

## FINDINGS

Based on the analysis, *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2022) answers the three research questions. The findings are constructed through narrative aspects of the film and supported by cinematic elements, such as *mise-en-scène*, camera works, and sounds. The findings reveal that the film completes the relationships between the protagonist and nature through the concept of ecological self and interdependence by Freyne (2018). It is also found in the ways of violence nature and woman experience, as well as their empowerment to oppose the patriarchy. Thus, the relationships between the protagonist and nature are portrayed through motifs: (1) marshland, (2) animals, and (3) wind. Then, the violence towards nature and the protagonist is portrayed by male characters through their treatments. In addition, the ways female characters oppose patriarchal exploitation are through cinematic and narrative aspects: (1) the motif of costumes, (2) being a writer, and (3) murdering the villain.

### **a. The relationship between nature and the protagonist**

#### ***Marshland***

The protagonist, Kya, lives in a marshland near the fictional town of Barkley Cove in coastal North Carolina. Kya's father chose this unused and uninhabitable place to avoid the cost of rent due to lack of income. However, life was unhappy there as her father neglected his responsibilities and only cared about himself. He became a heavy alcoholic and often abused his family, especially Kya. His abusive traits led Ma and her four siblings to leave, eventually followed by himself, leaving Kya alone in the shack in the middle of the marsh.

On the other hand, Kya does not get any protection or help from the people of Barkley Cove because they consider her "the Other" as she lives in the marsh. In the worldview of divided and hierarchically ordered parts, "the Other" is seen not just as different but as the enemy (Mies & Shiva, 2014). Consequently, Kya only depends on nature and develops the ecological self and interdependency, which is not possessed by children her age who live in the city.

The film portrayed marsh as a living being that helped Kya in more ways than one. Broadly, the marsh becomes a home for Kya because her family and the people's town abandon her. According to Zandvliet (2016), the concept of home allows humans to produce wealth and find solace while encouraging creativity and personal expression. In connection with this statement, the idea of the marsh in the guise of Kya's home adheres as her sanctuary and savior.



(Newman, 2022, 00:07:50)

In the opening scene, Kya desperately tries to escape from the sheriffs who want to arrest her for Chase's murder. With fear on her face, she quickly steers her boat into the marsh, hoping to find safety. The camera work frames Kya in a medium close-up to emphasize her expression from the chest up and focus her in the middle of the foggy marsh. The *mise-en-scène*, especially the setting, is a gloomy marsh that provides Kya with refuge to escape. This scene portrays Kya's ecological self, represents her deep connection with the marsh, and shapes her perception of it as a physical environment and a source of protection. It serves as her rescuer by offering refuge from patriarchal injustice.



(Newman, 2022, 00:26:02)

The marsh helps Kya to build financial independence to fulfill her needs. Kya enjoys collecting feathers, fishing, and gathering mussels near her home, which she can sell for income. One of the portrayals is when Kya digs mussels from the marsh before dawn to sell them to Jumpin's Bait & Gas. The camera uses a long shot that frames Kya's body, but the

marsh in the background is more dominant. This scene highlights Kya's interdependence on nature. By gathering mussels, a resource the marsh gives, Kya can fulfill her necessities. This example demonstrates that nature provides the means for her survival and Kya utilizes these resources responsibly.

In this film, the marsh also acts as a source of solace and peace. Each time Kya experiences pain or turmoil, her instinctive response is to seek refuge in the marsh. For instance, this scene [00:57:24-00:58:05] shows how Kya finds happiness again after Tate breaks his promise to meet her on the 4th of July. Kya woke up from sleep after a bird chirping woke her up. She followed the bird to the marsh, feeding grits to other birds. Kya's monologue stated, *"Tate, and life, and love had been the same thing. They were all gone. And then, whenever I stumbled, the marsh caught me. At some unclaimed moment, at last, the heart pain seeped away like water into sand. Still there, but deep."* The sentence, *"Whenever I stumbled, the marsh caught me,"* highlights the role of nature as a source of comfort for Kya. This excerpt embodies ecofeminism's concept of interdependence.

### ***Animals***

Since Kya considers the marsh her home, everything in it also becomes her family. Reflecting on Freyne's (2018) statement, women are intimately and unavoidably part of secondary relationships with nature. This relationship shows exchanges between humans and animals, demonstrating friendship, care, and a sense of belonging (Taylor, 2022). Animals such as cats and seagulls symbolize family and companionship for Kya from nature. Meanwhile, the fireflies represent Kya's ecological self and symbolize the ability of females to seduce males. Specifically, the fireflies lure their mates with false signals to consume them. Kya employs this same tactic to lure Chase to the Fire Tower and end his life as her empowerment, which will be explained later.



(Newman, 2022, 00:09:13)

It is shown in the scene when Kya plays with a cat called Sunday Justice in the cell after she is arrested for Chase's murder. Sunday Justice symbolizes the comfort and companionship that nature provides. The cat eases Kya's loneliness and relaxes her, indicating that woman and nature are interdependent. Sunday Justice illustrates how Kya is embraced by nature despite being rejected by human society. Additional evidence is from the dialogue. When Kya saw the cat, she desperately wanted it to stay and befriend her by saying, "*Please stay...*" because she needed it to accompany her.



(Newman, 2022, 00:54:21)

Another evidence of the relationship between Kya and animals is also portrayed through seagulls. For example, when Tate leaves her for college, Kya wanders the marsh alone and sees a Big Red, a giant red seagull. The long shot framed Kya sits on the boat, staring at the seagull that passes over her with a calm expression. The seagull represents a friendship that accompanies Kya and makes her feel comfortable when people leave her. This scene signifies Kya's interdependence with nature.



(Newman, 2022, 02:00:37)

This scene only shows the dark marshland and the fireflies flying around it. The extreme long shot frames the marsh more prominently while the fireflies are almost lost. The monologue from Kya, *"I'm a firefly. You'll see hundreds beckoning far into the dark reaches of the marsh. And that's where you will always find me. Way out yonder. Where the crawdads sing."* This sound indicates how Kya describes herself as a firefly and has become a part of nature. Despite being human, she sees herself as an animal, embodying her ecological self and reflecting that her identity is intertwined with nature.

### ***Wind***

As Freyne (2018) argued, ecofeminism reminds that women are not only recognized through their physical form but also as an integral part of the natural world. This statement means that Kya's emotions and identity are often reflected in the natural elements that surround her. In this film, wind is a recurring motif that mirrors Kya's feelings and inner state. The time she feels scared, sad, or happy, the presence of the wind consistently acts as a narrative device to depict her emotional journey.



(Newman, 2022, 00:20:44)

For example, Kya bravely goes to school alone after being encouraged by Mable. Her clothes and hair are untidy because no one cares for her. A medium close-up emphasizes Kya's facial expression from the chest up, focusing on her in the middle and little trees in the back. Her expression is frightened after Chase almost hits her by bicycle, and she sees the people in the city for the first time. The wind blows at that moment as the narrative expression of Kya's anxiety. This moment suggests Kya's ecological self and her relationship with nature.



(Newman, 2022, 00:24:33)

In the beginning, Kya cries because Pa burned the letter from Ma without being able to read it. At that moment, the wind blows to indicate the connection between Kya and nature. The *mise-en-scène*, particularly the setting, shows the ecological self with the motif of wind blowing as a device to show Kya's feelings. The low angle in this scene highlights Kya's sad face and makes her seem more vulnerable.



(Newman, 2022, 00:36:17)

Apart from sad moments, the wind also blows when Kya feels happy. For example, when Kya sits in the tree trunk while holding a book. Kya smiles brightly at Tate because she can finally read after being taught by him. At the same time, the wind blows as the expression of Kya's happiness and a form of ecological self. The straight-on angle allows the audience to connect more deeply with her emotions and creates a sense of equality.

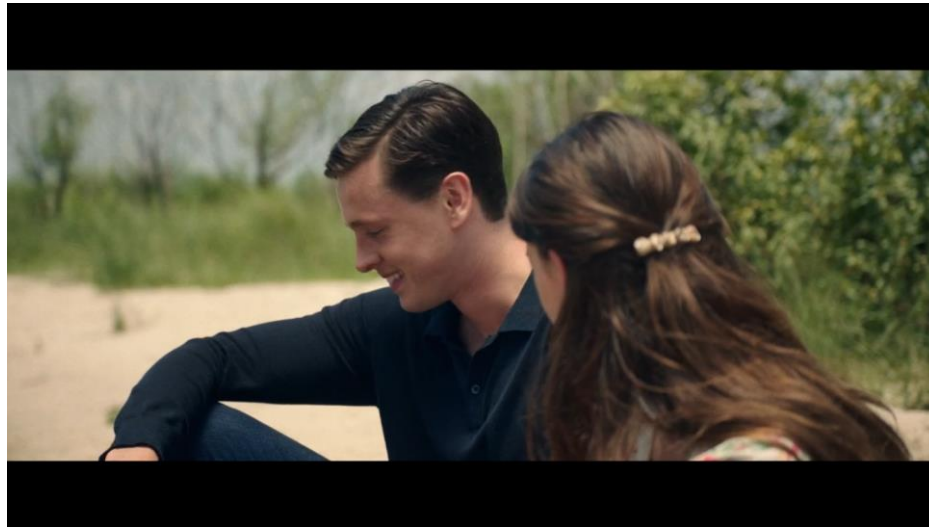
#### **b. The patriarchal violence towards nature and woman**

##### ***Male treatments***

Ecofeminism explores the connection between the oppression of nature and women (Freyne, 2018). This oppression can be carried out in various ways, both direct and indirect, as long as it threatens women and nature (Shiva, 2014). Violence against women can harm the body, mind, and spirit, leaving deep wounds and trauma that are difficult to heal. As for nature, patriarchy often commits violence through exploitation driven by greed and capitalism. They try to change nature to meet their needs without considering the consequences. Over time, this can lead to environmental damage, resource depletion, and habitat loss for other ecosystems. In this movie, the exploitation is shown through the treatment of some male characters: Pa, Chase, a social service worker, and the government.

Pa is portrayed as an irresponsible and alcoholic father, his bad habits had a profound impact on his family. At the beginning of the movie [00:13:00-00:13:21], Pa is abusive towards his family, especially Kya and Ma. For example, Pa hits Kya while she is playing on the boat, causing her to fall into the marsh. Additionally, he violently screams at and hits Ma, leaving her bleeding. This action shows Pa becomes a character who oppresses women through his acts. This scene is a clear example of physical violence, in which Pa directly attacks the female characters.

Chase grew up in Barkley Cove and lived a very different life from Kya, who spent her childhood surrounded by nature. Chase enjoyed all the conveniences of town due to his privileged background, while Kya learned extensively about animals and other ecosystems by living alone in the marsh. This contrast explains why Chase is violent toward Kya.



(Newman, 2022, 01:05:10)

For instance, Chase and Kya spend time together at the beach. Chase finds a shell that is rarely seen there and Kya casually explains its description. As she describes the shell's origin and details, Chase smirks and says, *"Oh, no, it's just, the Marsh Girl knows the Latin name for shells, and where they inhabit and why, for Christ sakes."* His statement shows that he is mocking her knowledge despite her lack of formal education. His attitude is in line with cultural violence that devalues her experience and position as a woman from the marsh. Chase verbally shows his superiority and belief that school-taught knowledge is more valuable than Kya's understanding of nature.

Another scene depicting Chase's violence occurs during a fight between him and Kya at the beach [01:33:46-01:35:30]. In this scene, Chase tries to force Kya to forgive him after she discovers he has lied to her and is engaged to another woman. Kya is unwilling to trust Chase again, which infuriates him. In his rage, Chase attacks Kya and then attempts to rape her. He says, *"You're mine, Kya. You belong to me. I'm not letting you go this time."* This scene clearly demonstrates Chase's direct violence towards Kya, including physical abuse and attempted rape.





(Newman, 2022, 00:40:39)

A social service worker also portrays the violence toward Kya. An example is when he talks with Jumpin about his plans to take Kya to a group home. His comfortable and impressive suit indicates his professionalism, while Jumpin's casual shirt shows that he is a friendly person. The social service worker's posture, with one hand on the table and the other in his pocket, suggests arrogance and dominance in the conversation.

Supporting dialogue:

*A social services worker: "A young girl living on her own like that looks immoral, don't you think?"*

*Jumpin: "No, sir. I don't. Think, that is. At least not enough. Just ask my wife."*

*A social services worker: "There are some fine group homes that would help keep a young woman out of trouble."*

The dialogue above describes how the social service worker mocks Kya as an immoral living being by saying, *"A young girl living on her own like that looks immoral, don't you think?"* It is also a form of indirect cultural violence. The worker implies, in a sexist manner, that Kya's independence is morally questionable simply because she is a woman.



(Newman, 2022, 01:01:22)

Not only do female characters experience violence, but nature does as well. A government worker takes pictures of Kya's house and the surrounding environment. The government plans to reconstruct the marsh into a hotel, representing a form of patriarchal exploitation of nature. The scene uses the straight-on angle to allow the audience to view the attempted exploitation by a government worker from the same level and perspective as Kya, making it clear how intrusive his actions are to her.

### **c. Nature and women's empowerment against patriarchal exploitation**

#### ***Costumes***

The cultural legacy maintains that men are superior to nature and women and have the right to dominate them (Freyne, 2018). Women and nature must unite to address this injustice as a powerful force. In *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2022), costumes serve as a motif that highlights the relationship between women and nature as a form of empowerment against patriarchy. Kya, Ma, and Mabel are consistently depicted in floral dresses with natural colors like blue and green. The costumes connect them on the same side and tie them together in their shared color and patterns. In contrast, Chase wears dark-colored costumes that reflect the concept of dualism and patriarchal dominance. These costume choices underscore the contradiction between ecofeminism and the patriarchal system.



(Newman, 2022, 01:01:22)

For example, the flashback starts in 1953 when Kya and Ma paint in their front yard. The *mise-en-scène*, particularly the costumes, are dresses with floral patterns. The floral dresses imply that they respect nature and reject its exploitation. A medium shot shows Ma from her waist up while looking at Kya. The frame also used a low angle to make Ma taller than Kya.



(Newman, 2022, 00:19:33)

Another instance is when Mabel tries to encourage Kya to attend school despite being abandoned by her family. In this scene, the low angle portrays Mabel from Kya's perspective, emphasizing her supportive and nurturing role. The camera work effectively conveys the characters' emotions, with Mabel's green floral dress symbolizing her alliance with nature and her rejection of patriarchal exploitation.



(Newman, 2022, 01:34:51)

In contrast with the female characters, Chase demonstrates his dominance through the costume choices. He often wears dark-colored clothes, such as black, to assert his presence. For example, in this scene, Chase tries to make amends after Kya finds out that he is already engaged to another woman, but Kya refuses. Unlike Kya, who wears a green shirt that matches nature, Chase wears a black shirt that signifies his power and wants to abuse her. The low angle makes Chase look more powerful, while Kya appears lower before him. The black shirt on Chase also emphasizes the dualism between himself and Kya. This dualism depicts Chase as a Master Model (colonialist identity) that embodies radical exclusion, where the Master reinforces the differences between himself, nature, and woman while minimizing the similarities. In this context, the difference is symbolized by the contrasting clothes of the characters (Plumwood, 1993, as cited in Gaard, 2017).

### ***Being a writer***

Since its inception, ecofeminism has called for ending all forms of oppression and shaping a more holistic society (Freyne, 2018; Valera, 2018). This empowerment is gained as women and nature focus on their responsibilities and rights. In response to patriarchal systems of domination, women evolved from a separate sense of self that seeks protection and guidance from nature.

One of Kya's ways to resist patriarchal exploitation is by becoming a successful writer. Despite not receiving formal education, she learned a lot from nature, which enriched her understanding of ecosystems and contributed to her writing skills. Here, nature plays an active role in supporting her skills and fulfilling her needs while she also works to protect the marsh from patriarchal exploitation that plans to reconstruct the marsh into a hotel.



(Newman, 2022, 01:29:26)

In this scene, Kya smilingly holds her own books that she receives from the publisher. This scene depicts a significant achievement in Kya's life through her hard work and dedication as a writer; Kya has earned a decent income. Her income is used to pay the taxes on the entire marshland and to furnish her home. This scene also illustrates the mutual dependence between Kya and the marsh: the marsh provides her with livelihood and educational insights, while Kya ensures its protection and freedom from the redevelopment by paying taxes and formally claiming ownership.

### ***Murdering the villain***

Kya has lived alone in a marsh since she was ten, forcing her to become deeply connected with nature to survive. Since childhood, she has not been used to interacting with people and feels more comfortable in the wild with various animals and plants. Her relationship with nature is strong, and she often observes animal behavior, which she uses as a reference to understand events in her life. According to Bennet and Royle (2016), humans are animals, after all, and often act as them.

In *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2022), Kya's encounter with Chase is a crucial turning point that brings more significant problems into her life. Chase, a man who is often violent towards Kya, embodies the patriarchal oppression she faces. To free herself from his violence, Kya empowers herself by killing Chase and eliminating the evidence. She learned this method from watching animal behavior, showing how her close connection with nature influences her actions and decisions.

In the following scene, Tate discovers Kya's body on the boat and finds out about her death. He then begins to sort through her belongings while a voice-over of Kya reciting a poem plays in the background [01:59:07-02:00:37]. As he goes through her things, Tate eventually

discovers a clam shell necklace that Kya had once given to Chase, which turns out to be evidence of the murder. The poem states:

*It has always been enough to be part of the natural sequence of things  
Sure as the tides  
Nature my guide  
The marsh knows all about death and doesn't necessarily define it as a tragedy  
Certainly not as a sin  
It understands that every creature does what it must to survive  
Sometimes, for prey to live, its predator must die  
I'm the marsh now  
I'm the feather of an egret  
I'm every shell washed upon the shore  
I'm a firefly  
You'll see hundreds beckoning far into the dark reaches of the marsh  
And that's where you will always find me  
Way out yonder  
Where the crawdads sing*

The poem reveals Kya's true feelings for Chase and explains how she killed him. Kya learned from female fireflies to seduce Chase by signaling him and then trapped him to his death in the Fire Tower. This shows the cleverness and survival skills are from nature as her guide. It can be concluded that Kya can finally free herself from the fear of the threat of Chase's violence.

*The marsh knows all about death and doesn't necessarily define it as tragedy.  
Certainly not as a sin  
It understands that every creature does what it must to survive  
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From the poem above, it can also be inferred that nature plays an active role in concealing Kya's murder of Chase. Through her deep connection with Kya, the marsh becomes an ally that helps her escape from Chase, the abuser. Nature is not only a setting in the narrative but also Kya's loyal partner in effectively hiding the evidence of the crime. This clearly shows nature's protective role and contribution to delivering justice. This underscores the concept that nature has its own agency, which can significantly affect life and death.