



UNFOLDING THROUGH LAYERS: A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TENSE, MOOD, AND VOICE IN *WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING* (2018) BY DELIA OWENS

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ABSTRACT

Unfolding Through Layers: A Narratological Analysis of Tense, Mood, and Voice in Where the Crawdads Sing (2018) by Delia Owens examines the narrative structure of the novel through Gérard Genette's narratological framework. The study aims to identify the narrative tense, mood, and voice and to analyze their implementation in the novel. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study identifies and classifies narrative passages according to Genette's theory. The findings reveal that the narrative tense in the novel is structured through anachronic order involving analepsis and prolepsis, various narrative durations such as scene, summary, pause, and ellipsis, and multiple frequencies including singulative, repetitive, iterative, and anaphoric. In terms of mood, the narration primarily employs internal focalization while also incorporating zero and external focalization. In terms of voice, the narrative is characterized by subsequent narration, an extradiegetic level, and a heterodiegetic narrator. Through the identification and analysis of the implementation of these narratological elements, the study demonstrates how Owens constructs a layered and non-linear narrative that organizes time (tense), perspective (mood), and narrative stance (voice).

Keywords: *Gérard Genette, Narratology, Narrative Tense, Narrative Mood, Narrative Voice, Where the Crawdads Sing.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is broadly defined as any body of written works created through the imaginative use of language. Wellek and Warren (1949, pp. 9–11) describe literature as a creative representation of life and society that deepens readers' understanding of human existence. Among the various genres of literature, prose is one of the broadest categories. Abrams (1999, p. 246) defines prose as an inclusive term for all discourse, spoken or written, which is not patterned into the lines either of metric verse or of free verse. Prose as a form of discourse is straightforward and structured into sentences and paragraphs. Within the various types of prose, the novel stands as one of the most influential and widely appreciated literary forms. Abrams and Harpham (2015, p. 252) define the novel as an extended prose narrative that portrays human experiences with depth and realism, while Cuddon (2013, p. 478) emphasizes its structural reliance on plot, character, and incident. These definitions reveal that a novel's artistic power lies not only in its story but also in how the story is told—its narrative structure, which determines how plots and events are arranged and presented to the reader.

Novels employ different narrative techniques and structures to enhance the storytelling process, making the study of their narrative frameworks a significant aspect of literary analysis.

The study of narrative structure, commonly approached through narratology, focuses on how stories are organized and communicated rather than on their themes or interpretations. Among the many scholars in the field of narratology, Gérard Genette has made one of the most significant contributions to the study of narrative form. His influential book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) introduces a systematic framework for examining how stories are structured and conveyed. Genette distinguishes between different levels of narrative and develops precise categories for analyzing the mechanics of storytelling, offering three central analytical categories; tense, mood, and voice to examine narrative time, perspective, and narrator relation to the story. These categories have become widely recognized as foundational in narratological analysis and continue to provide a reliable basis for the study of literary texts.

Recent narratological research continues to demonstrate the versatility of Genette's theory. For instance, studies have applied his framework to modern and postmodern novels to analyze temporal shifts, multiple perspectives, and narrative reliability. However, fewer studies have applied Genette's categories to contemporary popular fiction that blends literary and genre conventions—especially works that intertwine human psychology with ecological settings. This gap creates an opportunity to revisit narratology in a modern literary context, where narrative form becomes as crucial as theme in shaping the structure of storytelling.

Delia Owens's *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) exemplifies such a narrative. The novel combines literary fiction, mystery, and romance while portraying Kya Clark's coming-of-age story amid the marshlands of North Carolina. Its alternating timelines and layered narrative perspectives invite deeper examination through a narratological approach. Although previous analyses have explored its ecological and psychological dimensions (e.g., Bredenbeek, 2023; Marlinna et al., 2025), studies focusing specifically on the narrative structure of the novel remain limited. This absence indicates a need to analyze how Owens's narrative techniques—particularly in relation to Genette's concepts of tense, mood, and voice—contribute to the novel's storytelling complexity.

Therefore, this study examines the narrative structure of *Where the Crawdads Sing* using Gérard Genette's narratological framework. It aims to identify how narrative tense, mood, and voice are structured in the novel, and to analyze how these narrative elements are implemented to construct the storytelling process. By doing so, this study contributes to the broader field of narratological studies by demonstrating how Genette's classical categories remain relevant for analyzing the narrative techniques of twenty-first-century fiction.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the narrative structure of *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) by Delia Owens. Creswell (2014, p. 236) defines the qualitative descriptive method as an approach that allows researchers to explore narratives through systematic textual analysis. This approach is particularly suitable for narratological research, which focuses on the formal organization of a narrative rather than its thematic or psychological dimensions.

The primary data of this study consist of textual passages from *Where the Crawdads Sing* that exemplify Gérard Genette's three narratological categories—tense, mood, and voice. The analysis emphasizes how these categories structure the storytelling process within the novel. Prior to data analysis, the researcher conducted an in-depth review of Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) and other relevant studies to establish a theoretical foundation.

Data collection was carried out through close reading and textual documentation. The novel was read repeatedly to identify passages representing Genette's subcategories: order, duration, and frequency (for narrative tense); distance and focalization (for narrative mood); and time of narrating, person, and narrative level (for narrative voice). Each relevant passage was coded and organized thematically based on its structural features. In the analysis of narrative order, the sequence of events was mapped through a simple coding system to visualize the temporal rearrangement between story time and narrative time. This procedure served only as an organizational tool and did not involve any quantitative computation.

The data analysis followed a descriptive-analytic process based on Genette's framework. Each passage was examined to identify the specific narratological element it illustrates, followed by a descriptive explanation of its implementation in the text. The results are presented with textual evidence to ensure transparency and verifiability. By maintaining a consistent analytical structure grounded in Genette's theory, this methodology ensures a coherent and theoretically sound examination of the novel's narrative structure.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Gérard Genette (1980) explains that narrative discourse is structured through three primary elements: tense, mood, and voice. These elements shape how a story is presented in the text.

Tense

Narrative tense deals with the temporal relationship between events in the story and their representation in the text. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, narrative tense is structured through the relationship between the chronological order of events and the order in which events are told. It includes three components: order, duration, and frequency.

Order refers to the relationship between the chronological sequence of events in the story (story time) and the order in which they are narrated (narrative time) (Genette, 1980, p. 35). When the narrative deviates from strict chronology, it produces anachrony, which consists of analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flashforward). Narrative order in *Where the Crawdads Sing* identified as non-linear, marked by frequent shifts between past and present events. The following table illustrates the 22 selected key events and their placement in story time compared to narrative time to show how narrative order is implemented in the novel's temporal structure.

Table 1. Narrative Order in *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) by Delia Owens

Sequence of Events	Narrative Time	Story Time
Chase Andrews' body is found beneath the fire tower.	A	17
Kya's mother leaves their home.	B	1
Kya's father abuses the family, and her siblings leave.	C	2
Kya's father also leaves; she survives alone in the marsh.	D	3
Young Kya meets Tate Walker, who teaches her to read.	E	4
Kya and Tate fall in love, but he leaves for college.	F	5
Kya meets Chase Andrews and starts a relationship.	G	6
Kya discovers Chase is engaged and breaks up with him.	H	7
The town gossips about "The Marsh Girl".	I	8
Chase tries to assault Kya; she fights back.	J	9
Kya observes the courtship behavior of fireflies and uses it in her poetry.	K.1	11
Kya becomes more skilled at living alone, exploring the marsh and documenting nature.	K.2	12
Kya publishes her first book and gains financial independence.	L	10
Kya secretly watches the town from a distance, feeling both curiosity and fear.	L.1	13
Kya reflects on loneliness and how she is perceived as a wild creature.	L.2	14
Kya sees Tate again after years apart; he expresses regret for leaving her.	L.3	15
Chase starts following Kya again, making her feel unsafe.	L.4	16

Sequence of Events	Narrative Time	Story Time
The investigation into Chase's murder intensifies.	M	18
Kya is arrested for Chase's murder.	N	19
Kya's trial begins.	O	20
The jury reaches a verdict: Kya is found not guilty.	P	21
Years later, Tate finds Kya's journal, revealing the truth: She killed Chase.	Q	22

Based on the comparison between narrative time and story time shown in the table, the temporal structure of *Where the Crawdads Sing* can be summarized through the following pattern.

A17 [B1 C2] D3 E4 F5 G6 H7 I8 J9 [K.1–11 K.2–12] L10 [L.1–13 L.2–14] L.3–15 L.4–16 M18 N19 O20 P21 Q22

In this sequence, the numbers represent the actual chronology of events in Kya's life (story time), while the letters indicate the order in which those events are narrated in the text (narrative time). Brackets mark the use of flashbacks (analepsis), while the placement of scenes such as A17 and Q22 shows the use of flashforwards (prolepsis). This structural pattern shows that the novel does not follow a strictly linear or chronological narrative. Instead, the novel applies anachrony, a non-linear temporal structure that frequently shifts between past and present, aligning with Genette's concept of analepsis and prolepsis. The story begins in medias res with the discovery of Chase Andrews's body, "On the morning of October 30, 1969, the body of Chase Andrews lay in the swamp, which would have absorbed it silently, routinely." (Owens, p. 3). This is a clear instance of prolepsis (flashforward), that immediately introduces the central mystery before the narrative returns to Kya's childhood. Subsequent chapters move backward through analepsis (flashback), recounting the departure of Kya's family and her isolation: "After Ma left, over the next few weeks, Kya's oldest brother and two sisters drifted away too, as if by example." (Owens, p. 12). These alternating temporal movements organize the story around suspense and emotional development. Flashbacks provide the background for Kya's independence and resilience, while flashforwards sustain narrative tension until the resolution. The structure thus demonstrates Owens's use of temporal rearrangement to present the novel's events in a layered sequence rather than a strict chronology, reflecting Genette's concept of anachronic order (1980, p. 48), in which story time and narrative time interact dynamically.

In terms of duration, Genette (1980, p. 94) identifies four main narrative duration or movements that shape the relationship between story time and narrative time: summary, scene, pause, and ellipsis. Summary compresses a relatively long span of story time into only a

few lines or a short paragraph. It represents periods of growth, adaptation, or silence in Kya's life, as in: "By the end of August, her life once more found its footing: boat, collect, paint. Months passed." (Owens, p. 146), which condenses months of routine into a single line to highlight continuity rather than detailed progression. By contrast, scene reproduces dialogue and action in real time, allowing the readers to feel as if they are witnessing the event firsthand, as shown in: "Glancing down between the steps, Steve said, *"Whoa. What's that?" "Where?" "See, there. Blue clothes, like somebody's lyin' in the mud."*" (Owens, p. 22). Pause, meanwhile, halts story progression to focus on description, as in: *"Marsh is not swamp. Marsh is a space of light, where grass grows in water, and water flows into the sky."* (p. 3). Here, the narrative suspends time to foreground the novel's ecological atmosphere. Finally, ellipsis omits intermediate time entirely, for instance: *"Two days later, at 1:16 in the afternoon, Kya stepped off the Trailways from Greenville."* (Owens, p. 311). This omission of intervening events advances the story efficiently while maintaining narrative coherence. Through these combined movements, Owens constructs a rhythm that alternates between immediacy and reflection, regulating narrative tempo in accordance with Genette's duration types.

In terms of frequency, Genette (1980, pp. 113–160) identifies four main types of narrative frequency that establish the relationship between story events and their narration: singulative narration, anaphoric narration, repetitive narration, and iterative narration.

Singulative narration is the most common type of frequency, where an event that occurs once in the story is narrated once in the discourse. Singulative narration is implemented in *Where the Crawdads Sing* when the narrator describes Kya's important life events with clear and immersive detail, as shown in: *"Secretly Kya hoped not to catch a fish, but she felt a tug, jerked her line, and raised a thick bream, flashing silver and blue. Pa leaned out and snatched it in the net, then sat back, slapping his knee and yahooin' like she'd never seen. She grinned wide and they looked into each other's eyes, closing a circuit."* (Owens, p. 55). This shows the moment when young Kya catches her first fish with her father. This is told once as it happens once in the story, reflecting the principle of singulative narration. The narration focuses on this unique moment without repetition or variation, presenting the event exactly as it occurred.

Anaphoric narration, on the other hand, occurs when an event that happens more than once in the story is also narrated more than once in the discourse. Anaphoric narration is implemented in *Where the Crawdads Sing* through the repeated descriptions of Kya's routines, especially her foraging and selling of mussels and oysters to Jumpin'. According to the novel; "Earlier than usual, she got up the next morning when the tide was low, pulled on her overalls, and slipped out with a bucket, claw knife, and empty tow bags. Squatting in mud, she collected

mussels along the sloughs like Ma had taught her, and in four hours of crouching and kneeling had two croker sacks full.” (Owens, p. 75), “To stay ahead of the other pickers, Kya slipped down to the marsh by candle or moon—her shadow wavering around on the glistening sand—and gathered mussels deep in the night. She added oysters to her catch and sometimes slept near gullies under the stars to get to Jumpin’s by first light. The mussel money turned out to be more reliable than the Monday money ever had, and she usually managed to beat out other pickers.” (Owens, p. 76), “I’m sorry as can be, Miss Kya,” he said. “But they beatcha to it. I got my week’s quota of mussels, cain’t buy no mo’.” (Owens, p. 81), “After eating a breakfast of warmed-up mussels-in-grits, Kya motored over to Jumpin’s to see if any money’d come in from the smoked fish.” (Owens, p. 82), and “Oh, that’s a long boring story. Mostly I sold mussels, oysters, and smoked fish to Jumpin’.” (Owens, p. 239). These passages illustrate how anaphoric narration is applied to emphasize Kya’s repeated activities that sustain her survival. This implementation of anaphoric narration underlines the consistency of Kya’s routines and reinforces her resourcefulness and independence.

In addition, repetitive narration refers to an event that occurs once in the story but is narrated multiple times in the discourse. This narration is implemented in *Where the Crawdads Sing* through Kya’s recurring recollections of her mother’s departure and other emotionally significant memories that continually resurface. According to the novel; “*But when Kya ran to the porch, she saw her mother in a long brown skirt, kick pleats nipping at her ankles, as she walked down the sandy lane in high heels... Ma always looked back... But today she walked on, unsteady in the ruts. Her tall figure emerged now and then through the holes of the forest until only swatches of white scarf flashed between the leaves.*” (Owens, pp. 5–6), “*Each time Kya stepped off the porch, she looked down the lane, thinking that even though the wild wisteria was fading with late spring and her mother had left late the previous summer, she might see Ma walking home through the sand.*” (Owens, p. 67), “*Kya could still see the full, red lips as Ma sang to the radio, and hear her words, “Now listen close to Mr. Orson Welles; he speaks proper like a gentleman. Don’t ever say ain’t, it isn’t even a word.”.*” (Owens, p. 67), “*As if reflected in the cheap artifact, Ma’s red mouth and dark eyes were clearer than they’d been in years. Kya looked around; surely Ma was walking up the lane even now, come to help turn this earth.*” (Owens, p. 84), “*And as she wandered the beach remembering Jumpin’, thoughts of her mother pushed into her mind. As though Kya were once again the little girl of six, she saw Ma walking down the sandy lane in her old gator shoes, maneuvering the deep ruts. But in this version, Ma stopped at the end of the trail and looked back, waving her hand high in farewell. She smiled at Kya, turned onto the road,*

and disappeared into the forest. And this time, finally, it was okay." (Owens, pp. 361–362). These passages demonstrate how repetitive narration is applied to portray Kya's enduring memory of her mother's abandonment. The actual event of Ma leaving happens only once in the storyworld, yet it is narrated repeatedly throughout the novel in different contexts. Through this implementation of repetitive narration, Owens emphasizes how a single traumatic event is revisited multiple times in the narrative. The repetition conveys not only the persistence of grief but also the evolving way Kya processes her memories, showing how a singular experience can echo across time through multiple narrations.

Finally, iterative narration occurs when repeated events in the story are narrated only once in the discourse. Iterative narration is implemented in *Where the Crawdads Sing* when Owens summarizes Kya's daily or seasonal routines, such as her fishing trips with her father or stretches of isolation in the marsh, as shown in: "*Every warmish day of winter and every day of spring, Pa and Kya went out, far up and down the coast, trolling, casting, and reeling.*" (Owens, p. 56). This passage exemplifies iterative narration by condensing many fishing trips into a single sentence. The activity itself—Kya and her father going fishing—happened repeatedly across a whole season, yet it is narrated only once in the discourse. This implementation provides readers with a sense of rhythm and continuity, showing that fishing became a steady routine during that period of Kya's life. By using this technique, the narrative preserves forward momentum rather than expanding into separate scenes for every trip.

Mood

Narrative mood in *Where the Crawdads Sing* is implemented through a narrator who remains outside the story but often conveys Kya's unspoken thoughts and emotions. This creates a narrative stance that is external in position yet internal in focalization, structuring how the story is experienced by the reader, as shown in: "*A heaviness, thick as black-cotton mud, pushed her chest as she returned to the steps to wait.*" (Owens, p. 6). In this passage, Kya does not say these words out loud, but the narrator still conveys her precise inner state. This shows that the narrator has access to Kya's internal emotions, even though the narrator is not a participant in the story. The narrator never uses "I" and does not intervene in the events, which indicates an external position. However, the narration often reveals Kya's private thoughts and feelings, demonstrating the implementation of internal focalization. In addition to the narrator's position, narrative mood in *Where the Crawdads Sing* is also implemented through the use of different focalizations. Genette distinguishes three types of focalizations: internal, zero, and external.

Internal focalization refers to a situation where the narration is restricted to the perceptions, thoughts, and emotions of a character. The narrator only presents what the character knows or experiences, without extending beyond their viewpoint. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, internal focalization is implemented most frequently through the main character, Kya Clark, as shown in: “A heaviness, thick as black-cotton mud, pushed her chest as she returned to the steps to wait.” (Owens, p. 6), “Her cheeks burned at the thought of it. She would hide until he left.” (Owens, p. 121), “She tracked them, mostly him, down the shore. Her mind looking one way, her desire the other. Her body watched Chase Andrews, not her heart.” (Owens, p. 150). These passages demonstrate how internal focalization is implemented in the novel, where the narrator maintains an external position but consistently channels the events through Kya’s inner experiences. Although internal focalization is the most frequently used perspective in the novel, there are also moments where the narrator steps beyond the character’s viewpoint. These shifts reveal the use of zero focalization.

Zero focalization refers to a situation where the narrator is not limited by any character’s perspective and has unrestricted access to the fictional world that does not belong to any character. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, zero focalization is implemented in passages that provide background information, historical details, or descriptive overviews of the marsh and the town of Barkley Cove. These sections are not tied to Kya’s perspective or that of any other character but instead reflect the narrator’s broader knowledge. By including such moments, Owens varies the narrative mood, expanding it beyond the restricted viewpoint of internal focalization and presenting the fictional world from a wider, more comprehensive angle. This type of focalization can be seen in: “Marsh is not swamp. Marsh is 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—as though not built to fly— against the roar of a thousand snow geese.” (Owens, p. 3), “The scattered marsh holdings weren’t legally described, just staked out natural—a creek boundary here, a dead oak there—by renegades.” (Owens, p.7), and “Mostly, the village seemed tired of arguing with the elements, and simply sagged. The town wharf, draped in frayed ropes and old pelicans, jutted into the small bay, whose water, when calm, reflected the reds and yellows of shrimp boats.” (Owens, p. 17). These passages show how zero focalization is implemented in the novel to present context, background, and description from a narrator with unlimited knowledge. This technique structures the narrative mood by briefly moving away from Kya’s restricted point of view and widening the perspective to encompass the larger fictional world. In contrast to the full

narrative access provided by zero focalization, there are also sections in the novel where the narrator restricts the flow of information to only what can be observed from the outside. This narrative choice reflects the use of external focalization.

External focalization occurs when the narrative is limited to visible actions, spoken dialogue, and physical descriptions, while the internal states of characters remain unexpressed. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, external focalization is implemented in selected scenes where objectivity or narrative distance is required. Owens particularly applies this technique in investigative and courtroom sequences, where the narration records observable details rather than entering into the characters' inner thoughts or emotions. It can be seen in; "The two lawmen combed the area for a full ten minutes. *"You're right, not one print 'cept for the boys," Joe said.*" (Owens, p. 36), *"They took pictures of the body, of its position relative to the steps, close-ups of head wounds, the leg bent wrong. Joe made notes as Ed dictated."* (Owens, p. 36), and *"Kya didn't answer. Thoughts of an appeal sickened her more, the same forced march through different courtrooms, farther from the marsh. Probably large towns. Some gull-less sky. Tom stepped out of the room and returned with a glass of sweet iced tea and a package of salted peanuts. She sipped at the tea; refused the nuts."* (Owens, p. 334). These instances show how external focalization is implemented in the novel to restrict the narration to observable details. This technique introduces variation in the narrative mood by reducing subjective access and creating moments of distance, balancing the more frequent use of internal focalization with a more detached and objective perspective.

Overall, the narrative mood in *Where the Crawdads Sing* demonstrates Delia Owens's strategic use of focalization to control the flow of information and shape the reader's engagement with the story. Through zero focalization, the narrator provides unrestricted access to events beyond the characters' knowledge, ensuring that the larger structure of the narrative is clearly conveyed. Internal focalization is consistently applied to reveal Kya's private emotions, thoughts, and perceptions, allowing the narration to remain closely aligned with her consciousness even while the narrator maintains an external position outside the story world. In contrast, external focalization limits the narrative to observable actions and dialogue, creating moments of neutrality and distance, particularly in investigative and courtroom scenes. These varying modes of focalization contribute to the construction of narrative mood by alternating between comprehensive, subjective, and detached perspectives. This shifting use of focalization highlights Owens's narratological technique in balancing closeness and distance, thereby structuring the novel's storytelling in a way that both informs and involves the reader.

Voice

Narrative voice centers on the status, position, and identity of the narrator in relation to the story being told. Narrative voice can be analyzed through three principal aspects: the time of the narrating, the narrative person, and the narrative level. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, this voice is realized through the narrator's presence and the way the story is delivered to the reader.

Time of the narrating is the relationship between the narration and the events being narrated. There are four types: subsequent narration, prior narration, simultaneous narration, and interpolated narration. In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Delia Owens structures the novel using subsequent narration. This means the narrator tells the story retrospectively, with knowledge of how events develop and conclude. The narrator's position is consistently situated after the events of the story, which allows for retrospective commentary and temporal distance. Subsequent narration can be seen in these passages; "*On the morning of October 30, 1969, the body of Chase Andrews lay in the swamp, which would have absorbed it silently, routinely. [...] But this morning two boys from the village rode their bikes out to the old fire tower and, from the third switchback, spotted his denim jacket.*" (Owens, p. 3), "*Ma didn't come back that day. No one spoke of it. Least of all Pa. [...] There had been fights before; Ma had even left a time or two, but she always came back, scooping up whoever would be cuddled.*" (Owens, p. 8–9), and "*Later, near sunset, Jodie found Kya on the beach staring at the sea. [...] 'I hafta go, Kya. Can't live here no longer.' [...] Just before he stepped into the trees, she finally turned and watched him walk away.*" (Owens, p. 13). These passages demonstrate the implementation of subsequent narration in *Where the Crawdads Sing*, where the narrator consistently recounts events as past occurrences, often adding retrospective commentary and comparisons that highlight the distance between the narration and the narrated. This structural choice situates the story within Genette's category of subsequent narration, shaping the narrative by emphasizing recollection, completion, and authorial control over the unfolding of events.

Following the discussion of time of the narrating, it is necessary to consider the narrative person within the story. Genette defines the narrative person (or narrative instance) by asking the question "who speaks?" in the narrative. He distinguishes between two main types of narrators based on their relation to the story: the heterodiegetic narrator and the homodiegetic narrator. This distinction helps identify the narrator's degree of involvement in the narrative: a heterodiegetic narrator provides an external perspective, often with greater objectivity or omniscience, while a homodiegetic narrator presents a more internal and subjective viewpoint.

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, the narrative person is implemented through a heterodiegetic narrator. The narrator remains entirely outside the diegetic world, recounting the events in the third person without ever appearing as a character or shifting into first-person perspective. By maintaining this external stance, the narration consistently establishes authority over the unfolding story. This heterodiegetic narration can be seen in these passages; *“Ma didn’t come back that day. No one spoke of it. Least of all Pa. [...] There had been fights before; Ma had even left a time or two, but she always came back, scooping whoever would be cuddled.”* (Owens, p. 8–9), *“Kya, hand to her forehead, stared at the floor. Her editor was the only person she knew who didn’t think of her as the Marsh Girl, who had respected her, even seemed awed at her knowledge and talent. Now he was in court seeing her at the defendant’s table, charged with murder.”* (Owens, p. 329), and *“Even now, walking toward the new grave, carrying a brown plastic case, he found himself thinking more of Kya than of his dad and swore at that. He approached the fresh-scarred mound under the oaks, the wide sea beyond.”* (Owens, p. 356). In the first passage, the narrator describes Ma’s departure in the third person, with no suggestion of involvement in the story-world. The narration includes retrospective commentary, *“Ma had even left a time or two”* which reinforces the narrator’s external and authoritative stance. The second passage provides access to Kya’s inner thoughts and emotions during the trial, yet this access is mediated entirely by the third-person narrator, who remains outside the story. The absence of a first-person “I” confirms that the narrative voice is not a participant but an external presence. In the third passage, the narration focalizes through Tate, reporting his private feelings—*“he found himself thinking more of Kya than of his dad”*—yet the narrator continues to speak about him rather than as him. This technique demonstrates the flexibility of heterodiegetic narration, which can enter characters’ consciousness while still maintaining external distance.

The narrative level further determines its structural position in relation to the diegetic world. Narrative level refers to the narrator’s position in relation to the story. Genette distinguishes three levels: extradiegetic (outside the story world), intradiegetic (inside the story world), and metadiegetic (a story within another story). Narrators may be heterodiegetic (not a character in the story) or homodiegetic (a character in the story). In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, the narrator’s position as an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator, meaning they remain outside the story world and do not take part in its events. This extradiegetic-heterodiegetic voice is implemented to the novel, as shown in these passages; *“The marsh was guarded by a torn shoreline, labeled by early explorers as the “Graveyard of the Atlantic” because riptides, furious winds, and shallow shoals wrecked ships like paper hats along what would become the North Carolina coast.”* (Owens, p.7), *“After Ma left, over the next few weeks, Kya’s oldest brother*

and two sisters drifted away too, as if by example." (Owens, p. 12), and *"For the first time ever Kya walked alone toward the village of Barkley Cove to buy groceries—this little piggy went to market."* (Owens, p. 16). In the first passage, the narrator delivers geographical and historical information that no character directly states. This shows how the narration extends beyond the perspective of any one character and reflects an external authority that situates the story within a broader context. The descriptive overview confirms the narrator's position outside the story world, operating as an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic voice. In the second passage, the narrator recounts the departure of Kya's siblings in the third person. The heterodiegetic position is clear because the narrator does not participate in the diegesis and provides no suggestion of personal involvement, but simply relates the situation surrounding Kya. In the third passage, the narration follows Kya's action externally but momentarily incorporates her private thought ("this little piggy went to market"). Even though the line echoes Kya's inner voice, the narrator remains outside the diegesis, presenting it indirectly rather than as first-person speech. This demonstrates how an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator can convey a character's perspective while still maintaining narrative distance. Therefore, the narrative level is classified as extradiegetic-heterodiegetic and is implemented in the novel, presenting the story from an external position while maintaining the capacity to shift between broader descriptions and the characters' inner world.

Overall, the narrative voice in *Where the Crawdads Sing* demonstrates Delia Owens's consistent use of Genette's categories to position the narrator in relation to the story. The time of narrating is subsequent, with events recounted retrospectively after their occurrence, giving the narrative a controlled and structured progression. The narrative person is heterodiegetic, as the narrator is not a character within the story but remains external to the diegesis while recounting its events. The narrative level is extradiegetic, with the narrator standing outside the story world while still providing detailed descriptions of events and insight into characters' inner experiences (heterodiegetic). Together, these aspects establish a narrative voice that is external, retrospective, and authoritative, ensuring that the story is conveyed with both distance and reliability.

CONCLUSION

This study has applied Gérard Genette's narratological framework to examine *Where the Crawdads Sing* (2018) by Delia Owens in terms of its narrative tense, mood, and voice. The findings show that the narrative tense in the novel is organized through anachronic order involving frequent uses of analepsis and prolepsis, which interweave past and present events

to create a layered storyline. The duration types summary, scene, pause, and ellipsis are applied to control the pacing of the narrative, while the frequencies singulative, repetitive, iterative, and anaphoric contribute to the rhythm and emphasis of recurring experiences. In terms of narrative mood, the narration primarily employs internal focalization but also integrates zero and external focalizations to manage the reader's access to information and emotion. In terms of narrative voice, the narration is characterized by subsequent narration, an extradiegetic level, and a heterodiegetic narrator, placing the narrator outside the story world yet maintaining narrative coherence and insight.

Through these findings, the study concludes that *Where the Crawdads Sing* constructs its narrative through a complex interplay of temporal arrangement, perspective control, and narratorial stance. The analysis of narrative tense, mood, and voice reveal how Owens structures a non-linear yet cohesive story that unfolds gradually through shifts in time, focalization, and narrative position to uncover the layered structure of modern literary narratives.

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