



IRAQI  
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية  
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية



ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

**Journal of Language Studies**

Contents available at: <https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS>

## Water and Dreams: A Bachelardian Reading of Doris Lessing's *Through the Tunnel*

Hikmat Khalaf Hussein AL Hussein (Ph.D.)<sup>1</sup>

English Department, College of Arts, Tikrit University, Iraq

[hikmat\\_dikhayl@tu.edu.iq](mailto:hikmat_dikhayl@tu.edu.iq)

Received: 12/7/ 2025, Accepted: 26 /8 /2025, Online Published: 30/9/2025

### Abstract

Water is the essential substance universally acknowledged by all living organisms due to its critical significance and their need for it for survival. Gaston Bachelard believed that it transcends a simple natural element; instead, it symbolizes the essence of dreams, representing an interplay between the mind and the imagination. Bachelard primarily concentrated on the four fundamental components of the universe: water, fire, earth, and air. He also showed an interest in material components. His passion was manifested in a wide range of works, *Earth and Daydreams at Rest*, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, *Water and Dreams*, and *Air and Dreams*, and others. He used literary examples to illustrate his theory and philosophy on the poetics of water and dreams. However, this study aims to analyze Doris Lessing's story "Through the Tunnel" from Bachelard's perspective on water and dreams, based on his book *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. It seeks to analyze the depictions of water and dreams within a critical framework linked to the narrative roles and the personal construction of Jerry's character and the relationship of water in all of this construction. It also aims to analyze the elemental imagination of water and dreams in Doris Lessing's short story "Through the Tunnel". This investigation focuses on the poetic imagination, specifically the poetic elements of

<sup>1</sup>. **Corresponding Author:** Professor Hikmat Khalaf Hussein, **Email:** [hikmat\\_dikhayl@tu.edu.iq](mailto:hikmat_dikhayl@tu.edu.iq)

**Affiliation:** Tikrit University - Iraq

© This is an open access article under the CC by licenses <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



'water' which is the subject of this research. It focuses on employing Bachelard's vision of water and dreams to analyze the literary applications of water and dreams in the story, and their psychological impact on the life of the protagonist, Jerry, and the course of events. The study concludes that, for the story's main character, Jerry, water and dreams have a clear impact on the development, refinement, and formation of his personality and his relationship with his surroundings, starting with his mother, his male peers, and society as a whole.

**Keywords:** Gaston Bachelard, Water, Dreams, Imagination of Matter, Doris Lessing, Through the Tunnel.

## الماء والأحلام: قراءة باشلار لقصّة دوريس ليسينغ "عبر النفق"

حكمت خلف حسين الحسين

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة تكريت

المستخلص

الماء العنصر المادي الذي تجتمع عليه كل الكائنات الحية بأهميته وعدم قدرتهم على العيش بدونه. بيد أن لغاستون باشلار رأي آخر إضافي على أنه يتعدى حدود كونه عنصر طبيعي فقط بل هو رمز لمادة الحلم التي هي تفاعل بين النفس والخيال. فقد انصبّ تركيز باشلار الأساسي على العناصر الأربعة التي تُكوّن الكون: الماء، والنار، والتراب، والهواء. كما اهتمّ بالمكونات المادية. وقد تجلّى شغفه في مجموعة واسعة من الأعمال، منها ما يحمل عنوان "الأرض وأحلام اليقظة في حالة سكون"، و"التحليل النفسي للنار"، و"الماء والأحلام"، و"الهواء والأحلام"، وغيرها. واستخدم أمثلة من الأدب لإثبات نظريته وفلسفته عن شعرية الماء والأحلام. على أية حال، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل قصة دوريس ليسينغ "عبر النفق" من منظور باشلار حول الماء والأحلام حسب كتابه الماء والأحلام: دراسة عن الخيال والمادة. يسعى هذا البحث إلى تحليل تصوير الماء والأحلام ضمن إطار نقدي مرتبط بالأدوار السردية والبناء الشخصي لشخصية جيرري، وعلاقة الماء في هذا البناء. كما تهدف إلى تحليل الخيال الأساسي للماء والأحلام في قصة دوريس ليسينغ القصيرة "عبر النفق". وتُركّز على توظيف رؤية باشلار للماء والأحلام لتحليل التطبيقات الأدبية للماء والأحلام في القصة، وتأثيرها النفسي على حياة بطل القصة، جيرري، ومسار الأحداث. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن للماء والأحلام، بالنسبة لبطل القصة، جيرري، تأثيراً واضحاً على نمو شخصيته وصلها وتكوينها، وعلاقته بمحيطه، بدءاً من والدته، وأقرانه الذكور، والمجتمع ككل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: غاستون باشلار، الماء، الأحلام، الخيال والمادة، دوريس ليسينغ، عبر النفق.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Water, in literature in general, and in fiction in particular, the short story, constitutes a fertile material with many dimensions and connotations related to refining the narrative structure and interacting with the main characters and the hero of the literary work. It addresses the image of spiritual purification and character building for the heroes of literary works. In the short story, symbolic images are evident, giving it profound connotations that serve to multiply its imaginative connotations. Previous studies have mostly addressed and focused on images and symbols related to time, identity, and other things, but they have not included the image of water and its relationship to dreams in imaginative images as a profound symbol. Despite its importance, they have not included it within the circle of interest and critical analysis of the symbolism of water and its relationship to the social and psychological development of the main characters. The study focuses on an important fundamental question: how does the image of water as a narrative symbol with various connotations relate to the social and psychological influences that are connected to the narrative context of the story? Therefore, Gaston Bachelard's perspective is an important cornerstone in the symbolism of water as a material pumped with dreams, transcending narrative boundaries to build the character of the story's hero and developing it to advanced stages that have greatly changed him. Gaston Bachelard holds that fire, earth, water, and air, respectively, represent people afflicted by cholera, melancholy, phlegm, and blood. He supports his idea that looking at the important images of water helps develop a "material imagination" that is more feminine and consistent than fire, representing human abilities that are subtler, straightforward, and uncomplicated (5). Writers continue to employ elements of nature, including water and dreams, in metaphorical, figurative, or symbolic forms to convey a specific intention that requires its elaboration in this literary form. Therefore, critics read and analyze literary works on this basis and suggest the meaning inspired by the context. But Bachelard was one of those who delved deeply into his readings of such works, taking water and dreams as imaginative images to describe events and connect them to the lives of the characters. Consequently, he reached critical areas that no one had previously explored and obtained in-depth literary readings. From this standpoint, this study focuses on reading Dore Lessing's story "Through the Tunnel" according to these two elements in Bachelard's book, *Water and Dreams An Essay of Imagination and Matter*.

In *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard presents two different aspects of imagination: the formal imagination and the material imagination. Both of these features are described in detail. Recently, there has been a rise in the concept of material imagination, as well as the recognition of poets and novelists based on the material poetic element they possess. According to Bachelard, matter is the "unconscious of form" and it is the unseen impulse that gives a specific picture its poetic force. He argues that matter is the essential component of form. Therefore, the purpose of the study of cultural complexes is to provide a framework for comprehending the manner in which the imagination generates certain types of pictures. The capacity of imagination became Bachelard's primary focus once he shifted his attention away from the philosophy of science. Bachelard

hypothesized that many literary works, when studied with attention, reveal their poetic characteristics. He employs a new theory of imagination in his analysis of literary works, which warrants careful consideration (Kumar, 2023, p. 19). This study seeks to analyze the depictions of water and dreams within a critical framework linked to the narrative roles and the personal construction of Jerry's character and the relationship of water in all of this construction. It also aims to analyze the elemental imagination of water and dreams in Doris Lessing's short story "Through the Tunnel". This investigation focuses on the poetic imagination, specifically the poetic elements of 'water' which is the subject of this research.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study applied a qualitative analytical thematic approach. This methodology involves the examination of recurring themes in literary works, including water and fire, by connecting them to the psychological symbolism and poetic imagination of the protagonist and his relationship with water. This methodology was implemented due to the fact that the short story "Through the Tunnel" by Doris Lessing served as the research sample. The concepts of Gaston Bachelard regarding the poetic-psychological significance of water and its correlation with imagination were implemented. Excerpts from the narrative were chosen for the present study based on the young hero's proximity to or immersion in water. The research's desired outcomes were achieved by analyzing them in accordance with the aforementioned methodology.

## **3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

Bachelard is credited with writing one of the most influential works on the psychology of beauty and poetic imagination, which opened up possibilities for human imaginations that were before unimaginable. In this field, he investigates not only water but also the individuals who are impacted by it, as well as those who are interested in and concerned with materials. This is the reason why people have studied and been interested in the aspects of life. He made many attempts to understand their nature. Studies have differed since everyone has a different imagination and a different way of interpreting things. Some separated contemplation and imagination once again by studying it scientifically and analytically, while others dedicated it to literature, turning it into a literary symbol. Still others saw it as a philosophical, contemplative study. Matter changed into joyful and sad, calm and furious, life and dead. These feelings, created by human dreams along with the natural world around us, led to the creation of the image of material imagination and its psychological study, which is a key part of literary aesthetics. In his second book, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, Bachelard employed this method to study materials like water, which he analyzed after fire (Al-Saudi, 2023).

Additionally, Bachelard is one of the most influential philosophers who established a vital role for literary imagination. He established a connection between the initial poetic images that spring up in the minds of both the writer and the reader, and he linked the subjective and symbolic experience with the literary imagination. Bachelard conducts a novel critical experiment by approaching the subject of water not as a tangible object but rather as a fundamental image that reaches deep into the human psyche and conjures up types of dreamy imagination connected to peace, dissolution, flow, and

occasionally even death. He examines water as an imaginary image with a variety of connotations, including poetic symbolism and psychological profundity, rather than as a naturally occurring element. This method transforms water into the carrier of a collection of symbolic and affective qualities that represent a range of human states, from life to death and from purity to disintegration (Bardawil, 2025, p. 78-79).

The story is both straightforward and intricate at the same time. It is straightforward since it tells the tale of a young boy who visits the beach on vacation; it is complicated since it delves deeply into the actions and ideas of the central character. For the reader, this could make the reading process somehow challenging. Nonetheless, it lets the reader engage in a deeper literary experience that stretches the imagination beyond a basic comprehension of the narrative. The narrative is told in the third-person omniscient, in which the narrator is able to wander between the minds of each character and provide the reader more detailed knowledge. It allows the narrator to expose the inner thoughts of the characters. The title of the story has both its physical and symbolic interpretation. It refers to the normal adventure that any young boy goes through as a kind of challenge to other boys in order, for example, to prove strength. As a symbol, it may represent self-affirmation and transitioning between stages: childhood to adolescence, dependency to independence, and excessive care to explore the world alone. Jerry transitions from a state of closeness and intense attachment to one of distance and self-reliance. The tunnel represents the obstacles, problems, or difficulties that Jerry may face during the period of transformation. During this phase, the superego continues to develop. The boy starts developing social skills, values, and relationships with peers and adults outside of the family. The development of the ego and superego contributes to this period of calm. The title is apt for both Jerry, who has a physical and spiritual attachment to the tunnel, and his mother, who has only a spiritual experience through leaving her son to discover his new life and gain independence.

Bachelard (1982), then addresses several topics related to and connected to the physical and psychological makeup of the human personality. He discusses water and its relationship to sex, stating that river water is feminine, he states, "What, then, is the sexual function of the river? It is to evoke feminine nudity (33). The river is thus classified as having feminine qualities associated with feelings, imagination, beauty, beautiful images of nature, and serenity. In this context, Bachelard (1982), explains that, "Water is the most receptive of the elements, thus its strongly feminine characteristics. Water is the spring of being, motherhood. Water flows, its constant movement responding to the environment and possibility (ix). Bachelard also highlights the relationship between water and cruelty and violence, especially the sea, its waves, and storms. He refers to seawater and says, "While the masculine sea calls for tales of adventure, the rivers, lakes, and streams evoke reverie. It is the liquidity in our eyes that causes us to dream." (ibid). Adventure, then lies in the cruelty and turbulence of the sea and its ability to kill and bring about death, unlike rivers, lakes, and streams. The hero of the sea is a hero of death, (Bachelard, 1982, p. 74). This is because delving into water fantasies complicates the scene and links it to the formative elements of the human personality and its relationship to recurring death in waking dreams. Death, as Bachelard (1982), points out, is the end of pain "Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death. In innumerable examples, we shall see that for the materializing

imagination, death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite.” (6). Walsh (2017), also states that “Throughout history, water has been seen as a symbol of life and death, infinity, purity, and as a maternal symbol.” (53).

In a similar context, Bachelard presents various images of water and the symbolic and connotative meanings they hold by linking them to psychological states and human imagination. Water has a profound and sensual impact on the human psyche; it is nourishment for the soul, the home of dreams, a refuge for the lost, and a comfort for the body from the worries, problems, and ambitions that linger within the human soul. Bachelard points to the importance of water in exploring the depths of the human psyche in a way that psychoanalysis has not addressed.

Moreover, Bachelard (1982), asserts that water is the element that transports things, materials, and bodies from one state to another. It is the dividing line between two substances close to humanity. “Water is truly the transitory element, It is the essential, ontological metamorphosis between fire and earth.” (6). Thus, water is the refuge to which humans turn in the state of dreaming and the state of transformation from reality to imagination and vice versa. He also cites Baudelaire’s words about the infinity of a dreaming man:

Furthermore, does not Baudelaire say that six or seven leagues, for a man dreaming by the sea, represents the radius of infinity? Vallage is eighteen leagues long and twelve wide. It is, therefore, a world. I do not know it in its entirety; I have not followed all its streams. (8)

This evidence confirms that water is linked to the boundless imagination sought by dreamers to escape reality or identify their meaning in water as an essential element in exploring the depths of life. Bachelard emphasizes the significance of water and dreams and their relationship to imagination and reflection, asserting that water embodies the essence of dreams and absorption in the unconscious. The act of a child diving into the seawater can be interpreted as an immersion in his interior world, where the sea serves as a repository for memories and fantasies. In his view, water is the element that evokes dreams, surrender, and disintegration:

Dreaming by the river, I dedicated my imagination to water, to clear, green water, the water that makes the meadows green. I cannot sit beside a stream without falling into a profound reverie, without picturing my youthful happiness.... It does not have to be the stream at home, water from home. The nameless waters know all of my secrets. The same memory flows from all fountains. (Bachelard, 1982, p. 8)

It is the world that fulfills the ambitions and dreams of dreamers. It is the material through which the dreamer indulges in the pleasure of power, control, existence, and perfection. It is the world that the dreamer sees as his alone, his first steps toward asserting himself and his existence. Despite its fluidity, ease, simplicity, and softness, water carries a power that transcends the power of other elements in nature:

One drop of powerful water suffices to create a world and to dissolve the night. To dream of power, only one drop imagined in its depth is needed. Water thus given dynamic force is a seed; it gives life an upward surge that never flags. (9)

Bachelard, thus views the water as a realm for disengagement from reality. He describes water as a conduit for transcending the tangible realm and immersing oneself in an unlimited domain, a plunge into the realm of imagination. He writes “To disappear into deep water or to disappear toward a far horizon, to become a part of depth or infinity, such is the destiny of man that finds its image in the destiny of water.” (Bachelard, 1982, p. 12).

Bachelard perceives water as a poetic and philosophical metaphor that fluctuates based on psychological states and human imagination: it may be light, heavy, silent, or maternal, among other attributes. This study examines these fundamental categories, as they are associated with the protagonist’s condition in the narrative under investigation. In light of the fact that the narrative focuses on a young boy who maintains a mute relationship with the sea and who establishes a connection between his mother and his relationship with the ocean, thereby implying that he makes an effort to transition from his mother to the sea, Bachelard makes the following assertion:

We shall also see how profoundly maternal the waters are. Water swells seeds and causes springs to gush forth. Water is a substance that we see everywhere springing up and increasing. The spring is an irresistible birth, a continuous birth. The unconscious that loves such great images is forever marked by them. They call forth endless reveries. In a special chapter, I have tried to show how these images, impregnated with mythology, still give life naturally to poetic works. (14)

It is an obvious fact that death can be a new birth for anyone who throws himself into the sea’s embrace when it is calm and serene, like spring when it nurtures grains of wheat. The stages of pregnancy, birth, and nurturing are revealed, and thus the cycle of life continues and is repeated with death and water, “Death in calm water has maternal features. The peaceful horror [in which] water mixes its ambivalent images of birth and death. It is a substance full of reminiscences and prescient reveries.” (Bachelard, 1982, p. 89). The watery birth experience has the potential to link individuals with the birth cycle of springs that are bursting out, seeds that are developing and giving birth, and a continual one. As previously mentioned, Bachelard asserts several significant connections between water and the mother. These connections include the watery experience of birth itself as well as the consumption of our mother's milk (Walsh, 2017, p.65). This intermingling and blending of death and life, and the strong bond between them, which is water, reveals the depth of its secrets in the realm of memories, dreams, warmth, peace, and maternal security. In this context, Bachelard (1982), refers to Madame Bonaparte’s words, “The sea is for all men one of the greatest and most constant maternal symbols.” (115).

This intermingling and blending of death and life, and the strong bond between them, which is water, reveals the depth of its secrets in the realm of memories, dreams, warmth, peace, and maternal security. In this context, Bachelard (1982), refers to

Madame Bonaparte's words, "The sea is for all men one of the greatest and most constant maternal symbols." (115). Bachelard interprets Poe as depicting nature as a manifestation of the mother, an expanding being predisposed to embrace and nurture with her soul. The water serves as a metaphor for this projection, with its profound melodies that attract men and evoke distant sounds reminiscent of the nurturing mother. (Sparano & Strizzolo, 2024, p. 48). This affirmation is a maternal acknowledgment of every man's bond with his mother and her feelings, which cannot be translated through words or actions, rather through the subconscious. Therefore, Madame Bonaparte adds:

It is not because the mountain is green or the sea blue that we love it, even if we give these reasons for our attraction; it is because some part of us, of our unconscious memories, finds that it can be re incarnated in the blue sea or the green mountain. And this part of us, of our unconscious memories, is always and everywhere a product of our childhood loves, of these loves which in the very beginning went out only to the one who was our source of shelter, our source of food, who was our mother or our nurse. (qtd. in Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, p. 116)

This is important because this profound rhetorical dimension between the boy and the water can encapsulate the depth of the subconscious connection to childhood memories. Bachelard also focuses on the image of the mother in the form and nature of water as a constant embrace and deep emotional containment. Bachelard also regards water as essential for the development of creativity and imagination. He investigates the symbol of water as a fluid throughout the human life cycle, including our watery birth, our mother's milk as one of the first fluids we encounter during our life, and the movement of water that sways us until we fall unconscious. He is of the opinion that our unique connection to water is derived from its movement through the body. Our ability to generate images, activate the imagination, and comprehend our place in the world is facilitated by our interactions with this fundamental natural element. This is facilitated by reveries, a conscious interaction with the interior self, the internal forces that activate memories and experiences. Bachelard posits that a reverie inspired by water imagery prompts us to seek the "profound level of any experience." First, a reverie leads us inward, and then it propels us outward into a more expansive universe. (as cited in Erkoçi, 2023, p. 102). Water is a primordial fluid, embodying maternal affection, serving as the quintessential beverage of existence, and being the primary substance among liquid realities recognized by the tongue. Water epitomizes absolute motherhood. Consequently, milk, like water, serves as a catalyst for the imagination, a psychological seed for imagery. Water rejuvenates our maternal connection; it soothes our focus with an extraordinary delicacy. (Leviton, 1994).

It is an established fact that silence is a key trait of water, even when it is angry, as the sea does when its waves fight. Otherwise, silent water provides a symbolic dimension to contemplation and the immersion of the human soul in itself. That's why Bachelard (1982), affirms:

Silent water, somber water, stagnant water, unfathomable water, so many material lessons for 'a meditation on death; But it's not the lesson taught by a Heraclitean death, by a death which bears us afar with the current and like a

current. It is the lesson death in depth that stays with us, near us, in us. (68-69)

The silence of water gives a person a refuge and a shelter to hide and disappear from others, especially in a state of transformation and a desire for introversion. Bachelard (1982), adds, "It is from this still and silent water that lovers seek models of passion" (68). It is, thus, the desire for privacy among adolescent boys prompts them to immerse themselves in water, a place and medium that provides them with the opportunity to experience complete stillness, calm, and silence, away from the daily chaos. This sensation leads them to disconnect from the outside world and enter a state of unconscious feeling amidst dreams and their accompanying, yet narrow, imagination.

Jen Webb (2022), in a similar context, provides a comprehensive analysis and description of the power and efficacy of water and its interaction with narration; she says:

We too are captured by this notion of water as a dream state, water as a state for the performance of the self and its potential loss. We enter the conversation as painter and poet, collaborators, sisters who share a history of migration and resettlement, and a fascination with water. [...] Water, for both of us, has long generated thought and imagination [2]; afforded the sorts of images and narratives that made their way into creative outputs; and informed both dreams and nightmares. It's an oneiric medium, after all: unstable yet always finding its own level; possessed of strong surface tension that is easily pierced; taking on viscous properties as easily as it vaporises; adhesive, and yet a universal solvent; constant and yet never the same [...]. (7)

Therefore, water and dreams are intertwined and continuous states, as life, the world, and existence continue. Thus, one can view the world with a different imagination and new images when immersed deeply in water. It contributes to changing behavioural states and developing one's personality toward unconscious psychological perfection.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

Doris Lessing's story "Through the Tunnel" is wholly allegorical, symbolizing a journey from inception to conclusion; it transcends the mere account of a youngster vacationing with his mother at a foreign beach. Consequently, each scenario and action serves as a symbolic indication, from the first sentence of the narrative to the last phrase. "The young English boy stopped at a turning of the path and looked down at a wild and rocky bay, and then over the crowded beach he knew so well from other years." (Lessing, 1957, p. 61). The sentence indicates that Jerry's life is at a pivotal juncture, requiring him to choose between two paths: the beach, symbolizing the maternal figure associated with home, family, safety, shelter, and comfort, and the expansive world that can embrace his mother and loved ones, alongside the conscious aspect of Jerry's existence on the other hand. The Bay symbolizes his new realm, the arena of his transformation from boyhood to adolescence, his estrangement in this unfamiliar environment, and his existence outside the confines of his house via states of awareness or unconsciousness. It may signify a realm of peril and scepticism; while it exists outside the confines of home, it remains a little universe constrained by the yearning for movement and transformation, nothing more. Additionally, it is evident that the narrative contains additional terms that

serve as symbolic references, including swimming, which denotes contemplation, and divining, which is indicative of Jerry's unconscious state or imagination.

Water fully represents both the conscious and unconscious, together with their metaphorical connotations in the narrative. Consequently, it can be said that the symbolism in the narrative is crucial for depicting the boy's journey and metamorphosis between stages, as previously noted. Thus, the beach photo represents the community, which the boy is part of, but he must move on despite the obstacles. The picture of water symbolizes Jerry's unconscious mind as he embarks on his voyage, navigating through the communal tunnel, which is fraught with challenges and obstacles. Nevertheless, he attempts to pass through it, regardless of the outcomes. The rocks depict reality and the unavoidable choice, representing the process of transition and transformation.

Confronting the sea waters, Jerry tries to move from one mother to another. He transitions from the mother who nurtured him to the one who will fortify him, enabling him to envision and confront challenges. He is facing a difficult test and an unenviable situation, "he blurted out, 'I'd like to go and have a look at those rocks down there.'" (Lessing, 1957, p. 61). Jerry stands in front of the beach watching to take off, as beginnings are always difficult, especially those in which a difficult decision must be made that will turn Jerry's life upside down and move him from the world of childhood and innocence to the world of adolescence, self-reliance, and separation from his first mother (his birth mother) and joining his second mother (the sea water). In a similar vein, Lessing devotes a great deal of care to imaginatively depicting and illustrating these "unfavorable conditions" in her works, such as Jerry's mother's excessively protective nature. " [...] And then he was in the real sea a warm sea where irregular cold currents from the deep water shocked his limbs" (62). The preceding excerpt from the story illustrates how Lessing portrayed Jerry's new home, which is a favourable atmosphere in which he is able to immerse himself in his actual world, concentrate on himself, comprehend himself, and discover his true self away from the constraints and the throng (Hassan, 2022, p. 74). The rock of reality, through which he peers into the world of imagination and dreams, is the sea waters. They evoke a state of exciting contemplation for the dreamer, who sees the sea as a new refuge and shelter filled with diving and mystery, which he must confront in order to overcome with great confidence.

The crucial moment when Jerry stands at the threshold of the sea and attempts to sail away from reality toward the deep subconscious of the human psyche is an existential act that must be fulfilled. At this moment, Jerry sets out into a new world. It is also a new and unique opportunity through which the world expands for Jerry to venture into the depths:

He ran straight into the water and began swimming. He was a good swimmer. He went out fast over the gleaming sand, over a middle region where rocks lay like discoloured monsters under the surface, and then he was in the real sea a warm sea where irregular cold currents from the deep water shocked his limbs. (Lessing, 1957, p. 62)

On the one hand, he learns to swim, and on the other hand, he learns life experiences from his sea experiences and unconscious imagination. The warmth of the water represents the maternal world that surrounds Jerry, "In short — real water, maternal milk,

the perpetual mother, the Mother.” (Bachelard, 1982, p.125), nevertheless as soon as he emerges into the outside world, he is surrounded by cold currents, which in this context refer to the currents in Jerry’s real life. This swimming represents a victory, a true sailing toward the future, and an overcoming of fear, as Bachelard (1982), indicates:

In water, victory is rarer, more dangerous, and more deserving of credit than victory in the wind. The swimmer conquers an element that is more alien to his nature. The young swimmer is a precocious hero. And what true swimmer was not first a young swimmer? The first attempts at swimming provide an opportunity for overcoming a fear. Walking does not have such a threshold for heroism. Besides, to this fear of a new element is associated a certain fear of the swimming instructor who often pushes his pupil into deep water. (163)

Thus, the inner power that drives Jerry to swim is the same force that Bachelard points to in his analysis of the element of water and its exploration of the depths of the human self, which often calls for diving into the depths of water to overcome fear and overcome difficult life experiences.

Jerry’s participation in the boys’ swimming in the sea symbolizes his entry into society and his confrontation with challenges separate from his mother. The boys represent society, the sea is his second world, and the rocks inside and outside the sea represent the vast number of obstacles he will face. “Jerry dived, shot past the school of underwater swimmers, saw a black wall of rock looming at him, touched it, and bobbed up at once to the surface, where the wall was a low barrier he could see across.” (Lessing, 1957, p. 63). Jerry’s launch into the water brings back memories of childhood and dreams of past adventures. Jerry embarks on a journey to separate from his mother and rejoin society, building his personality away from her and his determination to face challenges despite the difficulties. His presence in the sea among the boys is an existential struggle, even if he is diving into a sea of dreams. He faces the rocks of reality to discover life and experience it. He knows the consequences, so he jumps into the water amidst dreams and the rocks of reality:

Water surged into his mouth; he choked, sank, came up. The rock, lately weighed with boys, seemed to rear up out of the water as their weight was removed. They were flying down past him, now, into the water; the air was full of falling bodies. Then the rock was empty in the hot sunlight. He counted one, two, three. . . . (Lessing, 1957, p. 64)

His feeling of joining as he dived into the depths of the sea was that of a dreamer silently diving into the catacombs of imagination. He joins and then separates; he joins and separates. Such are the dreams and fantasies of life for Jerry. He doesn’t pay much attention to the dreamers around him, but he acknowledges their presence. And then, at a hundred and sixty, the water beyond the rock was full of boys blowing like brown whales. They swam back to the shore without a look at him. (Lessing, 1957, p. 64). Their presence is necessary for him to feel competitive, particularly when he dives and swims with the boys in the middle of the sea, as this embodies the spirit of self-reliance and self-assertion. Jerry’s feeling of the water flowing, suffocating, and drowning carries the meaning of death approaching him, and the moment of suffocation, drowning, and then emerging represents his mother’s preservation of him, in the sense of the duality of death

and rebirth when “Water surged into his mouth” meaning he was granted new life. Jerry transitions from death to life, from dream to reality, and from imagination to the real world, “Death in calm water has maternal features.” (Bachelard, 1982, p. 89). That is, the mother gives her child life with the water of her womb, her blood, and her milk. She provides him with a new life. The mother here refers to the sea, as Bachelard, (1982), notes, “The sea is maternal; water is a prodigious milk.” (119).

Jerry attempts each time to adapt to his mother and his new world, the sea. He attempts to stay underwater for increasingly longer periods, which allows him to remain a dreamer and explore the depths of his own mind:

First, he thought, he must learn to control his breathing. He let himself down into the water with another big stone in his arms, so that he could lie effortlessly on the bottom of the sea. He counted. One, two, three. He counted steadily. He could hear the movement of blood in his chest. Fifty-one, fifty-two. . . . His chest was hurting. He let go of the rock and went up into the air. He saw that the sun was low. (Lessing, 1957, p. 66)

Due to the fact that Lessing implies that Jerry is carrying the stone in order to assist him in lying down, his carrying of the massive stone is a representation of his carrying of his great dream. As a result, laying down here is associated with sleeping, and his counting from one to fifty-two may be a metaphor for his psychological fight to survive, which is then followed by his ascension to the reality of life and his understanding of the dream.

Dreams remain the key to Jerry’s story with water. What he sees underwater while diving comes back to him when he lies in bed at night. Dreams are both the illness and the cure. For Bachelard, dreams are not the same as dreams for Freud. He believes that dreams are a warning to reorganize, reconsider, and rearrange things and the necessities of survival. This could demonstrate Jerry’s dream:

All night, the boy dreamed of the water-filled cave in the rock, and as soon as breakfast was over he went to the bay. That night, his, nose bled badly. For hours he had been underwater, learning to hold his breath, and now he felt weak and dizzy. (Lessing, 1957, p. 66-67)

Therefore, when Jerry encounters water, he produces a dream, thereby attempting to reorganize his priorities and abilities in confrontation with himself and a path toward reflection and reform within the depths of his dreaming self. Bachelard (1982), confirms these conclusions by saying:

The material element is the determining factor in the disease, as in the cure. We suffer through dreams and are cured by dreams. In a cosmology of dreams, the material elements remain the fundamental ones. In a general way, I believe that the psychology of aesthetic emotions would gain from a study of the zone of material reveries that precede contemplation. Dreams come before contemplation. Before becoming a conscious sight, every landscape is an oneiric experience. Only those scenes that have already appeared in dreams can be viewed with an aesthetic passion. (4)

That is, dreams contain areas through which Jerry can see his weaknesses and strengths and work to correct them. He had a dream, reflected on it, and interpreted it as a need to improve his ability to endure and confront himself and to deter temptations. So, he takes the initiative to go and dive at night and even practised excessively until his nose bled.

Jerry's insistence on trying and repeating his dives explains his desire to blend dreams and reality, his dreams and his abilities. His connection between lying on the bed and lying underwater is to pursue his dreams in various ways, including lying underwater. His merging with the materials and elements underwater reinforces Bachelard's concept that water and dreams are one whole. That's what Jerry does:

In the meantime, he lay underwater on the white sand, littered now by stones he had brought down from the upper air, and studied the entrance to the tunnel. He knew every jut and corner of it, as far as it was possible to see. It was as if he already felt its sharpness about his shoulders. (Lessing, 1957, p. 67)

The sand, the stones, the bumps, and the corners have become familiar to him. There is an internal sensory connection between them, linked to areas of his subconscious. For Jerry, water transcended the boundaries of physics and materiality and became a space for contemplation, dreams, patience, tranquility, and self-discovery. This situation also demonstrates Jerry's affection for water and his desire to return to it, viewing it as a space of security, protection, and containment. Seawater represents infinity, mystery, and the human depth of a mother who endures hardships without speaking or expressing them. To this notion, Bachelard (1982), comments, "To disappear into deep water or to disappear toward a far horizon, to become a part of depth or infinity, such is the destiny of man that finds its image in the destiny of water." (12). Thus, Jerry's lying underwater signifies his sense of security. Therefore, in this context, water takes on the image of maternal water. After all, it makes Jerry feel safe and gain experience. As for silent water, it allows him to lie in complete peace, far from external disturbances.

It's also important to note that the internal conflict raging within Jerry's soul foreshadows the reality that water was now flowing through his veins. For Jerry, water serves as a source of both birth and death. It was the birth of new experiences and the birth of new places and spaces, but it could also be the cause of his death at the same time. But the struggle for existence, self-affirmation, and a sense of belonging drive him to dive into the water:

But even after he had made the decision, or thought he had, he found himself sitting up on the rock and looking down into the water, and he knew that now, this moment, when his nose had only just stopped bleeding, when his head was still sore and throbbing —this was the moment when he would try. If he did not do it now, he never would. He was trembling with fear that he would not go, and he was trembling with horror at that long, long tunnel under the rock, under the sea. Even in the open sunlight, the barrier rock seemed very wide and very heavy; tons of rock pressed down on where he would go. If he died there, he would lie until one day—perhaps not before next year —those big boys would swim into it and find it blocked. (Lessing, 1957, p. 68)

Such determination, despite the associated risks of death, requires a crucial choice between diving, which symbolizes birth, and staying outside the water, which represents death for Jerry. In this context, Bachelard (1982), says, "It is only when we realize the substantial qualities of the water of Youth that we rediscover, in our own dreams, myths of birth, water in its maternal power, water which gives life in death, beyond death, [...]" (147). His desire to dive, despite his repeated nosebleeds, dizziness, and headaches, is evidence of the embodiment of the dream concept at the core of Jerry's internal images and the fusion of the elements of water and space to produce an innate place of comfort and containment.

Hence, Jerry's dream decision to conquer fear and pain shows the merging of the elements within him and beneath him. Likewise, Jerry desires to abandon his weak old self by diving into the depths of the water. Jerry experiences decisive moments as he plunges into the water and navigates the underwater tunnel. Jerry's swimming underwater and he promises to himself, "Fifty, fifty-one, fifty-two. . . .", "Seventy-one, seventy-two. . . ." then "A hundred, a hundred and one. . . ." (Lessing, 1957, pp. 68-69), perhaps indicates the degree of his cohesion and merging with the water and his becoming and crossing with matter after a measured poetic expression as he makes his way through the underwater tunnel. By rushing underwater through the tunnel, Jerry cuts short years of dreamy experience by forming and shaping himself unconsciously. Jerry transitions from an internal struggle to an external one as he wrestles with the water element in a state of wondrous harmony: "The water was pushing him up against the roof. The roof was sharp and pained his back." then "His head knocked against something; a sharp pain dizzied him." (Lessing, 1957, p.68) as if they were the blows of a caring mother who teaches but does not harm a dreaming boy like Jerry.

It is indisputable that Bachelard sees water as the element of infinity, as it represents continuity: birth, death, and rebirth. Thus, it is a continuous element. Jerry's journey has a beginning and no definitive end, yet it includes multiple endings. Jerry's journey through the tunnel enables him to traverse it more than once. Lessing's use of the underwater tunnel signifies Jerry's crossing from the boundaries of reality to the boundaries of dreaming, signifying a new birth in Jerry's life:

A hundred and fifteen, a hundred and fifteen pounded through his head, and he feebly clutched at rocks in the dark, pulling himself forward, leaving the brief space of sunlit water behind. He felt he was dying. He was no longer quite conscious. He struggled on in the darkness between lapses into unconsciousness. An immense, swelling pain filled his head, and then the darkness cracked with an explosion of green light. His hands, groping forward, met nothing, and his feet, kicking back, propelled him out into the open sea. (Lessing, 1957, p. 69)

Jerry, the dreamer, is crossing the underwater tunnel, signifying a new formulation of himself and his passage from darkness to light. Jerry crosses from the womb's dark to the light of life, even if only in dreams. Jerry's feeling that he is dying aligns with Bachelard's statement about death: "Then in death the still floating victims of drowning seem to continue dreaming." (83). For Bachelard, death is the perpetual continuation of dreamers and a renewal of consciousness through the element of water.

This illustrates Jerry's actions as he persists in moving through the tunnel, even in the face of pain, weakness, and a sense of dying. Yet this is the slogan and cloak of dreamers crossing towards the unconscious maturity of a real life that expresses their material maturity.

While Bachelard sees no definitive conclusion for the dreamer, Jerry determines his own destiny by crossing the tunnel into a new existence after a conflict between life and death. "His eyes must have burst, he thought; they were full of blood. He tore off his goggles, and a gout of blood went into the sea. His nose was bleeding, and the blood had filled the goggles." (Lessing, 1957, p. 70). Nonetheless, this conflict and introspection seem to lack a deliberate conclusion, with an implicit resolution that aids in the development of Jerry's identity: "He flung himself on his bed and slept" (Ibid). The bleeding and the blood are representations of a challenging but triumphant birth that Jerry experienced as he entered the tranquil waters and consumed his mother's milk. Jerry was transformed again by the sound of the water as an eternal element.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to analyze Doris Lessing's story "Through the Tunnel" from Bachelard's perspective on water and dreams, based on his book *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. It focused on employing Bachelard's vision of water and dreams to analyze the literary applications of water and dreams in the story and their psychological impact on the life of the protagonist, Jerry, and the course of events. Thus, the study concluded that, for the story's main character, Jerry, water and dreams have a clear impact on the development, refinement, and formation of his personality and his relationship with his surroundings, starting with his mother, his male peers, and society as a whole. It also concluded that Doris Lessing's use and employment of the water element and its connection to dreams in her story "Through the Tunnel" gave an aesthetic and poetic meaning to the secrets of the human psyche. In addition, it presented an image of Jerry's unconscious, strengthening his relationship with water and his estrangement from his mother. This employment has an imaginative dimension, not just a narrative one. Bachelard's ideas on water and dreams have proven effective in analyzing the inner imaginative dimension of a character when they dive into the depths of water and dreams.

## **References**

Al-Saudi, A. (2023, October 5). *Water and dreams from Bachelard's perspective*. Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation. <https://shoman.org/Readblogs/ID/5100/water-and-dreams-from-bachelard-perspective>

- Bachelard, G. (1982). *Water and dreams: An essay on the imagination of matter* (E. R. Farrell, Trans.). Pegasus Foundation & Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.
- Bardawil, S. T. (2025, July 16). *The theme of water in light of the thematic method: A partial reading of Gaston Bachelard's Water and Dreams*. *Awraq Thaqafya Journal*, (38), 71–81. <https://www.awraqthaqafya.com/5007/>
- Erkoçi, I. (2023). “A strange dream upon the water”: Venice as inspiration for writers and reader-tourists. *LIT&TOUR – International Journal of Literature and Tourism Research*, (Special Issue), 98–105. <https://publicacoes.ciac.pt/index.php/litntour/article/view/111>
- Hassan, E. M. E. (2022). *Self-awareness as a Pilgrim to Realness in Doris Lessing's "Through the Tunnel & A Sunrise on the Veld."* *Egyptian Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 11(1), 65-84.
- Kumar, B. S. (2023). *The poetic element of water in selected poems: A Bachelardian study* (pp. 19–24). The University of Zambia. <https://uruae.org/siteadmin/upload/UA0625405.pdf>
- Lessing, D. (1957). *Through the tunnel*. In *The habit of loving*. London: Michael Joseph.
- Leviton, R. (1994). *The barefoot philosopher of the imagination: Gaston Bachelard's reverie of the elements*. Academia.edu. [https://www.academia.edu/110094174/The Barefoot Philosopher of the Imagination Gaston Bachelards Reverie of the Elements](https://www.academia.edu/110094174/The_Barefoot_Philosopher_of_the_Imagination_Gaston_Bachelards_Reverie_of_the_Elements)
- Walsh, L. S. (2017). *Water and dreams: exploring Bachelard's concepts through new audiovisual works for the oboe*. University of Technology Sydney (Australia).
- Webb, J., & Webb, L. (2022). *Water and dreams*. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Programs*, 26(Special Issue 68), 1–20. [https://www.academia.edu/113359329/Water and dreams](https://www.academia.edu/113359329/Water_and_dreams)
- Sparano, E., & Strizzolo, N. (2024). *Imaginary and symbolic forms of water between spirit and culture*. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 15(30), 39–52. <https://dx.medra.org/10.7336/academicus.2024.30.03>