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**Where Memory Settles Like Silt: Fluid Subjectivities in  
Delia Owens’s *Where the Crawdads Sing*—A Blue  
Humanities Reading**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the littoral landscape of Delia Owens’s *Where the Crawdads Sing* through the theoretical framework of Blue Humanities, foregrounding the North Carolina marsh as a hydro-ecological space that shapes both narrative structure and subjectivity. Rather than treating the marsh as a passive backdrop, the study positions it as a more-than-human ecological agent. Characterised by shifting tides, porous boundaries, sedimentation, brackish currents, and cyclical rhythms, the marsh becomes central to understanding the protagonist Kya’s evolving identity, as well as the concealment of personal memory and material history.

The paper argues that Kya’s subjectivity is intimately aligned with the fluid properties of water such as adaptability, resilience, and emotional permeability, enabling her to exist beyond the rigid social frameworks imposed by the terrestrial community. In contrast to the fixed and exclusionary structures of society, the marsh offers an alternative space of belonging that is sustaining and non-hierarchical. Extending this argument, the study conceptualises the marsh as a “hydro-mnemonic” site, wherein watery elements actively shape the circulation of memory, secrecy, and narrative revelation. The silted depths and tidal movements function not merely as environmental features but as mediating forces that determine what is obscured, preserved, or ultimately disclosed. In this sense, water governs the flow of the narrative itself, particularly in its engagement with memory and hidden truths. Drawing on key insights from Blue Humanities and ecofeminist thought, this paper positions water as both material environment and symbolic force, challenging anthropocentric and land-based interpretations of identity and storytelling. By foregrounding hydro-ecological interconnectedness, the novel reimagines human experience as fluid, relational, and deeply embedded within aquatic landscapes. This reading contributes to emerging scholarship on environmental storytelling by emphasising the centrality of water in shaping both memory and selfhood.

**Keywords:** *Blue Humanities, Hydro-Mnemonics, Marsh Landscape, Fluid Identity, Ecofeminism, Environmental Storytelling, Memory*

## Introduction

Contemporary ecocritical discourse has increasingly turned its attention toward aquatic environments, recognising water not merely as a material resource but as a dynamic force that shapes cultural, narrative, and subjective formations. Within the interdisciplinary framework of Blue Humanities, scholars argue that water resists fixity and challenges terrestrial modes of thought that privilege stability, boundaries, and permanence. Steve Mentz suggests that “oceanic and aquatic thinking disrupt land-based epistemologies by foregrounding fluidity, instability, and movement” (Mentz 5). Similarly, Astrida Neimanis conceptualises bodies as “bodies of water, highlighting relationality and permeability as fundamental conditions of existence” (Neimanis 2). Such perspectives invite a re-reading of literary landscapes not as passive backdrops but as active forces that participate in shaping identity, memory, and narrative.

Delia Owens’s *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) offers a compelling site for such an inquiry. Set in the marshlands of North Carolina, the novel has often been approached through ecological or bildungsroman lenses; however, these readings frequently position the marsh as a static natural setting rather than as a structuring presence. The novel begins by distinguishing the “marsh” from the “swamp,” defining the former as a “space of light, where grass grows in water, and water flows into the sky” (Owens 12). This fluid intersection characterises what Blue Humanities scholars often describe as the “littoral zone”, a porous boundary where terrestrial and aquatic worlds meet. In this space, the “slow-moving creeks wander and water flows into the sky,” (Owens 12), suggesting a landscape that resists the rigid categorisations of the “terrestrial community”. Therefore the marsh is not merely described; it is experienced as a living and shifting environment that continually shapes perception and action.

This paper argues that the marsh operates as a hydro-ecological agent that structures both narrative form and subjectivity. Living in intimate proximity to this environment, the protagonist Catherine Danielle Clark, referred to as Kya Clark develops a mode of being that reflects the fluid properties of water such as adaptability, resilience, and emotional permeability. Thus Kya is not merely shaped by the marsh; she is, in a profound sense, marsh-made. Abandoned by her family and excluded by society, Kya survives by attuning herself to the rhythms of the marsh, learning from its tides, patterns, and silences. As Owens writes, “Kya laid her hand upon the breathing, wet earth, and the marsh became her mother” (Owens 38). This single line highlights the novel’s central ecological proposition: the marsh is not a backdrop but a more-than-human agent that sustains, shapes, and remembers alongside Kya. In contrast to the rigid and exclusionary frameworks of the terrestrial

community, the marsh offers an alternative epistemology that is non-hierarchical, relational, and sustaining.

Extending this argument, the paper conceptualises the marsh as a “hydro-mnemonic” space wherein water actively mediates the circulation of memory, secrecy, and narrative revelation. As Stacy Alaimo notes, “environments are materially entangled with human experience and shape bodily and cognitive processes” (Alaimo 238). In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, the silted depths, tidal movements, and obscured channels of the marsh function as mnemonic agents that determine what is concealed, preserved, or finally disclosed. The marsh thus participates in structuring the narrative itself, governing the interplay between visibility and secrecy, presence and absence.

By foregrounding the interplay between water, memory, and subjectivity, this study positions the novel as a significant contribution to Blue Humanities discourse. It argues that *Where the Crawdads Sing* reimagines human experience not through the solidity of land but through the fluid, shifting, and relational logic of water. In doing so, the text challenges anthropocentric and land-based understandings of identity and storytelling, offering instead a model of existence in which selfhood, memory, and environment are inextricably intertwined.

### **The Littoral Marsh as Hydro-Ecological Space**

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, the marsh is not merely a geographical setting but a dynamic littoral space that resists fixed boundaries and stable categorisations. Existing between land and water, the marsh occupies an ecological threshold where fluidity, transition, and permeability become defining characteristics. Such liminal spaces are central to the concerns of Blue Humanities, which interrogates the ways aquatic environments destabilise terrestrial notions of permanence, order, and control. As Steve Mentz argues, “water undoes rigid structures by foregrounding movement and instability” (Mentz 14). The marsh in the novel similarly functions as a space of constant transformation, shaped by tides, sedimentation, erosion, and cyclical rhythms. The marsh’s slowmoving creeks, shifting tides, and brackish currents function as a hydroecological matrix that structures both Kya’s subjectivity and the novel’s gradual disclosure of secrets. The marsh’s adipose, sedimentladen ground becomes the narrative’s mnemonic substrate: what is buried is not erased, but sloughed into the deep, to resurface only when movement and time allow. In this sense, the marsh internalises a “water memory” of its own.

From the earliest moments of the narrative, the marsh is represented as a living environment rather than a passive landscape. Kya repeatedly perceives the marsh as animate and communicative, a space capable of teaching, sheltering, and responding to human presence. The marsh thus becomes an

embodied waterscape that shapes where Kya can move, hide, and be known. Early in the text, her mother instructs: “Run deep in the marsh, hide in the bushes. Always cover yo’ tracks; I learned ya how. And ya can hide from Pa, too” (Owens 20).

Kya’s identity is a refusal to the rigid, land-based hierarchies that stigmatise her as “the marsh girl, the Wolf child, the girl who couldn’t spell dog” (Owens 87) and exclude her from the town’s social and legal order. The marsh offers her an alternative epistemology: one that values adaptability, emotional permeability, and non-hierarchical relationality. As Kya reflects late in the novel, “Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would” (Owens 320). The novel’s descriptions highlight movement and interconnection: the tidal waters continuously shift, channels disappear and reform, and the boundaries between land and water remain unstable. Such imagery foregrounds the marsh as a hydro-ecological system defined not by solidity but by flux. Unlike the terrestrial world of Barkley Cove, which is structured through rigid social hierarchies, exclusion, and surveillance, the marsh resists containment and categorisation.

The littoral quality of the marsh is especially significant because it embodies coexistence between opposing elements. It is neither fully swamp nor fully land, neither dark nor simply bright, but a “brackish” zone that confounds binary thinking. Owens writes that “within the marsh, here and there, true swamp crawls into low-lying bogs, hidden in clammy forests,” (Owens 12) yet the marsh remains “a space of light” , neither wholly land nor wholly water, it becomes a transitional ecology that challenges binary modes of thinking.

The prominent feminist writer and cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis’s notion of fluid relationality becomes particularly relevant here, as “the marsh dissolves distinctions between human and environment, self and space, memory and matter” (Neimanis 27). Kya’s existence within this ecology gradually reshapes her perception of identity and belonging. Rather than mastering or dominating nature, she learns to move with its rhythms, adapting herself to the tides and silences of the marsh.

The more-than-human agency of the marsh is evident in the way it catches Kya when she stumbles and absorbs the emotional traces of her abandonment. The narrator notes that “whenever she stumbled, it was the land that caught her and that the heart-pain seeped away like water into sand, still there but deep” (Owens 38). The social world of Barkley Cove is governed by fixity, stable identities, moral judgments, and rigid boundaries, whereas the marsh operates through fluidity and interdependence. The marsh, then, functions as a non-hierarchical space of belonging: it does not exclude Kya on the basis of gender, class, or literacy, but enfolds her into a relational ecology where

she “learns from the wild” In this sense, the littoral landscape offers an alternative epistemology, one rooted in coexistence and adaptation.

Moreover, the hydro-ecological characteristics of the marsh shape the narrative structure itself. The recurring imagery of tides, mud, feathers, shells, and shifting waterways produces a narrative atmosphere governed by uncertainty and concealment. Knowledge within the novel often emerges gradually, much like objects revealed by receding water or uncovered beneath layers of silt. The marsh therefore becomes more than a setting; it functions as a narrative medium through which perception, temporality, and memory are filtered. By situating the story within this fluid ecology, Owens constructs a world in which identity and truth remain unstable, relational, and perpetually in motion.

### **Fluid Subjectivities: Kya as a Hydro-Being**

The subjectivity of the protagonist, Kya Clark, is fundamentally a “blue” identity, defined not by the rigid social structures of Barkley Cove but by the “adaptability, resilience, and emotional permeability” of the aquatic landscape she inhabits. Unlike the townspeople, whose lives are governed by “laws burned onto stone tablets,” Kya’s survival is dictated by the “ancient and natural” laws of the marsh. Her identity is not formed through institutional structures such as family, school, or community, rather it evolves through the littoral; she exists in the porous boundary between land and water, a space that the town views with suspicion but that Kya experiences as a site of great connection. Within the fluid ecology of the marsh, Kya’s subjectivity develops in intimate relation to water and its mutable rhythms. In this sense, Kya may be understood as a hydro-subject whose consciousness and emotional life are shaped by the fluid properties of water.

From childhood onward, Kya experiences abandonment, isolation, and social exclusion. Deserted by her family and alienated by the community, she turns toward the marsh as a refuge and as a mode of existence. The marsh becomes her primary site of learning, emotional grounding, and survival. Owens repeatedly associates Kya’s movements and perceptions with aquatic imagery, portraying her as “deeply attuned to tides, currents, bird calls, and seasonal shifts” (Owens 58). This intimacy with the marsh gradually dissolves the distinction between self and environment, suggesting that Kya’s subjectivity is ecologically constituted rather than socially produced.

Astrida Neimanis’s concept of embodied fluidity offers a productive framework for understanding Kya’s identity. In *Bodies of Water*, Neimanis argues that “human bodies are never autonomous entities but are materially interconnected with the flows and movements of water” (Neimanis 15). Kya’s existence within the marsh reflects this relational ontology. She adapts herself to the changing conditions of her environment, learning resilience not through domination over nature but

through coexistence with it. Her subjectivity, much like the marsh itself, remains dynamic and permeable rather than fixed or bounded.

Kya's marsh-made self is further articulated in her lyrical self-description: "I am in the marsh now. I am the feather of an egret. I am every shell washed upon the shore. I am a firefly" ( *Where the Crawdads Sing* 2:00:25 – 2:00:39 ). This litany stages a radical de-centering of the human subject: Kya does not simply live in the marsh; she becomes its elements. The marsh's mud, water, and creatures are not metaphors for her inner life; they are the very substances that constitute her. When Tate remarks that "she feels the pulse of life...because there are no layers between her and her planet," (Owens 248) he is describing Kya's hydro-subjectivity as an embodied intimacy with the marsh's living rhythms. In this way, Owens reimagines selfhood as a relational, water-borne achievement rather than a land-bound, individual essence.

This fluidity is particularly visible in the ways Kya negotiates emotional experience. Rather than expressing grief or loneliness through direct social communication, she processes emotion through ecological intimacy. Birds, shells, feathers, and tidal movements become extensions of her emotional world, mediating experiences that language and society fail to contain. Water, in this context, functions not merely as symbolic imagery but as an affective medium through which Kya understands herself and her surroundings. Her emotional permeability mirrors the porous geography of the marsh, where boundaries continuously dissolve and reform.

This fluidity is also evident in her relationships with the two central male figures in her life: Tate Walker and Chase Andrews. Tate, a fellow "child of the marsh," facilitates Kya's intellectual growth by teaching her to read, effectively bridging her instinctive understanding of the environment with formal scientific knowledge. His gift of a "swan feather", a delicate artefact of the marsh, serves as the initial "mediating force" that establishes their connection. Through Tate's eyes, Kya sees herself not as a "wild thing" but as a part of a complex "hydro-ecological interconnectedness".

In contrast, Chase Andrews represents the "fixed and exclusionary structures" of the terrestrial community. Although Chase is drawn to the marsh for recreation, his relationship with Kya is one of "mating competition" and consumption. To Chase, the marsh is a "thing to be used," a sentiment he extends to Kya herself. His inability to see the "flowers" in the grass, dismissing them as merely "grass", highlights his lack of "emotional permeability" and his failure to recognise the intricate "hydro-mnemonic" depth of the landscape that Kya holds sacred. While Kya "laughs for his sake," she often feels she is giving away another piece of herself just to have someone else, illustrating the conflict between her fluid nature and the rigid expectations of human society.

Kya's fluid subjectivity also stands in sharp contrast to the fixed identities enforced by the terrestrial community. Barkley Cove repeatedly attempts to classify her through labels such as "Marsh Girl," reducing her to a stable social identity marked by exclusion and otherness. The town's fear of the marsh reflects its discomfort with ambiguity and liminality. In contrast, Kya resists such classification precisely because her identity is shaped within a littoral ecology that privileges movement over permanence. She inhabits an in-between state, neither fully assimilated into society nor entirely separate from it.

Her observational practices as a naturalist such as collecting shells, studying gulls, and documenting marine life, reflect a mode of knowing grounded in attentiveness and coexistence rather than mastery. Stacy Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality becomes relevant here, as Kya's body and consciousness remain materially entangled with the environment around her. The marsh does not merely surround her; it actively participates in shaping her emotional, psychological, and intellectual formation.

Through Kya's fluid subjectivity, the novel ultimately reimagines identity as ecological and relational rather than stable and autonomous. Her evolving selfhood mirrors the shifting tides and mutable boundaries of the marsh, suggesting that identity, like water, is never fixed but continuously in motion. By aligning Kya's consciousness with the fluid logic of aquatic space, *Where the Crawdads Sing* challenges land-based models of identity and offers instead a hydro-ecological understanding of human existence.

Therefore, Kya's "fluid subjectivity" is a defense mechanism against the trauma of abandonment. As she observes the "swimming shadows of water striders" (Owens 18) and the "darting minnows," she learns to move with the same "cyclical rhythms". Nature becomes her "clutch of women's most tender, most tough place on Earth" (Owens 135) when human society fails her.

### **Hydro-Mnemonics: Water, Memory, and Narrative Secrecy**

Memory in *Where the Crawdads Sing* does not function as a stable recollection of the past; rather, it emerges through the shifting materiality of the marsh and its aquatic rhythms. The novel repeatedly associates remembrance with tidal movement, sedimentation, concealment, and gradual revelation, suggesting that memory itself operates according to the logic of water. In this context, the marsh may be understood as a hydro-mnemonic space, a watery ecology through which memories, secrets, and histories are preserved, obscured, and selectively disclosed. Water becomes not merely symbolic but epistemological, shaping how truth is remembered, hidden, and narrated.

The marsh consistently mediates Kya's relationship with the past. Abandonment, loneliness, and trauma are never articulated through direct confession alone; instead, they are absorbed into the ecology of the marsh. Owens frequently situates moments of emotional intensity within tidal landscapes, muddy inlets, shifting channels, and silent waters, where memory appears sedimented into the environment itself. Much like silt settling beneath water, Kya's memories remain layered, partially submerged, and resistant to immediate visibility. The marsh thus functions as an archive of emotional experience, storing traces of grief and survival within its material depths.

The "hydro-mnemonic" character of the marsh is most strikingly realised in the concealment of Chase Andrews's death. In the Blue Humanities framework, water is not just a medium for life but a mediating force that determines what is obscured. When Chase falls to his death from the fire tower, his body is discovered in the "deep muck" of the swamp, a site Owens describes as a place where "decomposition is cellular work" (Owens12). The crime itself is hidden through an expert manipulation of the environment's fluid properties. The marsh repeatedly complicates attempts to establish certainty, obscuring physical traces and destabilising linear understandings of truth. "Tides erase footprints, waterways conceal movement, and the mutable geography of the marsh resists surveillance and containment"(Owens 185).

In this way, the marsh becomes the novel's primary narrator of the past, a submerged archive whose sedimentary deposits partially reveal and partially conceal what happened that night. The absence of footprints in the mud is especially significant because it disrupts the town's desire for legible, humanscale evidence. The investigators note that "there were no footprints near the body and no signs of prints being brushed away," and that the open grate, splintered beam, and body imprint suggest "staged circumstances". In this sense, the hydro-ecological landscape actively shapes the narrative's structure of suspense and revelation. Knowledge emerges gradually and incompletely, much like objects uncovered through receding tides or sedimentary displacement. The marsh does not passively contain secrets; it governs the conditions under which they may surface.

This dynamic reflects Steve Mentz's argument that "aquatic environments destabilise fixed epistemologies by privileging uncertainty, motion, and transformation" (Mentz 41). Unlike terrestrial models of knowledge that seek clarity and permanence, watery spaces resist stable interpretation. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, truth itself becomes fluid, shaped by concealment and partial visibility. The marsh continually interrupts the town's attempts to impose definitive narratives upon Kya, complicating juridical and social forms of knowledge.

At the same time, the hydro-mnemonic quality of the marsh extends beyond secrecy into processes of preservation and continuity. The shells, feathers, and natural specimens Kya collects

function as mnemonic objects that preserve fragments of ecological and emotional memory. Her careful documentation of marine life reflects an attempt to create continuity within a life marked by instability and abandonment. Yet these acts of preservation remain inseparable from the watery environment that surrounds them. Memory in the novel is never entirely fixed or recoverable; it remains fluid, relational, and vulnerable to erasure.

Tate's decision to "dispose" of the incriminating shell necklace and related objects into the marsh suggests that the waterscape can function as both a hiding place and a repository of memory. The marsh, in this act, becomes a watery archive where the physical traces of Kya's entanglement with Chase are absorbed into the ecosystem rather than neatly stored in a human archive. When the necklace later resurfaces in the narrative consciousness through Tate's memory it does so as a spectral object, re-mediated through the marsh's hydro-narrative currents. The marsh's role here is reminiscent of what the Blue-Humanities scholar Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls the "operative memory" of water: the idea that "oceans and wetlands hold and re-order histories through circulation, erosion, and sedimentation, even when those traces are invisible to human eyes" (DeLoughrey 16).

The marsh therefore operates simultaneously as archive and obscuring force, preserving traces while resisting complete disclosure. This duality is central to the novel's environmental storytelling. The hydro-ecological landscape shapes not only what characters remember but also how the narrative itself unfolds. Water regulates temporality, governs revelation, and mediates the relationship between absence and presence. Through this interplay between memory and aquatic space, the novel challenges land-based assumptions that associate truth with stability and visibility.

By conceptualising the marsh as a hydro-mnemonic site, *Where the Crawdads Sing* reimagines memory as ecological rather than purely psychological. Memories do not exist solely within the human mind; they circulate through tides, sediment, and material environments that shape the conditions of remembrance itself. The novel thereby positions water as both mnemonic medium and narrative force, foregrounding the profound entanglement between environment, secrecy, and selfhood.

### **Tidal Temporalities: Cyclical Time and the Rhythms of the Marsh**

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, the marsh is not only a spatial habitat but a temporal one: its tides, seasons, and animal migrations constitute a cyclical clock that structures Kya's life and narrative duration. The novel's title itself suggests a kind of deep, repeating rhythm: "where the crawdads sing" is a place beyond the linear, clock-time of the town, a liminal zone where time is measured by the return of tides, the hatching of eggs, and the turning of marsh grass. This tidal temporality directly opposes the linearity of the murder-trial plot, which marches toward a single verdict, while the marsh's

rhythms insist that events loop, echo, and recur in ways that human legal time can never fully capture. Within the framework of Blue Humanities, aquatic environments are often associated with fluid and nonlinear temporalities that resist fixed beginnings and endings. The marsh in Owens's novel similarly generates a tidal sense of time in which memory, identity, and narrative evolve through recurrence and return rather than straightforward progression.

Kya's life within the marsh is structured by ecological rhythms rather than institutional schedules. Her interior life is mapped onto the marsh's tidal cycles from the beginning. The narrator notes that "Kya knew the time of the tides in her heart, could find her way home by the stars, knew every feather of an eagle, but even at fourteen, couldn't read these" (Owens 91). This line is crucial: Kya's "clock" is not the school-bell or town-church time, but a hydro-temporal one encoded in the body and the landscape. Unlike the town community, which measures time through school calendars, social expectations, and civic routines, Kya experiences temporality through tides, migrations, storms, moon cycles, and seasonal transformations. Her understanding of existence emerges through attentiveness to recurring natural patterns, positioning her outside the regulated temporal frameworks of terrestrial society. Time within the marsh is therefore experiential and ecological, shaped by repetition and adaptation rather than by linear advancement. Here Owens re-envisioned time as embodied rhythm rather than abstract measurement, aligning with the Blue-Humanities interest in "blue temporality", a nonlinear, aquatic time that "resists the homogenized, industrial clock" (DeLoughrey; Oppermann 11).

This cyclical temporality significantly influences the novel's representation of memory and healing. Traumatic experiences in Kya's life do not remain confined to a singular moment in the past; instead, they return in waves, resurfacing through environmental triggers and sensory encounters. Kya knew the years of isolation had altered her behavior until she seemed a witch to the town, it is not only social exclusion that matters, but the mismatch between her tidal time and the town's calendar-bound expectations. Her body, scarred by abandonment and adapted to the marsh's "tick and tock of life," follows a rhythm that is at once biological and hydro-ecological. The marsh becomes a temporal medium through which emotional experiences ebb and flow rather than disappear entirely. Much like tides that repeatedly reshape the shoreline, memory in the novel is constantly reworked through recurrence. The persistence of abandonment, loneliness, and desire within Kya's consciousness reflects this tidal movement of affect and recollection.

Steve Mentz notes that "aquatic environments produce forms of temporal instability that challenge land-based assumptions of permanence and order" (Mentz 63). In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, this instability manifests in the narrative's shifting movement between past and present. The novel's

structure itself mirrors tidal temporality through its alternating timelines and gradual revelations. Rather than progressing toward truth in a direct and linear manner, the narrative circles around concealed memories and fragmented histories, allowing understanding to emerge incrementally. This fluid temporality reinforces the hydro-mnemonic qualities of the marsh, where knowledge surfaces slowly through repetition, return, and sedimented recollection.

The marsh's ecology itself is narrated in lyrical, cyclical terms. Owens describes it as "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 the sea, and long-legged birds lift with unexpected grace... against the roar of a thousand snow geese" (Owens 12). This passage evokes annual migrations, tidal oscillations, and the daily play of light and water. The marsh is not a static setting but a rhythmic one, where life repeats in seasonal and tidal cycles. The return of the geese, the ebb and flow of the creeks, and the slow creep of marsh grass all signal a temporality that works through repetition and recurrence rather than single, one-time events.

The tidal temporality of the marsh also complicates the binary between permanence and transience. Although water is often associated with movement and impermanence, the marsh simultaneously preserves traces of ecological and emotional history. Shells, feathers, footprints, and sedimentary layers become material reminders of lives and events that persist within the landscape. The marsh therefore embodies a paradoxical temporality: it is constantly changing, yet continuously retaining memory within its cycles. This interplay between continuity and transformation reflects Kya's own evolving identity, which remains fluid while maintaining deep ecological rootedness.

Furthermore, the marsh's cyclical rhythms challenge anthropocentric notions of time that position human experience at the centre of temporal meaning. Within the littoral ecology of the novel, human life becomes only one element within broader environmental cycles that exceed individual control or comprehension. Storms, tides, migrations, and ecological processes continue irrespective of human desires, situating Kya within a temporal framework that is fundamentally more-than-human. Her gradual attunement to these rhythms reflects a mode of existence grounded in coexistence rather than mastery.

By foregrounding tidal temporality, Owens reimagines time itself as fluid, ecological, and relational. The marsh resists the linear temporality of terrestrial modernity and instead offers a cyclical model in which memory, identity, and narrative move according to rhythms of ebb and flow. Through this hydro-temporal framework, *Where the Crawdads Sing* presents human experience as inseparable from the recurring movements of aquatic life, emphasizing the profound interconnectedness between water, time, and selfhood.

## Conclusion

Where the *Crawdads Sing* reimagines the relationship between human subjectivity and environment by positioning the marsh not as a passive backdrop but as an active hydro-ecological presence that shapes identity, memory, temporality, and narrative structure. Through the theoretical lens of Blue Humanities, the novel reveals how aquatic environments destabilize terrestrial assumptions of fixity, permanence, and separation. The littoral landscape of the North Carolina marsh, marked by shifting tides, porous boundaries, sedimentation, and cyclical rhythms, becomes central to the formation of Kya's fluid subjectivity and to the unfolding of the narrative itself.

The paper has argued that Kya's identity emerges through her intimate coexistence with the marsh. Unlike the rigid social structures of Barkley Cove, which attempt to define and exclude her through fixed categories, the marsh enables a fluid mode of being grounded in adaptability, resilience, and relationality. Kya's consciousness develops through ecological attunement rather than social assimilation, reflecting the mutable and permeable qualities of water. Her subjectivity thus challenges anthropocentric and land-based models of identity that privilege autonomy and stability over interconnectedness and change.

At the same time, the study has demonstrated that the marsh functions as a hydro-mnemonic space where memory, secrecy, and narrative revelation are materially mediated through water. The tidal movements, obscured waterways, and sedimented depths of the marsh regulate the circulation of knowledge within the novel, determining what remains hidden, preserved, or eventually disclosed. Memory in the text is therefore not confined to individual psychology but is embedded within ecological processes that shape the conditions of remembrance itself. By conceptualizing the marsh as hydro-mnemonic, the paper foregrounds the role of aquatic environments in structuring both emotional experience and narrative epistemology.

The novel's representation of tidal temporality further reinforces this hydro-ecological worldview. Time within the marsh unfolds through cyclical rhythms of recurrence, erosion, and return rather than through linear progression. Such temporal fluidity challenges terrestrial notions of permanence and allows the narrative to mirror the ebb and flow of memory and affect. The alternating timelines and gradual revelations of the novel reflect the marsh's own unstable and shifting ecology, emphasizing that truth and identity remain perpetually in motion.

*Where the Crawdads Sing* contributes significantly to contemporary environmental storytelling by foregrounding water as both material environment and narrative force. Owens's novel invites readers to move beyond land-centered understandings of selfhood and to recognize the profound

entanglement between human life and aquatic ecologies. Through its depiction of the marsh as a space of fluid subjectivity, ecological memory, and tidal temporality, the text reimagines existence itself as relational, permeable, and continuously shaped by the movements of water. In doing so, the novel demonstrates how littoral landscapes can become sites where memory settles like silt, never entirely fixed, yet never fully erased.

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