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Self-growth of a Wetland Girl - Ecological Perspectives on Where The Crawdads Sing

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Abstract: Owens' novel *Where The Crawdads Sing* tells the story of a girl named Kya, who grows up alone in the wetlands. The pain of family and love runs through Kya's growing-up process, but fortunately, the healing of nature and the courage of her self-awakening and resistance help Kya to break her shackles. The "modern civilisation" brings Kya harm, while the "natural civilisation" helps Kya to get rid of the pain, and eventually, Kya combines the advantages of both civilisations to gain physical and mental independence and freedom.

Keywords: *Where The Crawdads Sing*; Ecocriticism; Feminism

Author Delia Owens is an American biologist and writer who spent 23 years in Africa researching endangered species. Her acclaimed novel *Where The Crawdads Sing* tells a story of a girl's growth in the wetlands of North Carolina, U.S.A., with a murder that takes place in the wetlands of North Carolina as the main narrative thread, and the protagonist, Kya's coming-of-age journey as a subplot. Kya, who grows up alone in the natural environment, not only learns how to face the crisis of survival but also learns a lot from the plants and animals, such as gender relations and self-reconciliation. This paper starts from the perspective of Ecocriticism and Feminism, and argues it is Kya's perseverance in drawing on the advantages of both civilisations that enables Kya to complete her "spiritual ecology reconstruction" and find the meaning of her life. The subtle relationship between humans and nature in the novel reflects Owens' harmonious ecological concept of symbiosis of nature, as well as her independent Feminism worldview.

1. Ruins

The people suffering from spiritual degeneration in the novel include not only the main characters but also most of the people in the town. In the post-World War II period, this hidden wetland accommodated many people with identity crises due to "spiritual degeneration". Under such a social environment, Kya was subjected to multiple pressures from survival crises and social discrimination. The tearing between the "modern civilisation" from the outside and the "natural civilisation" of the wetland is also the driving force behind the "spiritual ruin" of the residents of the town, including Kya.

Kya was repeatedly abandoned by her family as a child, and growing up alone in the wetlands, she was always resistant and hostile to the outside world. Not only in the social human interaction in the repeated barriers, in the relationship between the sexes Kya is still difficult to navigate, the abandonment of her first love Tate let her already lack of love and care for her heart suffer a blow again, which gave the playboy Chase the opportunity. Although she can only see the "male gaze" in Chase's eyes instead of full of love, Kya still believes in Chase's "oaths" mixed with lies, Chase cunningly proposes marriage, and uses it as bait to take possession of her, and then did not hesitate to abandon her to get engaged to someone else. The repeated abandonment experiences leave her with a sad inferiority complex, and she even believes that she is doomed to a life of abandonment. This feeling of self-loathing and decadence is also the trigger for Kya's intermittent "spiritual degeneration".

Unlike Kya, who represents natural civilisation, and faces spiritual degeneration caused by oppression from modern civilisation, Chase represents the rudeness of modern civilisation and the inferiority of spiritual barrenness. Like most people in the town, Chase knows the wetlands "as objects to be exploited for boating and fishing". His condescending attitude makes Chase never approach nature with awe or curiosity. Therefore, when Chase meets the simple and kind-hearted Kya, he will only have an animal instinct to conquer and seize rather than respect and appreciation from his beloved one, which is a true portrayal of the disdain of Chase's modern civilisation for natural civilisation. It is this contempt that dooms Chase to spiritual barrenness.

Kya's first love, Tate's spiritual degeneration stems from the contradictions that arise from being immersed in both natural and modern civilisations. However, Tate always thought that Kya couldn't fit into the outside world, so he was a coward who ran away without being able to apologize. Tate undoubtedly respects and loves Kya, but his exposure to modern civilisation at university puts him in a paradoxical posi-

tion: Kya is the pure and good side of Tate's heart, but the rules and temptations of modern civilisation pull Tate in and out of it. It is this dilemma and the condemnation of his conscience that puts Tate in a situation of spiritual degeneration.

2. Reconstruction

The protagonists, who have suffered from repeated spiritual degeneration, struggle to find a balance between nature and modern civilisation. The ruins of spiritual loss require constant awakening to be rebuilt, and in this process, the healing of nature and the guidance of scientific knowledge are the driving forces that enable the protagonists to rediscover themselves and discover the true meaning of life.

For Kya, the experience of being abandoned by her family and her lover was painful, but she seldom wallowed in the pain but rather strengthened her belief in independence after each blow. In the process of Kya's Spiritual ecology reconstruction, nature's healing and soothing play an indispensable role: under the warmth of the sun, Kya feels that the wetland is like she departed mother; after her father leaves, Kya digs up mussels to exchange for daily necessities, thus tiding over the crisis of survival; after being abandoned by Tate, Kya sees Cooper's hawk gliding close to the ground and then dashing into the clouds. Only dual spiritual and economic independence can bring true freedom as well as liberation. Guidance from nature's animals and other imagery teaches Kya how to live on her own, helps Kya to get out of the rut of low self-esteem, how to gain insight into human inferiority and how to regain her strength. In addition to natural guidance, Kya's awakening consciousness and thirst for knowledge is also an important part of her spiritual reconstruction. As a teenager, with Tate's help, Kya learned to read and worked tirelessly to learn all she could; later in life, despite not receiving education, Kya attempted to draw the flora and fauna of nature on her own for her study of the wetlands. Kya's Spiritual ecology was rebuilt through the spiritual guidance of the wetlands and the financial independence brought about by the publication of the book.

Like Kya, Tate's reconstruction of spiritual degeneration comes from the balance between natural and modern civilisation. When he first entered the university, Tate thought that Kya could not adapt to his academic life and thus cowardly abandoned Kya. However, in the subsequent five years of research and reflection, Tate finally realised that he could not leave Kya. To stay with Kya and engage in the wetland biology that he loves, Tate longed to return to the wetland to build a laboratory to better interpret and conserve the land with scientific knowledge. Tate's awakening proves that modern civilisation and natural civilisation are not incompatible, that such civilisational coexistence is of great significance to the reconstruction of human Spiritual ecology.

3. Inspiration

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir summarises that the biggest difference between women and men, apart from biological differences, also includes "submissiveness". Women are gradually "tamed" under the male-dominated judgement mechanism. However, Kya, who has been growing up alone in the wetlands, is not bound by this set of rules which is the main driving force for her to plan the murder of Chase in the end, not willing to be deceived and to obtain spiritual liberation.

The small-town society outside the wetlands represents the mechanism of judgement under a patriarchal society. The infinite courage in Kya allows her to conceive and act on the murder of Chase from the revelation that the female praying mantis eats the male praying mantis, and the jury's prejudice ultimately becomes a powerful weapon in sparing the real culprit. Isn't the drama of this phenomenon an irony of the limitations of modern civilisation? This ending is not only Kya's successful revolt against the male-dominated society beyond the wetlands but also a victory for the liberation of natural civilisation from human domination. It seems that Feminism's resistance to the oppression of male domination and nature's criticism of modern civilisation's aggression are similar, both of which are metaphors for the fact that in the face of natural civilisation and modern civilisation, the wondrous nature always dominates, while modern civilisation, always reveals its limitations and ultimately becomes a sharp blade that stabs itself.

The three main characters in the novel, Kya, Chase and Tate, are metaphors for natural civilisation, modern civilisation and the fusion of the two. In the first part of the novel, each of the three characters is caught in a different situation of Spiritual degeneration. A mono-civilised environment will have certain limitations on the physical and mental growth of human beings, behavioural extremes and ambivalence in the context of spiritual alienation may lead to the fall of humanism, and only by drawing on the strengths of both civilisations and generating their awakening and progress will they be able to adapt to the new society. Tate and Kya's dedication to biological research in the wetland is a fusion of natural and modern civilisations. Their story also tells us that the right way to live in harmony with nature is to abandon the hegemony of men over women and of human beings over nature and that the only way to do so is to assimilate the superiority of modern science and ecological nature at the same time.

Through exploring how Kya finds independence and healing in the wetland after a series of setbacks from the perspective of Ecocriticism and Feminism, this paper shows the writer Owens' deep concern for women seeking social values and breaking the male subordination. At the same time, the author is also able to glimpse the author's hidden worries about how to find a balance between natural civilisation and

modern civilisation in the dichotomy between the two and ultimately discovers that only by learning from the superiority of the two civilisations at the same time, and by abandoning human arrogance, can we realise the ultimate goal of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature.

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