



Voiced Nature: An Ecocritical Reading of To Kill a Mockingbird and Where the Crawdads Sing

الطبيعة المنطوقة: قراءة نقدية بيئية لروايتي "قتل الطائر المبجل" و"حيث يغني السلامانجر"

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Abstract	Article info
<p><i>To Kill a Mockingbird and Where the Crawdads Sing depict the marginalization of nature by society and the reconsideration of voicing it. In both works, nature is designed to impose its voice on mankind through characters who either defend or take revenge on nature's behalf. Introduced in the 1970s, ecocriticism immediately became favored amid literary circles. Cheryll Glotfelty, as one of the significant figures of the movement, demanded scholars for a revival in examining nature writings in different eras. Moreover, American Literature, specifically from the emergence of Transcendental movement in the 19th century onward, prioritized the role of nature in man's life. This paper aims to connect the two novels on an ecocritical basis and focus on the influential role of nature in both works to give a fair perspective of American contemporary literature and its concerns toward the possible marginalized/voiced nature. The way both novels prioritize nature and wilderness explains the growing concerns toward ecocritical matters and how mankind is affected by its annihilation.</i></p>	<p>Received 21/04/2024</p> <p>Accepted 26//04/2024</p> <p>Keyword:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Mankind:✓ Marginalization:✓ Material Ecocriticism:✓ Voiced Nature:✓ Wilderness:
المخلص	معلومات المقال
<p>يصور كتاب "قتل الطائر المبجل" و"حيث يغني السلامانجر" تهيمش الطبيعة من قبل المجتمع وإعادة التفكير في إعطائها صوتاً. في كلتا الأعمال، تم تصميم الطبيعة لفرض صوتها على البشرية من خلال شخصيات تدافع أو تنتقم نيابة عنها. ظهر النقد البيئية في السبعينات من القرن الماضي وأصبح محبوباً على الفور في الدوائر الأدبية. طالبت شيريل جلوتفيلتي، كواحدة من الشخصيات البارزة في الحركة، العلماء بإحياء الفحص لكتابات الطبيعة في فترات زمنية مختلفة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، اعطى أولوية الأدب الأمريكي، بدءاً من ظهور الحركة العابرة للحدود في القرن التاسع عشر وحتى الآن، الدور الأساسي للطبيعة في حياة الإنسان. يهدف هذا البحث إلى ربط الروايتين على أساس نقدي بيئي والتركيز على الدور المؤثر للطبيعة في كل منهما لإعطاء نظرة عادلة للأدب الأمريكي المعاصر ومخاوفه تجاه الطبيعة المهمشة/المتحدثة المحتملة. تفسر الطريقة التي تعطي فيها الروايتان أولوية للطبيعة والبرية المخاوف المتزايدة تجاه المسائل البيئية وكيف يتأثر البشر بإبادةها.</p>	<p>الكلمات المفتاحية:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ البشرية✓ التهيمش✓ النقد البيئي المادي✓ الطبيعة المنطوقة✓ البرية

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1 Introduction

By the end of the twentieth century governments, environmentalists, universities, and media had taken big steps toward advertising ‘greening’ that is the process of preserving natural resources through simple tasks such as riding bikes to work, using bio disposable plastic bags, and substituting polluting energies with clean ones. Undeniably, these actions are not sufficient enough to stop the speeding demolition of natural resources. Activists are aware that no didactic point is better absorbed than the ones told by entertainers which are authors and poets in this case. Many recent nature writings are composed for this particular reason.

An authentic way of looking at environmental issues is to regard nature as a suppressed being, silenced by the assumed supremacy of mankind. Ecocritics aim to stop this suppressing process and allow nature to be heard through literature. They “explore literary texts as ‘refractions of physical environments and human interactions with those environments’ (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 190) in an attempt to make people interested in the environment and its crisis.

Interestingly enough, they can connect many of the Postcolonial concepts with ecocritical ones in different texts, even those written by white people. Characters can be related to nature by the way they are both treated, exploited, and underestimated. These concepts are the backbone of Postcolonial ecocriticism, a mixture of the two approaches, which focuses on the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on the poor treatment of colonial powers toward exploited nations and their natural environment. “Relating these core postcolonial ideas to ecocriticism, the need to highlight and challenge the marginalization, silencing, and misrepresentation of humans is extended to include the environment within postcolonial ecocriticism” (Salisbury 2023, 10). Based on this critical approach, nature is examined as a dynamic being denied of the right to speak, defend, and simply exist the same way as the colonial/marginalized subject in the harsh age of industrialization and colonialization.

The idea of giving voice to nature was inspired by the concept of agency attributed to the colonial subject. Hence, nature was allowed to present itself in the literary atmosphere too. Material Ecocriticism is an expanded theory of this opinion, i.e. the agency of nature and matter in general. Scholars believe that “the natural world is perfused with signs, meanings, and purposes which are material and which evolve” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 4).

Some people mistakenly take the concept of voiced nature literally, “To speak of ‘non-human agency’, however, immediately invites the allegation of anthropomorphism, potentially imputing to non-humans a capacity for choice, decision-making and conscious planning often considered by human beings to be unique to themselves” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 191) which is not a true interpretation. To apply agency to animals brings out an opportunity to redefine the concept.

“Many people (outside the West, but in it too) have [now] started to deconstruct seemingly obvious claims about the privileged status of the human, in contradistinction to the animal, as the source of agency in the world” (Armstrong 2008, 3–4). Agency is “an inbuilt property of matter” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 3) which sets each matter as a powerful agent as human beings in the control of world’s events. Nature can present its agency through different elements one of which is mankind.

The concept of anthropocentrism was revived in Western philosophy with the emergence of humanism in the sixteenth century which sought to promote human beings’ control over life as a reaction to the Church’s powerful domination on every aspect of it while “many non-western [and even western] cultures have [now] recognized that their identity as humans is essentially connected to land, and many indigenous voices from the past and present speak of respect for the land, and of the grief and pain in loss of their land, a grief as intense as for any human other” (Plumwood 1993, 148).

Still as Cheryll Glotfelty stated in her *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) “when the Renaissance inherited the *scala naturae*, however, a new configuration of thought that would eventually be called humanism converted it from a symbol of human restraint in the face of a perfect order to an emblem of human superiority over the natural world” (20). Since then, nature began to lose its effectiveness

and even though Romantic poets revived it as an entity more than an inferior background of human life, it was only at the end of the twentieth century that nature regained its status and entered the academia. The fact that “nature is silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (Glotfelty 1996, 15) has caused different damages to the environment.

This paper centralizes nature as a marginalized entity, like a colonized persona, since “postcolonial studies has come to understand environmental issues not only as central to the projects of European conquest and global domination but also as inherent in the ideologies of imperialism and racism on which those projects historically depend” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 6). The process of demarginalization and prioritizing nature in the world of literature is examined in this paper. In their own way, fiction writers that defend the natural environment in their works, have the capability of turning the readers into devoted advocates. This is the main reason that this research paper analyzes two popular novels that elevate nature into a new level of importance; an entity possessing voice and agency that can impose itself on mankind.

The existing literature covers many of the issues that are directly related to this study, for example, “Amalgamation of Human and Natural World: A Study of Delia Owens’ Novel *Where the Crawdads Sing*” is an article by Ananthi and Vanitha (2022) that takes a romantic approach toward Kya’s relationship with nature and ends with some lines from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* by Lord Byron about nature’s healing power.

A close analysis of ecocritical and postcolonial concepts in Owens’ novel can be found in a master’s dissertation by Annika Salisbury (2023) entitled as “Voice, Agency, and Urgency; Three Ecocritical Readings of Nature and the Protagonist in *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens”. Postcolonial ecocriticism is an emerging approach mingling notions from both theories: otherness, language, and representation.

In another study “An ecological allegory in Delia Owens’ *Where the Crawdads Sing*”, Marianne Kimura (2021) emphasizes the role of nature on Kya’s characterization, her actions, and fate of people around her. Delia Owens has a PhD in Animal Behavior and has written three non-fiction books about her experience

in the wildlife which consequently impacted her first novel, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, greatly. The author of the paper has included a part of Owens' interview on the novel where she states that she had no direct intention of inserting advisory material on environmentalism in the novel, this was all natural for her career and her devotion to wildlife. The paper investigates a symbolic allegory between humans and nature, Chase Andrew and Kya.

In an earlier study, the researcher of "Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*: An Ecocritical Reading" describes the dominant theme of the novel as "humans' relationship with non-human world" (Kim 2020, 1) which is nature in general. The article challenges another scholar's opinion that Harper Lee's story is set in the south in the 30s and belongs to only there, with no universal notion. The ecological theme of the narrative is very much influential on Scout's character development.

2 Ecocriticism: a green moral and political agenda

This study is a qualitative study which investigates *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Where the Crawdads Sing* based on Ecocriticism which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. It aims to analyze nature's role in American literature and the causes and results of their segregationist behavior toward marginalized nature reflected in literary texts. Different books, research papers, and dissertations on the subject of nature and marginalization were used to create a fair comparison of the two novels.

Nature's role has been neglected in literature for centuries (Greenblatt et al. 2011). Romanticism as an intellectual literary movement at the end of the 18th century in England is a reaction to this ignorance which is believed to lead to a sense of loss and failure in mankind. As Karen Barad (2007) states "We are a part of that nature that we seek to understand" (2). And we need to pay attention to the outer nature to reach our inner one. "This attention to the external world serves only as stimulus to the most characteristic human activity, that of thinking" (Greenblatt 2012, 13). Thus, to decrease the dehumanizing effect of Industrial age, people viewed spending time in nature as leisure time. For the first time in history, as Lucy Moore writes in *Ecologists*, "nature became an object, and this may be the moment the modern environmental movement began" (Galens 2002, 306).

American literature had been influenced by European literature, especially British, before its leadership in literary fields in the twentieth century. In the early nineteenth century, the philosophical movement of Transcendentalism took over the literary atmosphere of the United States under the effect of British Romanticism, philosophy and literature of the East and works of Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Due to its emergence, a great portion of literary works began to acknowledge the importance of nature on mankind's life and psychology. Besides, "much of Southern identity relies on landscape and place; the humid bayous, crunchy pine forest floors, and flooded swamp plains are all places that Southerners lean into for history and culture" (Peedin 2023, 13). However, the prominent effect of industrialization after the First World War and the transformation of American society, from an agricultural nation to a highly industrialized one, shifted the center of attention. War and its casualties, the migration of villagers to urban areas, factories, workers' protests, and the great depression were trendy subjects. Human beings were occupied with great changes around the world and nature was not one of them.

The turning point of this century was the 60s; the decade of Feminist and racial demonstrations. Environmentalists managed to express their ideals along with other establishments and entered the academic atmosphere twenty years later. By the second half of the twentieth century, environmentalists had begun controversial discussions on irrevocable natural resources and the ways governments would be able to cease or reduce the effects of air and water pollution. With the emergence of Ecocriticism, a critical approach of studying literary works, nature was turned into the focus of literary attention. It was inspired by the idea of "literary ecology" by Joseph Meeker in his *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* in 1972. The term "ecocriticism" was coined by William H. Rueckert in his "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. It is defined by its most significant theorist, Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, as:

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism

brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (xviii).

The first wave emphasized critical examination of Romantic and Transcendental works. The process of re-reading classical ‘nature writing’ and examining the role of nature was the starting point for Ecocriticism while the second wave began in 1990s regarding contemporary natural condition. For instance, *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson emphasizes more recent environmental issues, but during the first wave, literary works by Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Wordsworth, John Keats, and other Romantics were re-examined. To study pastoral scenes was a way of reaching inner peace and self-awareness yet it is not Ecocriticism’s ultimate goal for “Nature has intrinsic value” and it “consequently possesses at least the right to exist his position is sometimes called ‘biocentrism,’ ‘ecological egalitarianism,’ or ‘deep ecology,’ and it accords nature ethical status at least equal to that of humans” (Nash 1989, 9-10). Nature is ethically equal to humans in this respect. Informing authorities of the everlasting effect of natural disasters and an apocalyptic future with the continuation of the contemporary situation is Ecocritics’ final chance in reserving the natural environment through the power of the state. “Ecocriticism is, then, an avowedly political mode of analysis, as the comparison with feminism and Marxism suggests. Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a “‘green’ moral and political agenda” (Gerard 2004, 3).

One of the offshoots of Ecocriticism is Material Ecocriticism which relies on a simple perspective “that the world we inhabit (from the ocean floor to the upper atmosphere) is alive” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 1). Material Ecocriticism acknowledges that world’s material phenomena are intertwined in a vast narrative. “All matter, in other words, is a ‘storied matter”” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 1) therefore, scholars examine literary works by concentrating on the material nature which expresses itself in its concrete reality.

The difference of nature experiences in both works are the aspects which will be discussed in this paper. The importance of the role of nature, its influence on various characters and circumstances, and its resemblance to the colonized persona, or the subaltern, are the main points that are analyzed based on ecocriticism.

3 Voiced Nature

Despite the fact that the title of both works, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Where the Crawdads Sing*, are metaphors for social phenomena, the denotative meanings of them are directly natural. The sinful act of killing mockingbirds that sing beautifully and do no harm to mankind is a metaphor for racial behavior toward black people in the story. Yet, it would not be far-fetched to link it directly to the cruel treatment of nature by human beings; sabotaging the environment that serves their body and soul. ‘Where the crawdads sing’ is an American vernacular expression that indicates a place “far in the bush where critters are wild, still behaving like critters” (Owens 2019, 111) which refers to the adventurous exploration of nature and avoiding civilization. At young age, Kya was encouraged by her mother to explore the marsh specially where creatures are still unaffected and nature is still unpopulated. Perchance, she could anticipate the link between the marsh and her daughter’s fate.

3.1 *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Lee’s novel sets nature not only as the background of the story but a significant part of it. She demarginalizes nature. The interconnections between the characters and the nonhuman world of Alabama is a turning point for a work that was published in the 60s. The setting of the novel is near the Alabama River. Along with plants and flowers, animals, insects, and birds become the subject of conversations one side of which is mostly Scout. Her childish curiosity brings out questions about the nature of things and human beings’ moral responsibility toward them. Scout spent most of her time in nature, the streets of Maycomb, their backyard, or Miss Maudie’s garden and “A sin to Scout, a child of nature, is a violation of nature's ways by harming something or someone needlessly” (Turner 1979, 34-35) especially after Atticus explained to her why killing a mockingbird is considered a sin.

Jem Finch’s character is manifested as a nature lover, a personality trait that developed as he grew older. Jem cared for the obnoxious insects such as worms when he was digging behind the woodpile to build a snowman, he placed “any worms he found to one side” (Lee 2006, 75) as Scout witnessed. The common-sense education that Jem had received from his father about animals and human responsibility could be summarized in Atticus’ statement on killing innocent mockingbirds. Therefore, Jem, as the older sibling possessing a partly

developed consciousness combined of Atticus and Calpurnia's educational system, turned to a moral model for Scout. Among other characters, he had the strongest influence on her characterization. He prevented her from 'mashing' some vermin, a roly-poly she found in the house, reasoning that "they don't bother [people]" (Lee 2006, 273) and she simply agreed. However, she confessed she had known "he was certainly never cruel to animals" but "had never known his charity to embrace the insect world" (Lee 2006, 273) which was incomprehensible for Scout due to her "EQ (ecological quotient) or EI (ecological intelligence) [that] is far lower than Jem's" (Kim 2020, 3). Their age difference impacted their understanding of the world too. Perchance, Lee's intention of revealing a tolerant aspect of Jem was to magnify the racist atmosphere of Maycomb that showed no prudence in black or other suppressed beings, such as animals.

Lee could be inspired by Utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, "who suggested that cruelty to animals was analogous to slavery and claimed that the capacity to feel pain, not the power of reason, entitled a being to moral consideration" (Gerrard 2003, 136). In this case, insects replace animals that should be the subject of human attention and sympathy as the Utilitarian 'principle of equality' claims "everyone is entitled to equal moral consideration, irrespective of family, race, nation or species" (Gerrard 2003, 137). One of the reasons of Scout's deep concerns toward the marginalized, whether nature or the Black society, is her father's belief in the fact that "The one things that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience" (Lee 2006, 120).

In addition to Jem, Miss Maudie, their neighbor across the street, impacted her developing EI. She had a beautiful garden and even though she let the Finch children play in there, they were strictly forbidden to damage the plants. In the eighth chapter of the novel, her house was accidentally burned down. Instead of grieving, Miss Maudie told Jem that now she can have a bigger yard as well as "more room for [her] azaleas" (Lee 2006, 82). "There is the strong image of Miss Maudie forever bent over the bushes in the yard" (Kim 2020, 2) tending to her garden in the story and Scout remembers "she loved everything that grew in God's earth, even the weed" (Lee 2006, 47), useless plants, similar to Jem's care for the worms. She was even accused of frenzied obsession with beauty and flowers by some groups of fundamentalists. Her love for plants was

inherited from her father “[whose] obsession was anything that grew in the ground” (Lee 2006, 48). She believed that “time spent indoors was time wasted” (Lee 2006, 47) so she devoted her life to her love for the plants. Harper Lee attempted to take the dominant voice from man and distribute it to more marginalized entities such as nature. She made use of Bakhtin’s Dialogism in her novel: “Dialogics helps first by placing an emphasis on contradictory voices, rather than focusing mainly upon the authoritative monologic voice of the narrator. We begin to hear characters and elements of the landscape that have been marginalized” (Glotfelty 1996, 374).

3.2 Where the Crawdads Sing

On a higher degree, the same process of demarginalization is developed in Owens’ novel. It rewards nature as the ultimate influence on Kya’s life view and decisions when “every aspect of the natural world is performing some action, contributing to life and death” (Bonastre Calafell 2023, 19) and Kya spent her whole life by the marsh, analyzing, painting, and writing about it. As it is mentioned in the book, “the marsh did not confine them but defined them and, like any sacred ground, kept their secrets deep” (Owens 2019, 8) and had a greater impression than what’s imagined. When she was alone and afraid in her shack “it was the land who caught her” (Owens 2019, 34). Kya made the very first human contact through nature, when she got her first gift from Tate. Her fondest memories were set in nature where she acted like a part of nature without interrupting it. She spent her best times with Tate and Chase on a boat or in her shack by the marsh and all the glory and grace of the civilization could not change her mind.

The marsh was known as “wasteland bog” (Owens 2019, 8) to the city and few people had any moral/educational consideration of its ecosystem. Nevertheless, Kya was able to reform this perception. She needed communication, if not with other people, at least with the environment. “Kya knows that ‘when no one came, she got the pot of grits and walked through the woods to the seashore. Hands to her mouth, she held her head and called, ‘kee-ow, kee-ow, kee-ow’” (Owens 2019, 21) and when she laid her hand upon the earth “the marsh became her mother” (Owens 2019, 34). It shows that she wants to share her feelings with seagulls” (Ananthi and Vanitha 2022, 60). Feeling related to nature, she found a way to give it voice while she refused to

defend, or even speak, in the court for her own sake. She did not exclude herself from her natural surrounding as “the idea of internal relations is that a human being, let us say, is not the same person independent of his or her environment” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 24). Her association with natural elements turned her feelings poetic and she started writing poems and sending them to the daily newspaper under a false name; she needed to be heard and to give a voice to nature in an anonymous way, to protect her privacy.

Kya’s consciousness of the animal/insect behavior shaped her a flexible understanding of human behavior. The memory of her mother’s decision of abandoning her children got absorbable when she realized that even “overstressed mammal mothers abandon their young” (Owens 2019, 183). Therefore, she modeled animal behavior for human interactions and judged people through her knowledge of different species. For instance, in the court, she considered the judge, “the alpha male” for he was “secure in his position, so his posture was imposing, but relaxed and unthreatened as the territorial boar” (Owens 2019, 320). During these court sessions, all her attention was on Sunday Justice, the cat that often wandered around the department, unbothered by the juridical process.

At a time, a few developers were planning to build hotels, they chose the “murky swamp” (Owens 2019, 218) as their desired location. Draining an area with its whole dynamic ecosystem for economic purposes, without considering the damages to both man and nature, is an example of numerous destructive yet profitable plans of a Capitalist society that takes advantage of people’s unawareness about the importance of the marsh and how “most sea creatures – including the very ones they eat — need the marsh” (Owens 2019, 122). As “some theorists argued that the environment speaks and that we may somehow be the voice piece for this speaking” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 139), Kya’s books made her the agent of nature in the human world. They acted as a reminder of the marsh’s crucial role for the people of the area. They made nature to be heard again, to be noticed.

Generally, the origin and the ways to acknowledge the agency of animals in human life have been the topic of discussion for years. Rejecting their previous attitude, “the West is increasingly attempting to re-think

and re-capture practices generated through the very respect for animals and nature that the early settlers so righteously scorned” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 11). Virginia Anderson’s study in *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*, even though “is concerned exclusively with early settlement in America, necessarily raises the issue of the part played by animals in human histories” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 8) for scholars. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, however small it might seem, the part is regarded as prominent due to its influence on upcoming literature since Lee’s work was written in the modern era, especially the 60s, which was preoccupied by an oppositional atmosphere toward social standards. Hence nature was degraded to a marginal element in man’s life. On the other hand, *Where the Crawdads Sing* demonstrates the postmodern spirit centering environmental issues.

Iovino and Oppermann in *Material Ecocriticism* (2014) define ecological postmodernism as the opposite of anthropocentrism and “the rejection of old-fashioned binaries; the work of postmodern environmental thinkers indicates that in dismantling the binaries of language-reality, culture-nature, discourse-matter, human-nonhuman, ecological postmodernism sets in motion a non-anthropocentric paradigm” (25) that seeks to listen to the stories of matter, the world’s material phenomena or nature in general. It is hard not to notice the authors’ conscious or unconscious attempt to present a material nature possessing voice and agency.

4 Wilderness

The wildlife had a deep effect on the characters as Kya and Boo were both alienated and misbehaved like the wilderness. They spent most of their lives outside civilization while defying it. The case is much stronger for Kya since she literally lived in the unpopulated lands of the marsh but it can also relate to Boo. It is believed that he was probably hurt in some ways by the outside world that he preferred to stay aloof. To some extent, one can argue that Scout had similarities with these two since she, also, longed to have a life independent from the norms and views of the traditional western society, living in the unbothered nature.

4.1 Where the Crawdads Sing

Kya is a humanized version of wilderness. As a free spirit living in the woods, threatened by men, she broke the stereotypical image of women “comfortable in rural, cultivated nature, in civilized gardens” who “were not

perceived to experience any of the ambivalence to the settlement of the frontier landscape that men did and do” (Glotfelty 1996, 324). She had been on her own since the age of six, aloof from the crowd, growing up by the marsh, an environment that was pure of industries and modern technology. As her Ma said “There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot” (Owens 2019, 103) and Kya was one of the latter. She barely contacted other people for a long time except for Jumping, his wife, and Tate. As a young kid, she “didn’t talk to anybody but the gulls” (Owens 2019, 51). She befriended the marsh and the shells, collected leaves and rare feathers as a hobby, and spent her days wandering around the marsh with her father’s boat. Barkley Cove alienated her since her childhood by calling her “Swamp rat” (Owens 2019, 30) and later “the Marsh Girl” (Owens 2019, 91) became her nickname for the rest of her life. Parents warned their children of approaching her which created an intense bullying atmosphere in which she was turned to an uncivilized creature or a “Wolf Child” (Owens 2019, 91) to people.

Being secluded by almost every human being, later including Tate, when he suddenly stopped visiting her, she turned to nature. It became the only source of peace for her whenever she was disappointed or hurt by the people she used to trust. Therefore, she became a part of the untamed marsh. When Tate dropped the shell necklace on the sand to get disappeared he reckoned that “Kya had been of this land and of this water; now they would take her back. Keep her secrets deep” (Owens 2019, 368). She would examine insects’ mating process closely, relating herself to female fireflies or birds.

Avoiding city people even in her adulthood, lacking the experience of a true relationship since the age of six, and being a loner living in the woods created an interesting image of Kya as a beautiful, wild, and free creature for young people. This public perception attracted Chase Andrews’ attention toward Kya. He was the successful, handsome former football player of the town, an instance of a social butterfly. “Chase is implicitly linked to capitalism through his association with cars and houses, major products of economic expansion and fossil fuel use” (Kimura 2021, 8). Chase was good with flattering the ladies and his financial condition had a good influence on his popularity among them. He was the sort of man who could marry the most popular girl of the area. However, fascinated by Kya, he plans to use his charms to steal her heart. This is a typical white male

reaction toward exotica. “Wilderness as a touchstone of American cultural identity” (Garrard 2004, 67) is attractive for white men. “Like most people, Chase knew the marsh as a thing to be used, to boat and fish, or drain for farming, so Kya’s knowledge of its critters, currents, and cattails intrigued him. But he scoffed at her soft touch, cruising at slow speeds, drifting silently past deer, whispering near birds’ nests” (Owens 2019, 176). Wilderness is considered a sacred being and Kya is the representation of it; a soul for the lost, civilized man. It is believed that nature is “a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives” (Garrard 2004, 69).

To be able to tame a wild creature, share the sacred experience in the wilderness, and feel free and unmasked far from the city life were Chase’s inner desires. Kya’s insecurity about him led her fear of being a mere “piece of beach art” that will be “tossed back on the sand” (Owens 2019, 159) yet it did not stop her from opening herself up to Chase. Although his curiosity led to his literal downfall from the fire tower, the consequence of being a playboy, along with one more bitter memory for Kya, Chase was fond of their secret affair. Kya was the symbol of sublime for him and as E. Burke claims “the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror” (Garrard 2004, 64). Even after being rejected, Chase never took Kya’s shell necklace off as his mother informed the police posthumously. Any involvement in the savage game of nature can cause irrecoverable damage and Chase was aware of that.

Remarkably, Kya reacted to Chase’s continuous assaults the way nature would react, as the narrator of the story states “when cornered, desperate, or isolated, man reverts to those instincts that aim straight at survival” (Owens 2019, 8). She was inspired by the female firefly’s strategy of signaling a male firefly and killing it after mating. That is how she tricked Chase to go to the fire tower in the middle of the night undoubtedly. “His death is a metaphor for nature simply coolly and dispassionately killing off a destructive capitalistic society which is causing the end of the sustenance which the ignorant society had relied on with no thought for the future” (Kimura 2021, 10). This is a true manifestation of the terrifying side of nature that H. D.

Thoreau felt deeply after climbing Mount Katahdin; “Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful” (Garrard 2004, 66).

4.2 To Kill a Mockingbird

The character of Arthur ‘Boo’ Radley can be an equivalent to the character of Kya. He was an alienated man who had not been seen in the light of the day for a long time. Although there were many rumors about his past and the way he was treated and locked in the house by his father, Scout and Jem realized by the end of the story that he was alienated by choice. His absence from the social life of Maycomb, like Kya’s, created an exotic image for the children. The assumption that he has been in the house for years, except for the nights, and having to only witness society from the outside made him a mysterious, even dangerous, figure. He probably felt closest to nature and farther away from civilization at night, invisible and unmasked.

Scout, Jem, and Dill spent their entire summer on coming up with ways to approach Boo to help him. They tried to communicate with him through a hole in a tree by putting letters in it. On the other hand, they received interesting items such as “two small images carved in soap” (Lee 2006, 67) or a broken pocket watch. Boo’s abnormal appearance and behavior, as rumors had it, radiated signs of primitiveness, especially to the children. In the first chapters of the novel Jem offers a few ways to force him out of the house in the same way a turtle is persuaded to move, by “striking a match under him” (Lee 2006, 15). Unlike other adults, he continued the Finch’s game of leaving little items in the tree hole. He prefers this harmless, primitive model of communication specific to animals and uncivilized beings.

Boo’s commonality with Kya is his decision to be deserted, to seem uncivilized in the light of cruel civilization. Along with nature, they are othered in society. They sought company but their vulnerability prevented them from meaningful communication. Nevertheless, Kya let go of her mental cages when she gave Tate another chance. The acts of murdering Chase Andrews and Bob Ewell, the antagonists, count as justifiable, interestingly, for not only Kya and Boo but most characters who were aware of the crime. Along with Atticus and Sheriff Tate that preferred not to interfere Boo’s privacy, Tate Walker, Kya’s lifetime partner, also decided to ignore the revealed information about Chase’s death. It was as if there was no place for the law

to take part since the victims deserved the punishment. Kya and Boo played the role of nature, or a means in God's hand, who avenged the morally corrupted characters. In this way, nature is given voice in a novel way, manifesting itself in human beings while avenging those who misuse it. Interestingly, this dark side of nature has only been studied by the literary circles since the eighteenth century while pastoral literature has taken a large part of the literary canon from ancient times.

Besides Boo, Scout's character parallels Kya's since both of them had been raised without a mother and spent most of their childhood in the outdoors. Calpurnia's role as a mentor in Scout's upbringing is close to Mabel's, Jumping's wife, in Kya's life but with limited authority compared to the Finch's black chef. Mabel's concerns about Kya's clothing or her first period fulfill the supporting role of a female guide that resembles Calpurnia's responsibility toward Scout's moral education on a more general scale. Unlike Kya, Scout had the gift of a loving family, yet she was not successful in satisfying society's needs expected from her as a functioning young girl either. She wore overalls and hanged around with her brother and Dill in the backyard all the time instead of wearing dresses and being "a [conventional] ray of sunshine in [her] father's lonely life" (Lee, 2006, p. 92). Kya and Scout behaved uncivilized/boyish in southern conservative societies of the 30s and 60s, spending time in nature with boys, speaking vulgar English, and being fond of natural experiences. As it was mentioned in the book, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (Lee 2006, 33). These characters were never understood by the society simply because they didn't think conventionally of the incidents around them. Although the nature experience is a different case in Lee's novel, an urban area in Alabama, its effect on Scout's characterization equates with Kya's rich experience of her natural surroundings and how the environment had the role of a mother-figure for both of them.

A key difference concerning their characterization that needs to be mentioned is that *Where the Crawdads Sing* covers most of Kya's life story, from the age of 6 to her death at the age of 64, while, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is rather a short account of Scout's childhood memories, between the ages of 6 to 9, told by her. Unlike Kya, it is impossible to follow her later behavior, as a grown woman, affected by those childhood

memories but the fact that as a fictional character, she decided to narrate them, indicates the importance and influence of such memories for her.

At last, the two novels try to create a world that relies heavily on the natural world and human conscience. The characters are deeply affected by their environment, they model nature to act and react in time, bring out the darker sides of it, and try to be the voice of the marginalized.

5. Conclusion

Narrative has been a powerful device for theorists to engage common people with their ideas and actions. As a developing approach, ecocriticism is a critical school scrutinizing nature-related aspects of different literary pieces including narrative writings. Through narrative, authors turn into activists aiming to wake the readers from a long ignorant sleep to the fact that the preservation of humans totally relies on the natural environment. The ideas of prioritizing planet Earth, providing it with a voice, and treating it as the eternal house of humans are still novel but expanding concepts around the globe that need more recognition from the public.

The intensity of presenting nature as a voiced being is different in the two works which can be justified by the discrepancy of time of the narrations. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a didactic and amusing work, became a classical model for next generation writers to focus on issues that belong to less populated or industrialized areas with rich natural environments. This is manifested by the impression nature had left on her childhood that still follows her to her adult years. Still, the story revolves more around racial segregation and its dramatic effect on her life.

Owens' novel intensifies this impression to the point that Kya is turned into a particle acting like nature. *Where the Crawdads Sing* rewards nature as the most influential element of Kya's life which demonstrates the author's insistence on the role of nature which is more extreme compared to Harper Lee's. Here, nature is the sole interest of the story that inspires others to act. This is due to the environmental development in recent decades that makes the talk of nature more urgent than before.

This paper intended to compare two novels based on ecocritical concerns and natural influences on characters. There are characters in both works that exhibit strong affection toward nature in its domestic sense,

animals and plants. However, another aspect of nature is brought into consideration. There are characters who portray wilderness and its aloof sense of existence.

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