



GOTHIC AND THE SOUTHERN UNTAMED WOMAN IN WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 10 th October 2025 Accepted: 8 th November 2025	Southern gothic is an important genre of American literature. It shows the integrated fear of racism, gender roles, and class, in the southern states of America. It focuses on the traditional American values and how they are represented in the eccentric southern environment. This paper analyzes Delia Owens' <i>Where the Crawdads Sing</i> as an exemplary of southern gothic that focuses on the exiled wild woman of the south. The wild woman is the archetypal image of women before they were confined to the house space. Estates' image of wild woman calls into the liberation of women from the urban lives and have them united with the natural world. She finds the most honest and fulfilled woman is one that can breathe and live near the natural environment. Estes' ideas are especially important to southern women. Southern women have been ruled by patriarchy and racism for long periods of history. They led lives that distinguished them from the northern free states which are, comparatively, more liberated with regards to race and gender roles. The protagonist of <i>Where the Crawdads Sing</i> is a young lady who breaks free from her town in north Carolina and live in the marsh with animals and water. The paper analyzes her gothic tale as she is estranged from society and embraced by nature.
Keywords: Southern Gothic , Wild Woman Archetype , Nature and Identity , Patriarchy and Gender , <i>Where the Crawdads Sing</i>	

INTRODUCTION

Southern Gothic describes a type of literature from the American South. This style of writing has evolved from the American Gothic tradition, which again evolved from the English Gothic tradition. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) is considered the first Gothic novel, and Ann Radcliffe is seen as a cofounder of the genre thanks to her Gothic romances such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797).

Southern Gothic gained popularity in the 1940s and 1950s when writers started using Gothic storytelling to examine Southern society. In the twentieth century, William Faulkner helped shape Southern Gothic by depicting the decline of Southern traditions through characters like Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*. The American Gothic tradition began with dark romantics such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, who used dark themes to question society and reveal the darker aspects of human nature. Edgar Allan Poe further developed the genre by mixing Gothic elements with humor to explore topics like death. By the twentieth century, the tradition evolved into Southern Gothic, where dramatic supernatural features gave way to more realistic and grotesque elements. (Keith, 2017, p. 224).

The Gothic first appeared in American literature in the early 19th century. American writer, Charles Brockden Brown, is credited with founding the American Gothic novel with *Wieland* (1798). The South is the region where Gothic themes are most relatable in the United States (Bjerre, 2017). Allison Graham (2008) describes it as "the popularity of the genre might suggest that the south continues to function as a repository of national repressions, as the benighted area 'down there' whose exposure to the light is unfailingly horrifying and thrilling." (p. 349). The American south was the place that is primarily controlled by slavery trading which made it home for many abuses and human rights violations.

In his influential 1960 work *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler highlights the major role the Gothic genre plays in American literature. He claims that "the gothic form [...] has been most fruitful in the hands of our best writers" (p. 28), that American literary tradition "is almost essentially a gothic one" (p. 142), and that "Until the gothic had been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin; and as long as that novel lasts, the gothic cannot die" (p. 143). Charles L. Crow supports this idea in his *American Gothic* (2013). He argues that the Gothic has been a significant and central part of U.S. literature since colonial times, often used to address serious themes. According to Crow, much of the nation's literature is Gothic, and it is far from being a minor genre. Many

well-known works and authors fall into this category—Moby-Dick, several of Emily Dickinson's poems, *The Sea Wolf*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Native Son*, and *Beloved*. The Gothic also appears in films as varied as *Alien*, *Lone Star*, *Sling Blade*, and *Winter's Bone* (p. 1).

Southern Gothic keeps the key features of traditional Gothic, which blend romance and horror. However, Southern Gothic stories include more specific elements like being set in the southern United States, addressing racism and gender bias, finding the roots of horror in Southern culture and nature, and featuring eccentric characters who play important roles in the story (Mazzeno, 2017, p. 178). America has traditionally been linked to issues of class structures, social tension, race, gender, and religion. The Gothic in America goes beyond simple set of clichés like ghosts, castles, and monsters. It gives form to anxieties and forbidden desires that are shaped by specific cultural contexts. (Weinstock, 2017, p. 2). Gothic stories express culturally specific fears and forbidden desires, which are always connected to issues of power and restriction, specifically, what is denied in a given social setting. The American Gothic can be seen as centering on four closely linked main areas, religion, geography, racial and sexual otherness, and rationality. Although not a complete list, these include anxieties and desires tied to God, the devil, and the lasting influence of Puritanism. (p. 6).

American writers realized early on that the Gothic gave them a way to explore subjects that were otherwise off-limits. The Gothic is a form of literature built on opposition. While the national narrative of the United States has celebrated progress, success, and opportunity for the individual, Gothic literature tells the stories of those who are excluded, oppressed, or have failed. It has also served as a space to confront long-standing national issues about race, a persistent challenge to the country's founding myth. If the national ideal promoted equality and a society where class and race were irrelevant, the Gothic revealed the deep class anxieties during times of abolition of racism (Crow, 2013, p. 2). These issues appeared more starkly in the south than in the north due to its being the home of slavery and traditional gender roles. The Southern Gothic is deeply connected to the unique tensions and disturbances of its region. While the United States lacked old castles for Gothic romances, after the Civil War, the many ruined or decaying plantations and mansions in the South became eerie settings for Gothic tales about sins, secrets, and the "haunting history" of the South (Bjerre, 2017).

Among the most notable writers of the southern gothic are Writers like William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Anne Porter, Thomas Wolfe, and Tennessee Williams who drew inspiration from the myths tied to the South's historic past. One of the most popular novels of the twentieth century, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, reflects this influence. On the other hand, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* discusses the racism that troubled the South even after a century has passed since the Civil War (Mazzeno, 2017, p. 178). Thus, due to its focus on the unique environment of the south, and its clinging to traditions against modernity, southern Gothic can be a perfect frame to discuss the archetype of the Wild Woman.

1.1. The Wild Woman Archetype

Southern Gothic focuses on fear, eccentrics, romance, and southern nature. It can, thus, form a fertile ground to tackle the connection between nature, fear and the myth of Wild Woman. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung has grounded much of the western mythology in his theory of collective consciousness and character archetypes in his book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959). The book has had major influence on psychology and literary theory. It has also been incorporated in gender studies, especially in Men's Movement that appeared in the 1960s-70s. Jungian philosophy has led to the publication of two main books that discussed the gender archetypes in relation to nature, Douglas Gillette's *King Warrior Magician Lover: Rediscovering the Archetype of the mature Masculine* (1990) and Clarissa Pinkola Estes' *Women who run with wolves* (1990).

In her book (1990), Estes discusses the image of women in nature that was wide spread in ancient mythology and old societies, but was later eroded from society as women were required to be more submissive and contained in the domestic realm. Estes presents the wild woman archetype not just as an idea but as a real, living force inside every woman. She explains that women's greatest strength comes from being both fierce and gentle at the same time, able to howl with passion and heal with kindness. The wild woman is a deep, authentic way of living. Yet, her strength is stolen away with the necessity of civilization. She writes, "The spiritual lands of Wild Woman have, throughout history, been plundered or burnt, dens bulldozed, and natural cycles forced into unnatural rhythms to please others" (Estes, 1990, p. 3).

According to Estes (1990), there is a stark resemblance between women and wolves. Just like wolves, women depend on their senses, emotions, freedom and they have great capacity for dedication. She also believes that a wolf's priority is never its own safety or its own life. A wolf will always prioritize the pack, the young and the weak ones, just like women do. Women's emotions make them always care for the vulnerable and prioritize their children and their families. Not to mention that both women and wolves are adaptive and can survive even in the most difficult circumstances. "Wolves and women are relational by nature, inquiring, possessed of great endurance and strength" (p. 4). However, humanity has a tendency to capture and jail all that's free and wandering. Therefore, just like wolves, women have been harassed, tamed, and denied their freedom. They were put in cages and told that that is where they belonged. They were denied the liberty to wander in nature, to have their spirits unite with the natural environment that first embraced, trained, and sustained them:

They have been the targets of those who would clean up the wilds as well as the wildish environs of the psyche, extinguishing the instinctual, and leaving no trace of it behind. The predation of wolves and women by those who misunderstand them is strikingly similar. (Estes, 1990, p. 4).

A woman's true nature is wild. She belongs to nature, to the outside world. She belongs to the other species, to the animals and plants, to the dirt, earth, and air. And her wild spirit will always be waiting inside her to be freed. And there is no force that can change or alter that by keeping her caged and pushed to the corner. She suggests that instead of that, "Instead, the goal must be the retrieval and succor of women's beautiful and natural psychic forms" (Estes, 1990, p. 6).

Estes, thus, calls for awakening in women's consciousness. She believes that women's true selves can be fulfilled and attained again through nature. Women should become aware of who they were originally, their ancestors and the animals that united with them, the wolves that ran with them, and the earth they stepped on barefoot. She believes that this is the dream that every woman has, to be one with nature and to be free regardless of what society orders, "[w]e dream the archetype of Wild Woman, we dream of reunion. And we are born and reborn from this dream every day and create from its energy all during the daytime" (Estes, 1990, p.458). Estes calls for the connection between women and nature to be restored if women want to lead a better and less repressing life.

The genre of Southern gothic and the image of wild woman are both united in Delia Owens' novel, *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018), which follows the life of Kya who lives close to nature with her father. The novel shows the abundant peace and beauty that wraps Kya in the wild marsh since her childhood. Known by some locals as the "Marsh Girl," Kya grew up in a swamp, causing the residents of Barkley Cove, North Carolina, to label her as "swamp trash". Isolated from the age of six, Kya builds a strong connection with the marsh and finds an alternative company to people in its animals and plants.

1.2. Literature Review

Where the Crawdads Sing is studied in different articles and thesis. Rida Fatima and colleagues (2025) approach *Where the Crawdads Sing* through the lens of ecocriticism, focusing on the relationship between the characters and the natural world. They explore how Delia Owens uses images of wilderness, pastoral landscapes, and the concept of ecofeminism to connect human life with the environment. Nature in the novel is not only a setting but also a reflection of human behavior. The study points out that Owens uses nature to discuss environmental issues.

Mely Mauliddiyah (2023) compares the novel to its 2022 film adaptation, concentrating on how the characters are portrayed in each version. The study finds that the film changes the story by adding some characters, removing others, and altering certain roles. Out of 42 characters in the novel, 10 are new in the film, 24 are removed, and 12 are changed. Most changes involve reducing characters to fit the shorter format of a movie. These adjustments are made to keep the story engaging while adapting it for a visual medium.

Thasyalina Amarthalia, Yoga Sudarisman, and Bunyamin Faisal Syarifudin (2022) examine Kya Clark's character in the film through Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory. Their analysis shows how Kya's life reflects common struggles faced by women, including the fight for independence, freedom, and dignity in the face of social stigma, discrimination, harassment, and oppression. The study emphasizes how Kya grows stronger despite being judged and excluded by her community.

Hannah Martin (2023) takes a different approach, looking at how *Where the Crawdads Sing* encourages readers to think about the differences between natural law and human-made law, as well as how justice works in rural communities. She argues that the novel pushes readers to question the fairness of legal systems and to reflect on moral responsibility.

Amna Asif, Samina Sarwat, Sonia Amjad, and Muhammad Anwar Farooq (2024) analyze *Where the Crawdads Sing* using Roman Jakobson's theory of language functions to explore how characters communicate and how this shapes the novel's themes. Their study looks closely at the dialogue, identifying six key functions: expressive, conative, referential, metalinguistic, phatic, and poetic. The last two appear least often, showing that the novel focuses more on clear communication and the exchange of information than on abstract or artistic expression. The researchers argue that these language patterns are central to the novel's exploration of isolation, resilience, and identity. The study shows that subtle choices in language influence how readers understand the novel.

From the above reviewed literature, it becomes clear that the topic of this study is unique and can make important contribution to the literature on *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

1.3. Fear the Wilde woman in Where the Crawdads Sing

In southern gothic novels, it is extremely important that the aura of mystery and fear should be driven from the geography of the south and its charged history. Owens sets her novel in the 1950s and 60s of North Carolina. These two decades witnessed different protests and intellectual movements that challenged racism and old systems of gender, race, and class separation. It is a time when "the Frontier West and exceptionalist South would be especially tested and challenged" (Monteith, 2008, p. 22). At the period from 1954 to 1968, the south was charged with tension, fear, change, hatred, and new breeze of prospect that came with the Civil Rights Movement.

The novel follows the life of Kya and her family in the marsh of north Carolina. The southern gothic uses such places as plantations, swamps, and ruins as sources of the uncanny. "The Southern Gothic swamp became so fully developed as a cultural signifier during the nineteenth century that it served as a form of shorthand for the various miseries of the Southern experience" (Sivil, 2016, p. 88). In these quite marshes, a crime is discovered. The prologue at the beginning of the novel creates the atmosphere of mystery around the found corpse:

On the morning of October 30, the body of Chase Andrews lay in the swamp, which would have absorbed it silently, routinely. Hiding it for good. [...] But this morning two boys from the village

rode their bikes out to the old fire tower and, from the third switchback, spotted his denim jacket. (Owens, 2018, p. 1).

For the reader, questions immediately arise: Who is Chase Andrews and what happened to him? Instead of offering answers, the novel switches to chronicle Kya's childhood and the loss of her family.

Kya is born last in a big family with many siblings, a kind mother, and an abusive alcoholic father. Kya lived her entire life in the swamp where she united herself with nature. She had a dirty appearance as a child with dark eyes that match her black hair. In 1952, her mother left, and when her older sisters prepared the food, she would not eat. Instead, Kya would go and sit on the porch, looking down the lane where her mother had walked the previous day.

Domestic abuse is a significant issue in the novel that contributes to Kya's estrangement and her alliance with the swamp as an alternative family. Kya's father, Jackson Clark, is a temperamental alcoholic. Whose addiction causes severe mood swings and lead him to be physically abusive. He does not retreat from hitting his wife and children. The constant beating has led his wife to leave, and then all his children left him one after another. Except for Kya who was too young to know how to deal with him

Ma had been quiet; her smile lost, her eyes red. She'd tied a white scarf pirate style, low across her forehead, but the purple and yellow edges of a bruise spilled out. Right after breakfast, even before the dishes were washed, Ma had put a few personals in the train case and walked down the road (Owens, 2018, p. 16).

The father's abuse does not stop at the mother but reaches all his children. This leaves young Kya in confusion. The domestic abuse in the novel extends to the southern culture itself. During the 1950s, the south was characterized by its patriarchal dominance. Even with the establishing of new rules that served equality and the removing of discrimination, the father, and the white man in general, was still in control of the family and society at the time. In fact, "[e]ven in the twenty-first century, with the New South firmly established, 'patriarchal views, particularly with respect to the father's role in the family, still find staunch adherents among many fundamentalist southern Christians' (Morgart, 2022, p. 18). Thus, fatherly control is expected to be written about in southern literature. Issues of maltreatment and racism are shown in the novel as byproduct of the tyrannical control that alienates and shatters the family. That was clear even to the mind of young Kya. "She knew Pa was the reason they all left" (Owens, 2018, p. 20).

Kya's sadness continues after her mother's departure as she feels neglected. Domestic violence becomes unbearable for the children, ultimately driving everyone except Kya to leave. When she was 10 years old, Jodi found her on the same porch she would sit and wait on since her mother left. He told her frankly that he is leaving, "'I hafta go, Kya. Can't live here no longer.'" She almost turned to him, but didn't. Wanted to beg him not to leave her alone with Pa, but the words jammed up" (Owens, 2018, p. 20). The scene shows Kya speechless as she is incapable of finding the right response. Kya, now, has to deal with her father alone. The house and the swamp become uncanny places as they are completely deserted by the family except for little Kaya and her father. The fact that there is a child trapped with an abusive alcoholic father in a desolate setting makes the atmosphere quite disturbing.

Secrets begin to unfold and mystery starts to arise in the middle of horror. As a Christian family, Kya's mother always read in her Bible. And after her departure, Kya begins to imitate her mother in an attempt to reconnect with her. Instead of mere verses, she finds her full name written in the Bible: "Sitting at the table, she turned the thin pages carefully to the one with the family names. She found her own at the very bottom. There it was, her birthday: Miss Catherine Danielle Clark, October 10, 1945" (Owens, 2018, p. 99). Kya only found her true full name after her family left, with that she also found another family which is the marsh. Kya unites herself with the natural world. She dissociates from the town, her departed family, the school they try to force her into, her alcoholic father, and unites with the animals, plants, and water of the swamp. By that she becomes a true embodiment of the wild woman that Estes describes in her books:

she lived in the woods and water, then padded into the house to sleep in her bed on the porch as close to the marsh as she could get (Owens, 2018, p. 22).

Wild women always existed in history, in myths, and folklore stories. However, their image is associated with madness, strangeness, and fear. The town people always harass her for her unique dwelling in the swamp, "the villagers called her the Marsh Girl and made up stories about her" (Owens, 2018, p. 111). Kya refuses the people's label of the swamp as something close to a waste-land. To her, a place that is inhabited by all kinds of creatures cannot be described as such, "Maybe it was mean country, but not an inch was lean. Layers of life [...] were piled on the land or in the water" (p. 8). Nature instructs Kya on the skills necessary to survive and reveals daily wonders that keep her learning. This leads her to create her own place within the marsh: "The sun, warm as a blanket, wrapped Kya's shoulders, coaxing her deeper into the marsh". Nature is Kya's guard that support her when people fail her: "whenever she stumbled, it was the land that caught her" (p. 34). The only thing that disturbs the unique harmony between her and the natural life is the intervention of people. Kya abandons the formal school and launches a journey of learning by studying and writing on the shapes and behavior of wildlife:

She never collected lightning bugs in bottles; you learn a lot more about something when it's not in a jar. Jodie had taught her that the female firefly flickers the light under her tail to signal to the male that she's ready to mate. Each species of firefly has its own language of flashes (Owens, 2018, p. 142).

When she was younger, the marsh brought her together with the boy that would have permanent impact in her life, Tate. She meets him in the marsh and one day he begins to teach her reading and writing after she leaves school. Tate and Kya's bond grows around the love of nature. Even of their reading lessons is taken from books about animals and plants. They study together and learn about life directly from the species around them.

Through Kya's journey, the author shows an image of both racism and gender roles in the south. Jumpin' is the man that runs the gas station and shop near Kya's residence. He is a friendly person who offers her fatherly help and remains loyal to her even when she is taken to prison later on. As a Black man, Jumpin' sees all kinds of racism from the white people in town, especially the young ones. His and Kya's status is defined by being outsiders and unwelcomed by the society. This lack of belonging draw them closer to each other. He and his wife Mable sell some of Kya's clothes in exchange for food. Despite his kindness, Jumpin' is always mistreated in his workplace:

"Jest an ol' nigger walkin' to town. Watch out, nigger-boy, don't fall down," they taunted Jumpin', who kept his eyes on his toes. 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 (Owens, 2018, p. 101).

After the abolition of slavery in the south. The southern states retained the racial segregation rules that discriminated against people of color. Thus, racism was still in control of African Americans lives (Burner, 1998, p. 236).

In contrast to Jumpin' and Tate, Chase appears as a person who has the favor and acceptance of town and who is portrayed with the classic blonde western appearance of a white man. He is the town's golden boy and quarterback. His death is shown as a tragic loss to the community that admire him. If Kya is the representation of wild untamed woman who is one with the natural world, Chase represents the civilized tamed town people who expect everyone beneath them to succumb to rules and accept orders. Chase's first notice of Kya is that she is untidy and inelegant lady but he still has developed feelings for her.

He hadn't planned on feeling anything for this strange and feral barefoot girl, but watching her swirl across the sand, birds at her fingertips, he was intrigued by her self-reliance as well as her beauty. He'd never known anyone like Kya; a curiosity as well as desire stirred in him. When she came back to where he stood, he asked if he could come again the next day, promised he would not even hold her hand, that he just wanted to be near her. She simply nodded. The first hope in her heart since Tate left. (Owens, 2018, p. 169)

Essential to a gothic tale is the intertwining of fear and love, mystery and romance, abuse and hope. The introduction of Chase into the plot offers these seemingly contrasting elements of gothic. He is initially shown as a kind attractive man who promises love and care and want nothing but to be close to Kya in her wilderness of the marsh. Yet, this initial image is sharply altered as their interaction develops. Kya decides to gift him something that stands out to her spirit and heart. She makes him a necklace of seashells. Chase accepts her gift and lets the townspeople see him wearing it.

Chase's treatment of Kya gradually changes. His absence becomes the norm and then he stops coming to see her. Kya notices that "He had never mentioned love. Kya searched his eyes for truth but found only a hard stare." (Owens, 2018, p. 164). Kya learned from the newspaper announcement that he is getting married to another girl named Pearl. The deception and neglect that this accident cause her to feel trigger her childhood pain again. She remembers her mother's abandonment. Kya decides to overcome his betrayal by walking in the marsh and sailing to the fire tower. Like a wild woman, her loss can only come from losing her unity with nature, people cannot traumatize her here.

Kya is surprised with Chase's appearance when she's on top of the tower. He blatantly informs her "you are mine" (p. 233) and attempts to hit and rape her. Kya identifies with the beauty and cruelty of the marsh, she cannot surrender to a 'civilized' code of living that dictates women to submit to men. In fact, she refuses to follow the fate of her mother. When Chase hits her, she remembers her "Pa hitting Ma. Her mind blanked for seconds against a pounding pain." Kya refuses to let her life be defined by a man's aggression like her mother. She wrestles with him, "As his head swung to the side, she struck him wildly with her fists until he lost his balance and sprawled backward onto the dirt." (p. 233). She hit him and run away to her boat. Not even once did she glance behind because she thought she'd find him after her. Had she glanced, she would have known that he fell off the tower and died. The aggression towards Kaya from both Chase and the townspeople come from an inherited perspective towards strange and different women. Society expects everyone to be molded and changed according to the norms of their culture. Thus, when a person, especially a woman, diverges from these norms, she would be faced with aggression. Estes, states that this aggressive intimidation of different women can only break them not "fix" them:

A woman's issues of soul cannot be treated by carving her into a more acceptable form as defined by an unconscious culture, nor can she be bent into a more intellectually acceptable shape by those who claim to be the sole bearers of consciousness. Instead, the goal must be the retrieval and succor of women's beautiful and natural psychic forms. (Estes, 1990, p. 6).

Nature gives strength, knowledge, and help to its wild woman. The strength of nature is directed against Chase and his people. From the beginning, nature is shown as a formidable force with a big role in the region's history. It wrecks ships, swallows explorers, and serves as a shelter for some people, "keeping their secrets deep" (p. 7). Tulloch states that "With the realities of rural living in mind, Where the Crawdads Sing presents a complicated

image of life and law in rural communities" (p. 1351). Thus, the marsh shows the pain that comes towards its people from the civilized world. It is a sight of murder, abuse, and hope for Kya.

Kya is taken to prison not because there is proof but because she lives alone in the marsh. She is believed to be mad and violent because she lives with animals. This notion is not quite accurate yet it is not false either. Life in the marsh has taught Kya that death is not a tragedy, it is an acceptable part of existence. One day, Kya observed as a female firefly killed and ate a male from a different species when he tried to mate with her, the "swamp knows all about death, and doesn't necessarily define it as tragedy, certainly not a **sin**." (Owens, 2019, p. 1). The marsh is a place of struggle between life and death. People of the town want to tame it and control it along with Kya. That's why they build the fire tower, to observe and watch the marsh from top. What happened instead is that nature and Kya asserted their dominance over the place. After it was a sight of abuse and healing for her family, the marsh became a murder scene of Chase. It is a mysterious patch of land that welcomes love, life, and quite, but severely punishes destruction and aggression.

Kya's time in the prison is frightening as she imagines that this would be her life permanently. She is threatened with death penalty that makes her see "images of jail, bars, clammy cement walls. Mental inserts now and then of an electric chair" (Owens, 2018, p. 333). Kya's terror and anxiety intensify as she faces her potential fate. Eventually, she was released due to the lack of sufficient evidence. She leaves the prison and sails back to her residence and as she lands her boat she realizes, "it wasn't Chase she mourned, but a life defined by rejections" (p. 212). In her struggle with the justice system, the only two people that supported her were Jumpin' and Tate.

In Gothic fiction, secrets come to light as part of plot resolution. The crucial moment in a Gothic work happens when something hidden or unspoken is revealed, giving a shock that is unexpected. In gothic fiction, when readers think, or even scream, "No!" another part of their minds may quietly agree, "Yes, that's it!" Gothic fiction often mixes the attributes of good and evil as they are usually understood. Readers sometimes have to set aside the normal ways of judging as the gothic novel presents a character that has both the qualities of good and evil (Crow, 2013, pp. 1-2). This moment of revelation happens when Chase's murder is explained as part of Kya's self-defense. Throughout the novel she insisted that she didn't kill him which makes the reader expect that she has been falsely accused, yet the chapter of her attempted rape shows him as the true antagonist and Kya as both innocent and culprit in an unintended murder.

Ultimately, Kya admits to killing Chase through poetry and gives the poem to Chase. She allows him to see her own perspective of the story. That she was defending herself, trying to run for her life, and didn't intend to harm anybody, like the firefly that killed the wrong male when he approached her:

The Firefly
Luring him was as easy
As flashing valentines.
But like a lady firefly
They hid a secret call to die.
A final touch,
Unfinished;
The last step, a trap.
Down, down he falls, (Owens, 2018, p. 323).

Poetry serves as mitigated confession for Kya as she cannot admit easily that she is involved in taking someone's life. Tate understands and believes her which brings her back to her former life before Chase, alone with nature with Tate being the only person she ever mingles with. She chooses to leave her family house and live with Jumpin' and Mable. Kya's true release of pain happened as she sails again in the marsh with the insects and birds hovering over her, with none to abuse her at home or a police officer that seeks to chain her in a prison. According to Estes, woman's freedom is strongly tied to the wilderness that they abandoned, yet women dream of uniting with it again to have "the soles of our feet black with damp earth, our hair smelling like ocean, or forest or cook fire". (Estes, 1990, p. 458).

CONCLUSION

The novel follows the journey of abuse, healing, love and freedom of Kya in a thrilling way. Delia Owens follows her protagonist's journey alongside the investigation progress of Chase's murder. Which makes the plot intriguing to readers. The marsh is a character in the novel, it witnesses Kya's abuse, brings her love, and consumes the body of her abuser. The fear and love arise within the wild swamp that engulfs all that approach it with harm, yet, offers shelter to those that seek its gifts and beauty. Kya is a representative of the wild woman that finds her spirit in the wilderness and who stands up against harm that comes from a rejecting society. The southern setting of the novel intensifies Kya's struggles against traditional rigid values that want to force her out of nature into the city. The novel shows her triumphant return to the wild and the failure of society to mold her into urbanism.

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