Andrews, Jumpin' and Mabel. There are, of course, other characters such as Sheriff Ed Jackson, Robert Foster, Dr. Steward Cone, Tom Milton and many others.

6.2.1 Kya

Catherine Danielle Clark, "*later nicknamed Kya because, when first asked, that's what she said her name was*"⁶¹, is the main protagonist of the story living in the marshlands of North Carolina. Kya is left as a six-year-old girl in a run-down shack by her family, supposed to take care of herself by her own. Kya has to learn many things by herself, which is not what children at her age commonly do. Kya manages to supply food, to cook, to clean up, to make money but, above all, to protect herself from the outside world. Kya is called to enter the school, which she tries for one day, but because of kids making fun of her and calling her "marsh girl", she decides to never go there again and avoid people as much as possible.

⁶¹ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

She is a very talented and adventurous person, and her curiosity and interest in the nature, especially in the marsh, brought her many successes in a form of highly sold books about animals and nature around her. In terms of her curiosity in the nature, Kya, deeply influenced by growing up in such conditions, likens everything that happens in her life to the life in a marsh, whether it relates to other people (a), her relationships with them (b) or the death of Chase Andrews (c).

(a) *“Several girls, dressed in full skirts fluffed out wide with layers of crinolines, approached. One was tall, skinny, and blond, another round with chubby cheeks. Kya wondered how they could climb a tree or even get in a boat wearing those big skirts. Certainly couldn’t vade for frogs; wouldn’t even be able to see their own feet.”*⁶²

(b) *“But this was too abrupt – picnic, the mate the Marsh Girl. Even male birds woo the females for a while, flashing brilliant feathers, building bowers, staging magnificent dances and love songs. Yes, Chase had laid out a banquet, but she was worth more than fried chicken. And “Dixie” didn’t count as a love song. She should’ve known it would be like this. Only time male mammals hover is when they’re in the rut.”*⁶³

(c) *“Female fireflies draw in strange males with dishonest signals and eat them; mantis females devour their own mates. Female insects, Kya thought, know how to deal with their lovers.”*⁶⁴ In this extract, female fireflies are a symbol of a strength or an ability females have when it comes to seducing males. To be more precise, the fireflies in a marsh lure their mates with wrong signals so they can eat them. This same tactic is used by Kya to lure Chase to a fire tower to end his life.

6.2.2 Ma

Kya’s mother, in a book nicknamed “Ma”, is woman coming from a rich family with a beautiful house in New Orleans. At the very beginning of the book, she is leaving her children as a result of an abuse by her husband. Ma fell in love her husband at a young age very quickly as he promised her that he will go to the college and that they will have a stately house. But as it usually happens, things are not always as we dream. Pa

⁶² OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam’s Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

started to drink and convinced Ma to move to the run-down shack in North Carolina and she said yes, which later became one of the worst decisions of her life. He never stopped drinking and began abusing her and their 5 children (Kya was the youngest one).

Regarding to the relationship between Ma and Kya, Kya never forgot her mother, and every day she remembered something her mother had taught her. She tried to figure out why she had left them and why she hadn't taken her with her. At first, she couldn't understand it all, but after Kya herself experienced bad behaviour and fear of men, she finally understood Ma's decision to leave.

“Like Ma, monstrous, afraid to go home. In sudden clarity Kay saw what Ma had endured and why she left. “Ma, Ma” she whispered. “I see. Finally I understand why you had to leave and never come back. I’m sorry I didn’t know, that I couldn’t help you.” Kya drooped her head and sobbed. Then jerked her head up and said” I will never live like that – a life wondering when and where the next fist will fall.”⁶⁵

At the end of the story, we learn that the mother never forgot her children and tried to contact them several times, but Pa threatened her that if she took them, he would kill them all.

6.2.3 Pa

Kya's father, named Jake, is an alcoholic and abusive man, who makes everyone leave their home except Kya. He used to be a soldier during World War II, in which he was wounded for the rest of his life as a result of not going to help to another soldier. Despite this experience, he is undeservedly declared a hero and only he knows what really happened. Because of this, he has never been the same, which went hand in hand with the alcoholism.

“Jake hunched in a corner, too scared to move, but a mortar exploded yellow-white just beyond the hole, shattering the bones of his left leg into fragments. When the soldiers tumbled back into the trench, dragging the sergeant, they assumed Jake had been hit

⁶⁵ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

*while helping the others rescue their comrade. He was declared a hero. No one would ever know. Except Jake.”*⁶⁶

When we focus on the Kya’s relationship with her father, at first, Kya tries to learn from the mistakes of other children, which meant trying to ignore him and to appear in the shack only when he is not there, and she was successful in it. Nevertheless, their coexistence experiences a lot of ups and downs but ended up with him leaving one day and never returning.

6.2.4 Jodie

Jodie, Kya's brother, and her favourite sibling looked very much as Kya - black thick hair and dark eyes. Jodie played special role in her life and held more special place in her heart. He was the only one who did not leave after they all ran away from their abusive father. He taught her how birds sing, what the stars are called, and how to navigate a ship. He tried to reassure Kya that their mother would return by saying that mothers would never leave their children.

*“Ma’ll be back,” he said. “I dunno. She’s wearing her gator shoes.” “A Ma don’t leave her kids. It ain’t in ’em.” “You told me that fox left her babies.” “Yeah, but that vixen got ’er leg all tore up. She’d’ve starved to death if she’d tried to feed herself ’n’ her kits. She was better off to leave ’em, heal herself up, then whelp more when she could raise ’em good. Ma ain’t starvin’, she’ll be back.” Jodie wasn’t nearly as sure as he sounded, bud said it for Kya. Her throat tight, she whispered, “But Ma’s carrying that blue case like she’s going somewhere big.”*⁶⁷

Due to the deteriorating behaviour of their father, he eventually leaves as well. Despite her endless love for Jodie, Kya never forgave him for not taking her with him, even though he returned after years and tried to rectify what he has caused.

6.2.5 Jumpin’

Jumpin’ is a black, warm-hearted man, who owns a gas dock, where Kya often comes for gas. Because, at the very beginning of the story and after everyone leaving her, she

⁶⁶ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam’s Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

has a problem with talking and opening up to people, Jumpin' and his wife Mabel, the old Afro-American couple, are the only people Kya is talking to. Even though the relationship between white and black people is still a burning issue at this time, they become good friends. Jumpin' and Mabel take very good care of her and give her necessary things Kya is not able to provide by herself. Kya takes them as her parents, especially Jumpin' as her father.

*"I'm okay now, Jumpin'. Thank you, and thank Mabel for all you did to me". He stared at her. In another time and place, an old black man and a white woman might have hugged. But not there, not then, she covered his hands with hers, turned and motored away. It was the first time she'd seen him speechless. She kept on buying gas and supplies from him but never accepted a handout from them again. And each time she came to his wharf, she saw her book propped up in the tiny window for all to see. As a father would have shown it."*⁶⁸

At the end of the story, Jumpin' is dying. Kya did not attend the funeral, but she did not forget to say goodbye in her own way.

*"Lawd, he loved ya like his own dawder," Mabel said. "I know," Kya said, "and he was my pa." Later, Kya walked to her beach and said farewell to Jumpin' in her own words, in her own way, alone."*⁶⁹

6.2.6 Tate Walker

Tate Walker is a caring, nice boy from Barkley Cove. He is living with his father because his mother and his sister died due to a car accident while driving for a present for Tate and that is why Tate takes their death as his fault. Since he was a kid, his big dream was to become a scientist, so he went to college, earned a doctorate, and got a job at the local laboratory.

The relationship between Tate and Kya is another essential part of her life. They have known each other since Kya's childhood because Tate was a close friend of Jodie. He

⁶⁸ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

was Kya's first and last love and first person she fully opened up to. Their first contact was through the bird feathers they kept at one of the trees.

At first, Tate felt sorry for her being alone in that place with such conditions, but then he fell in love with Kya for the reason that he saw her as someone different from the others, specifically different from the girls from his school, and was fascinated by her knowledge of the marsh. Being much older than Kya, Tate taught her how to read and count and enriched her with many books, which helped Kya in her future writing career. Furthermore, he taught her to deal with emotions that had been unknown to Kya until then.

“Then, as she whirled around, she bumped into Tate, who had stood and they froze, staring into each other's eyes. They stopped laughing. He took her shoulders, hesitated an instant, then kissed her lips, as the leaves rained and danced around them as silently as snow. She knew nothing about kissing and held her head and lips stiff. They broke away and looked at each other, wondering where that had come from and what to do next. He lifted a leaf gently from her hair and dropped it to the ground. Her heart beat wildly. Of all the ragged love she'd known from wayward family, none had felt like this.”⁷⁰

Tate did not arouse in her only a great wave of love, but such a great wave of disappointment when he went to college and broke his promise of coming back to her. Since then, Kya refused to trust anyone again and stopped believing in love (before the local handsome Chase Andrews appeared).

6.2.7 Chase Andrews

Chase Andrews, the main antagonist of the story, is widely known as the best former quarterback Barkley Cove has ever seen. Chase is very popular in the city, mainly due to his famous and wealthy parents. His character traits undoubtedly include self-confidence and disrespect for women.

As I have already mentioned above, Chase was one of two Kya's lovers. They started their romance after Chase met Kya at the beach. Within a couple of days, they started

⁷⁰ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

dating, and for the first time since Tate and everyone else left her, Kya felt again that she was not alone.

Ky's feelings for Chase are somehow confused because she is still afraid of someone leaving her again, but she still longs for love.

“She didn’t know if she felt about Chase the way wife should but in this moment her heart soared with something like love.”⁷¹

As for Chase, it's more of an attraction to Kya's wilderness than love.

“Chase says, “Yeah, she’s wild as a she-fox in a snare. Just what you’d expect from a marsh minx. Worth every bit a’ the gas money.”⁷²

In the following years, their relationship will become deeper, as evidenced by the fact that Chase promises that he will marry her one day. However, everything changes the moment Kya discovers that Chase is engaged to another woman. Kya's feelings of love turn into feelings of anger and fear that causes Chase's attempt to rape her. At this moment, a lust of revenge awakens in Kya, which ends with Kya killing Chase, as something she compares to female fireflies and mantis females eating their own mates.

“After a simple meal of hard bread and smoked fish, she sat on the edge of her porch bed, staring through the screen. Just at that moment she noticed a female praying mantis stalking along a branch near her face. The insect was plucking moths with her articulated forelegs, then chewing them up, their wings still flapping in her mouth. A male mantis, head high and proud as a pony, paraded along to court her. She appeared interested, her antennae flailing about like wands. His embrace might have been tight or tender, Kya couldn’t tell, but while he probed about with his copulatory organ to fertilize her eggs, the female turned back her long, elegant neck and bit off his head. He was so busy humping, he didn’t notice. His neck stump waved about as he continued his business, and she nibbled on his thorax, and then his wings. Finally, his last foreleg protruded from her mouth as his headless, heartless lower body copulated in perfect rhyme.

⁷¹ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

⁷² Ibid.

Female fireflies draw in strange males with dishonest signals and eat them; mantis females devour their own mates. Female insects, Kya thought, know how to deal with their lovers."⁷³

6.3 Space and Natural Conditions in The Locality

The story is set in marshlands of North Carolina, especially in the round shack, where most of the story takes place.

The round shack, where the main protagonist Kya lives, is surrounded by palmettos, which reach up to the green lagoons and to all the marsh beyond. In this area, blades of grass are so strong they grow even in salt water and trees are bent due to wind. Other three sides of the round shack are enclosed by the oak forests encompassing the closest lagoon very rich in life.

To be effectively correct, marsh is something completely different from the swamp. At the beginning of the book, the author is trying to describe the difference. The marsh is a part of a land, where the spaces of light shine and where the grass grows. There are slow-moving creeks moving to the sea with pieces of light. Birds with long legs and other species of animals are welcomed as the marsh is overflowing with good conditions for animals in this area. On the contrary, the true swamp is quiet and made up of still and dark water and is usually set in humid forests, where most of the light is absorbed. The swamp is a place, where the body of Chase Lawrence Andrews was found, hiding silently and stealthily. To be more accurate, there is an excerpt from the very beginning of the book:

“Marsh is not a swamp. Marsh is a space of light, where grass grows in water, and water flows into the sky. Slow-moving creeks wander, carrying the orb of the sun with them to sea, and long-legged birds lift with unexpected grace – as though not built to fly – against the roar of a thousand snow geese. Then within the marsh, here and there, true swamp crawls into low-lying bogs, hidden in clammy forests. Swamp water is still and dark, having swallowed the light in its muddy throat. Even night crawlers are diurnal in this lair. There are sounds, of course, but compared to the marsh, the swamp

⁷³ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

is quiet because decomposition is cellular work. Life decays and reeks and returns to the rooted duff; a poignant wallow of death begetting life."⁷⁴

This area has been occupied since the 16th century, as the land was not marked by the law but, for example, by a river or a fallen tree. Mostly people who fled or were at the end of their journey lived here.

This swamp was lined with a torn environment and was called the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" because many people and ships did not survive here due to strong winds. It was the coast of North Carolina. This region pulsed with life to the last centimetre. There were many animals, both on land and in the water.

Rebellious seafarers, outcasts, debtors, and people fleeing wars, taxes, or laws fled to the area. There were those who were not affected by malaria or a swamp, and they created a natural tribe who was able, for example, to cut down a smaller forest with an ax or drag deer for miles. Everyone had their own territory here.

The year was 1952 and the land here was owned by people who were not recorded anywhere, most of them before the Civil War. The next part came after two world wars. The locals wrote their own laws, not the ones that would be written on parchment, but the ones that were inscribed in their genes.

Barkley Cove was the nearest town from the marsh. It was the first village settled in this marshy coast of North Carolina. Barkley Cove was surrounded by everglades, whose salty haze mixed with the smell of the ocean. The town was separated from the rest of the world by the marsh and the ocean and the only way how to get there was the cracked single-lane highway. Barkley was made up of two streets – Main and Broad. Main ran along the coast and contains several shops such as Piggly Wiggly grocery, the Western Auto, Kress's Five and Dime, Penney's, Parker's Bakery, Buster Brown Shoe Shop, and Dog-Gone Beer Hall. Broad Street was from the old highway to the ocean and ends in Main Street.

What is interesting about this town is the fact that shops and offices are not put together but separated by the uninhabited lands with palmettos and sea oats which meant only

⁷⁴ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

one thing - signs of a marsh were visible even in Barkley Cove. Buildings were marked by hundreds of years of the ocean wind.

“For more than two hundred years, sharp salty winds had weathered the cedar-shingled buildings to the color of rust, and the window frames, most painted white or blue, had flaked and cracked. Mostly, the village seemed tired of arguing with elements, and simply sagged.”⁷⁵

“Saltwater marsh, some say, can eat a cement block for breakfast, and not even, the sheriff’s bunker-style office could keep it at bay. Watermarks, outlined with salt crystals, waved across the lower walls, and black mildew spread like blood vessels toward the ceiling. Tiny dark mushrooms hunkered in the corners.”⁷⁶

6.4 Themes

6.4.1 Human – nature relationship

Human – nature relationship, that has been closely and generally introduced in chapter 4.1, is one of the main theme of *Where the Crawdads Sing*. Kya’s unconditional love and connection to nature is something that we can find in every page of the book. As stated earlier, Kya, deeply influenced by growing up in such conditions, likens everything that happens in her life to the life in a marsh, whether it relates to a school, her relationships with other people or the death of Chase Andrews.

By reason of being left in the marsh all alone, without parents and siblings, everything that Kya learnt was from and about the marsh. It became Kya’s closest friend and mother. Nature replaces the absence of family and social community to the marsh girl.

“Until at last, at some unclaimed moment, the heart-pain seeped away like water into sand. Still there, but deep. Kya laid her hand upon the breathing, wet earth, and the marsh became her mother.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam’s Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

6.4.2 Abandonment

Abandonment is another major theme in this story as Kya is abandoned by everyone in the beginning, which has a big impact on her growing up and forming her personality. This theme goes hand in hand with another theme and that is the independence because being abandoned by everyone is what made Kya such an independent girl.

6.4.3 Independence

Independence can be considered as another important theme of the story as Delia Owens tried to point out Kya's admirable adaptation to what life had brought her and the exceptional independence that Kya had been able to build. Kya, left at the age of 6, managed to take care of herself by earning a minimum of money by collecting shells, which from the beginning was enough for her, at least for food.

Kya not only managed to raise herself completely, without attending school and without a classic job, but also believed that nature would teach her much more than she could ever learn in school.

*"Kya never went back to school a day in her life. She returned to heron watching and shell collecting, where she reckoned she could learn something. "I can already coo like a dove," she told herself. "And lots better than them- Even with all them with shoes.""*⁷⁸

From the beginning of the story, we can notice that Kya feels that she can do everything and does not want anybody to help her with her growing independence, whether it is Tate's first effort to help her or a later effort from Kya's brother.

6.4.4 Violence

Signs of violence can be seen right at the outset of the book, when Kya's mother and later other family members leave successively because of the violent father. Other signals of violence may be marked by Chase as he tries to rape Kya.

On the other hand, even Kya uses violent tactics against Chase, not only right after his attempt to rape her, but also when planning his death and a subsequent murder.

⁷⁸ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam's Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8

6.4.5 (Non) Acceptance

Kya is generally unaccepted by townspeople who condemn her based on where she grew up. As she walks through the town, people are calling her “swamp trash” or children “marsh hen” or “swamp rat” and make various gossips about her. This created illusion does not help Kya much even in investigating the murder, because majority of people immediately thinks it was the “marsh girl” even though there is no real evidence at first.

Tate’s love for Kya is a beautiful example of acceptance. Tate does not try to change or condemn her based on where she grew up. Instead of it, he tries to support her in what she loves and to help her use her incredible knowledge about the marsh.

6.4.6 Racial Discrimination

The tense relationship between blacks and whites can be found in *Where the Crawdads Sing* several times. It is mentioned for the first time, at the beginning of the book, when Kya decided to go to the town named Barkley Cove to buy some food when she found that there were no more food supplies at home. In this part, the narrator describes us the locations, streets and shops of Barkley Cove, where she mentions that blacks were not allowed to use the door or the window.

*“Next to the Piggly was the Dog-Gone Beer Hall, which offered roasted hot dogs, red-hot chilli, and fried shrimp served in folded paper boats. No ladies or children stepped inside because it wasn’t considered proper, but a take-out window had been cut out of the wall so they could order hot dogs and Nehi cola from the streets. Coloreds couldn’t use the door or the window.”*⁷⁹

It is mentioned second time when Kya is to start school.

*“Barkley Cove had one school for whites. First grade through twelfth went to a brick two-story at the opposite end of the Main from the sheriff’s office. The black kids had their own school, a one-story cement block structure near Colored Town.”*⁸⁰

Another moment, where we can point out this issue is when white boys are mean to Jumpin’, Kya’s close friend and a man who owns a gas dock and bait shop.

⁷⁹ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam’s Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

“One of the boys pointed down the lane. “Lookee up thar.” “Ain’t we lucky. Here comes a nigger walkin’ to Nigger Town.” Kya looked down the path, and there, walking home for the evening, was Jumpin’. Quite close, he had surely heard the boys, but he simply dropped his head, stepped into the woods to give them a berth, and moved on... One of the boys reached down, picked up a stone, and slung it at Jumpin’s back. It hit just under his shoulder blade with a thud. He lurched over a bit, kept walking. The boys laughed as he disappeared around the bend, then they picked up more rocks and followed him.”⁸¹

6.4.7 Investigation

The investigation is another theme that intertwines with Kya's life in the book. The most interesting part is that from the beginning of the investigation, Kya is automatically taken as the murderer, even though there is no real evidence. She is convicted precisely because of the fact that she grew up in a marsh.

The theme of violence is relevant to the genre of Southern Gothic, connected with the theme of the murder mystery, investigation, and racial discrimination.

6.5. Symbols

6.5.1 Female fireflies

As it has been already mentioned, female fireflies are a symbol of a strength or an ability females have when it comes to seducing males. To be more precise, the fireflies in a marsh lure their mates with wrong signals so they can eat them. This same tactic is used by Kya to lure Chase to a fire tower to end his life.

6.5.2 Shell necklace

The shell necklace is a symbol of love and devotion that Kya gives to Chase when he promises her that he will never do anything to make her feel uncomfortable again. Interestingly, Kya takes the necklace back right after she kills him, most likely as a proof that he no longer has her loyalty and that she is taking her self-assurance back.

⁸¹ OWENS, Delia. *Where the Crawdads Sing*. United States: GP Putnam’s Sons, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4721-5466-8.

6.5.3 Bird feathers

Bird feathers is a symbol of the only communication that Tate and Kya had between them at first. Tate chose the bird feathers as a mean of communication because he knew how much Kya was interested in nature and that it would be something Kya would appreciate. It can also be understood as love letters through which Tate tried to prove to Kya that he likes her.

6.5.4 Animals

Throughout the story, Kya takes the animals of the marsh as her family or as her friends, especially the seagulls that she used to go to see every day. They are also mentioned at the end of the book when Kya is sitting in the cell and wishes she could see them again.

Conclusion

In the theoretical part of my bachelor thesis, I have described the definition, types, and history of literary fiction and the coming-of-age novel. The main part was the description of Southern literature, its key characteristics which some of them have been found in the analysis of the story. Southern and contemporary southern writers and their most famous works have been defined as well. I have mentioned the life of Delia Owens, her novel, and memoirs.

In the analysis of *Where the Crawdads Sing*, I have tried to describe the storyline of the book consisting of two timelines. The first timeline, telling the whole life of Kya and the second timeline about the investigation of Chase Andrews' death. I have also compared the main characters of the story, especially in relation to Kya, from which we found out that every person in her life influenced her being. Space and natural conditions, main themes and symbols were specified as well. The point here was to examine the marsh girl myth, her social interaction, lifestyle with respect to natural balance and harmony, the genre of romance, the moral point, justice, crime, and punishment. The author's attitude to natural science is also relevant as Kya studies nature in the process of her growing up. Natural science becomes her life occupation in the end.

To sum it all up, Delia Owens created the noticeable character of Catherine "Kya" Danielle Clark, an abandoned and sensitive girl, who, despite the hatred, condemnation, and judgement of other people, grew up into an independent, talented, and successful woman who could be an inspiration and an ideal of many girls becoming women all around the world.

Furthermore, author's deep and detailed knowledge in the field of natural science must be also highlighted as the reading of the book not only enriches us with pleasant reading experience, but also gives us an overview of fascinating information about the marsh.

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