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<p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p>		
<h2 style="text-align: center;">Maritime Spatiality and Readerly Engagement in Contemporary Algerian Fiction: A Narratological and Semiotic Analysis of Samia Ben Dris's <i>Spectra of Scheherazade</i></h2>		
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This study presents a comprehensive aesthetic and narratological analysis of maritime space as a central spatial and symbolic construct in Samia Ben Dris's short story <i>"Light Blue... Dark Blue"</i>, included in <i>Spectra of Scheherazade</i>. Situated at the intersection of spatial literary theory and reception aesthetics, the research examines how the sea transcends its conventional role as a passive setting to function as an active and generative force shaping narrative structure, thematic articulation, and readerly engagement. Employing a qualitative textual analysis, the study conceptualizes the sea as a multidimensional semiotic system that oscillates between material reality and imaginative abstraction, thereby producing a dense and dynamic field of meaning. The findings demonstrate that maritime space operates as a narrative agent that significantly contributes to plot development, character construction, and the formation of emotional and atmospheric depth. At the same time, it facilitates a dialogic interaction between text and reader, enabling an interpretive process grounded in openness and multiplicity. Particular emphasis is placed on the aesthetic strategies through which spatial imagery is constructed, including chromatic symbolism, sensory representation, and anthropomorphic projection. These techniques collectively enhance the narrative's expressive capacity and evoke complex emotional and cognitive responses. The analysis further reveals that the sea embodies a fundamental duality—simultaneously representing harmony and tension, stability and transformation, presence and uncertainty—which reinforces its role as a catalyst for narrative conflict and symbolic production. In addition, the study highlights the significance of narrative techniques such as repetition, descriptive layering, interior monologue, and temporal modulation in consolidating the centrality of space within the narrative discourse. Through these mechanisms, the text generates a cohesive aesthetic experience that actively engages the reader and deepens the process of reception. Ultimately, this research argues that maritime space in Ben Dris's narrative transcends its physical dimension to become a key epistemological and aesthetic framework through which broader concerns related to identity, memory, human experience, and the relationship between nature and narrative are articulated.</p>		
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Introduction

In contemporary literary studies, the concept of space has emerged as a central analytical category, reflecting a significant shift from traditional temporally oriented narratology toward a more spatially conscious understanding of narrative structures. While classical narrative theory privileged time as the primary organizing principle of storytelling, recent theoretical developments have emphasized the active and constitutive role of space in shaping narrative meaning, aesthetic experience, and readerly engagement (Genette, 1980; Bal, 2009). Within this evolving paradigm, space is no longer conceived as a passive container for events but as a dynamic and semiotically charged element that participates in the production of narrative discourse.

Among the various spatial configurations explored in literary texts, maritime space occupies a particularly complex and multifaceted position. The sea, as both a physical and symbolic entity, embodies a rich spectrum of meanings that traverse cultural, psychological, and existential dimensions. It simultaneously represents openness and confinement, continuity and rupture, life and death, thereby offering a fertile ground for literary exploration. As Bachelard (1994) suggests in his seminal work on the poetics of space, natural elements such as water possess profound imaginative and emotional resonance, functioning as catalysts for memory, identity, and creative expression. In narrative contexts, the sea often transcends its material reality to become a symbolic and aesthetic construct that shapes the trajectory of events and the inner worlds of characters.

In parallel, the development of reception theory has further transformed the analytical landscape of literary studies by foregrounding the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. According to Iser (1978), literary texts are inherently indeterminate structures that require active interpretation, while Jauss (1982) emphasizes the historical variability of reader responses. Within this framework, spatial representation plays a crucial role in mediating the interaction between text and reader, providing a site where imagination, perception, and interpretation converge. The sea, with its fluidity and ambiguity, is particularly suited to this function, as it invites multiple readings and facilitates a dynamic process of meaning-making.

Despite the growing body of research on spatial narratology and reception aesthetics, the specific role of maritime space in shaping narrative discourse remains underexplored, particularly within the context of contemporary Algerian literature. Existing studies have often addressed space in descriptive or thematic terms, without fully integrating the theoretical insights of narratology, semiotics, and reader-response criticism. This gap is especially evident in analyses of short narrative forms, where spatial elements are frequently treated as secondary to plot and character, rather than as central organizing principles.

Against this background, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive aesthetic and narratological analysis of maritime space in the short story "Light Blue... Dark Blue," included in *Spectra of Scheherazade* by Samia Ben Dris. The research investigates how the sea functions as an active narrative agent, a semiotic system, and an aesthetic framework that shapes both textual structure and readerly reception. By employing a qualitative analytical approach grounded in spatial narratology and reception theory, the study seeks to elucidate the mechanisms through which maritime space contributes to the construction of meaning, the development of narrative dynamics, and the engagement of the reader.

The significance of this research lies in its attempt to bridge theoretical and textual analysis, offering a multidimensional perspective on the role of space in literature. By situating the analysis within an interdisciplinary framework that integrates narratology, semiotics, and reception studies, the study contributes to ongoing debates on the nature of narrative space and its implications for literary interpretation. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of examining regional literary traditions—such as Algerian narrative fiction—within a global theoretical context, thereby enriching our understanding of the diversity and complexity of contemporary literary production.

Literature Review

The study of space in narrative discourse has evolved into a central domain within contemporary literary theory, particularly with the emergence of spatial narratology and geocritical approaches. Traditionally, narrative analysis prioritized temporal structures; however, modern scholarship has increasingly emphasized the role of space as an active and constitutive element in meaning-making processes (Genette, 1980; Bal, 2009). Within this paradigm shift, space is no longer perceived as a passive backdrop but as a dynamic semiotic system that shapes narrative structure, character development, and readerly interpretation.

One of the foundational contributions to the study of literary space is offered by Gaston Bachelard (1994), whose concept of the *poetics of space* foregrounds the intimate, psychological, and phenomenological dimensions of spatial representation. Bachelard argues that spaces—whether real or imagined—function as repositories of memory, emotion, and identity, thereby enabling literature to transcend physical boundaries and engage with deeper

existential concerns. This perspective is particularly relevant in the analysis of maritime space, which embodies both material and symbolic dimensions, oscillating between stability and fluidity, presence and absence.

Complementing this phenomenological approach, semiotic theorists such as Lotman (1990) conceptualize space as a structured system of signs, embedded within cultural codes and interpretive frameworks. In this context, spatial elements operate as carriers of meaning, interacting with narrative components to produce multilayered interpretations. Similarly, Westphal (2011) and Tally (2013) emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of spatial analysis, integrating literary studies with geography, philosophy, and cultural theory to explore the complex relationship between real and fictional spaces.

Reception theory further expands the analytical scope by shifting attention from the text itself to the reader's role in constructing meaning. Iser (1978) posits that literary texts are inherently indeterminate, requiring active participation from the reader to actualize their potential meanings. Jauss (1982) similarly highlights the historical and cultural variability of reader responses, arguing that interpretation is shaped by evolving horizons of expectation. Within this framework, spatial representation becomes a key site of interaction between text and reader, enabling diverse interpretive engagements.

In the context of Arabic and Algerian literary studies, scholars such as Hussein (2000) and Baza (2010) have explored the significance of space in narrative discourse, emphasizing its role in structuring events and shaping character experiences. However, these studies often remain confined to descriptive or thematic analyses, lacking integration with contemporary theoretical frameworks. This gap underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach that combines narratological, semiotic, and reception-oriented perspectives.

The present study addresses this gap by examining maritime space as a multidimensional construct that operates simultaneously as a narrative agent, symbolic system, and aesthetic experience. By situating the analysis at the intersection of spatial narratology and reception theory, the research contributes to ongoing debates on the role of space in literature, offering new insights into the interplay between narrative form, symbolic meaning, and readerly engagement.

How has the storyteller employed the sea within the narrative fabric of the short story?

The theme of the sea in Algerian narrative fiction constitutes a central reference through which its presence may be traced in artistic and aesthetic images that unfold and harmonize within the storyteller's imagination—particularly when the narrative trajectory shifts toward where the other stands, thereby endowing the short story with an event, a plot, and a conflict among characters situated within a specific time and space.

But how can one assert that the theme of the sea represents a source of attraction and inspiration for the storyteller? Has the sea become a pretext for writing a narrative text addressed to a reader whose interpretations are as diverse as the thematic and generic variations of the text itself? Does the short story possess a particular merit or privilege in establishing the sea as an autonomous literary subject? Furthermore, how does the sea manifest in creative writing, and what forms does its presence assume? Can it be argued that each short story possesses its own distinct sea, especially given that the sea carries multiple conceptual and symbolic meanings?

These questions, among others, will be addressed through the short story "*Light Blue... Dark Blue*", included in the collection *Spectra of Scheherazade* by Samia Ben Dris, in the hope that it may provide answers. This inquiry proceeds from a problem that appears central to this research paper, namely, whether the storyteller employs a single theme or multiple themes within her narrative work. The guiding question is thus formulated as follows:

The Sea as Space and Signification

Human engagement with the forces of nature has developed progressively. In its eternal struggle with these forces, humanity moved from a stage of fear to one of reverence, eventually arriving—through an evolved consciousness—at the necessity of abandoning confrontation and defiance, and instead adopting respect and even reconciliation. This occurred through uncovering nature's laws and regulations, understanding and interpreting them in order to live in harmony, without seeking to tame or dominate them. Rather, this engagement has been driven by a quest for the unknown, a spirit of adventure, the pursuit of wonder and ambition, the fulfillment of material and spiritual desires, the opening of new horizons, and the establishment of human connection that overcomes isolation. Yet, humanity did not stop there; it began to engage with nature through writing, shaping it into poetry, short stories, and novels—just as droplets of water formed seas, rivers, and oceans.

Just as the wind stirs the waves of the sea, the sea, in turn, propels the events of the story. Indeed, "the sea, unlike other spatial patterns, constitutes a pivotal sign and a central focal point in contemporary Algerian literary discourse, owing to Algeria's coastal nature. Since most writers come from the northern coastal regions, the color blue has become pervasive in their texts, and they have carried the sea upon their shoulders. The sea has taken on

diverse forms, colors, and images through which the Algerian writer expresses experience, concerns, and viewpoints” (Said Shamsham, 2012, p. 08).

Yes, it is the sea—from whose depths the creator extracts ideas imbued with the most refined meanings and aesthetic forms; from whose reality the events of narrative works are woven; from whose waves characters emerge; and from whose imaginative inspiration the writer derives uniqueness. Does not everything have its own surge—and the sea, too, has its literature? Its stature lies in being a source of inspiration for the creator in multiple ways, as each writer leaves their own imprint through addition and omission, in accordance with the specific demands of their narrative particularities, which pulse with vitality. Ultimately, this creative reality becomes a purely aesthetic heritage, shaped by the writer’s experience in intercultural exchange, the transmission of accounts, and their transformation into ideas and images. The more the sea rages and intensifies, the more it fuels the creator’s fervor, stirring emotions with force, which is then reflected in words, expressions, and imagery. Conversely, when the sea calms and settles, it soothes and expands the writer’s sensibility, which is translated into a creative expression that gratifies both the self and the recipient. It is the sea in its vigor and ferocity, enveloped in a deep and expansive spirit.

Moreover, “it is impossible to conceive a narrative without space; no events exist outside space, for every event takes place within a specific location and time” (Mohamed Baza, 2010, p. 99). While the sea has been extensively employed in Algerian poetic texts, it is also present in short stories and novels with considerable scope, due to the expansiveness that narrative grants the narrator, allowing them to analyze and explore the worlds of this captivating space with all its elements (Said Shamsham, 2012, p. 9).

This is the approach adopted by Samia Ben Dris, who situates the events of her short story “*Light Blue... Dark Blue*” within the orbit of the sea. The word “sea” itself is repeated seventeen (17) times in this short narrative text, which spans only four and a half pages. Its lexical extensions vary between foam, blueness, expansion, withdrawal, shore, sail, boat, and seagulls—the latter mentioned only once, yet functioning as part of a network that gathers all elements related to the sea, thus forming vivid images in the recipient’s imagination. Meanwhile, boats and waves are each mentioned four times, emphasizing the dangers and hardships faced by boats whenever stirred by waves. Indeed, “the sea is indifferent; it expands and contracts, practicing its game with neutrality, playing its melody: the beginning and the end—the wave departs only to return, in renewed repetition” (Samia Ben Dris, 2016, p. 77). Yes, it is the sea, within which boats become “a swing swaying in the hands of the waves... and in a moment, life turns into a fleeing boat in the depths of the night” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79).

In contrast, the color blue is mentioned five times, if we include the title of the story—an indication of this color, which carries meanings of strength, energy, and authority. It is indeed a color that significantly affects moods, emotions, and behavior. Blue is classified among the cool colors due to its prevalence in nature: the sky is blue, and bodies of water interact with its hue. It is known for its calming effect on the self, promoting relaxation, psychological comfort, and spiritual harmony with nature. It is also the color of the mind, intellect, and creativity, associated with enhanced concentration and clearer thinking. Moreover, when light, it conveys reliability, composure, cleanliness, and communication; when dark, it signifies confidence, dignity, intelligence, authority, and control.

Among its negative connotations are feelings of indifference, melancholy, negativity, sadness, isolation, emotional detachment, and coldness. Describing a scene, the author writes: “The boy walking toward school on foot, and the girl following in his footsteps, walk alongside the sea, wrapped in foam and dream, and a path adorned with a renewed blueness” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76).

The storyteller then shifts in her deployment of the color blue to a more perilous maritime phase, when sailors appear in the narrative, enduring the hardships of the sea and struggling against it in a reciprocal contest—at times offering it some of their lives in exchange for what lies hidden in its depths of secrets and spoils: “- Hila hop, hila hop... the sailors cried out as they ventured deeper into the dark blue, the pitch-black color, the secrets, the spoils, and destruction” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79).

Conversely, shells are mentioned eight times, and the author transforms them into a theme open to the symbolism of motherhood, which evokes tenderness, warmth, and profoundly harmonious spiritual human bonds between mother and child. The shell thus establishes an organic relationship between the protagonist Jamal, the heroine Nadia, and the sea, considering that “the spatial imprints in a character’s life permeate biological, psychological, and social levels” (Hussein Hussein Khaled, 2000, p. 114). This is clearly reflected in the story, where it is stated: “He holds a shell in his hands: ‘Look, this resembles a mother who has lost her daughter. The word “shell” suggests superficiality—so people believe,’ he laughs, ‘but you know it is only a shell in the eyes of those who do not see. You know those artifacts at home—I dream of holding an exhibition for them, to restore their dignity... theirs, of course’” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 78).

Thus emerges a refined aesthetic image of the sea when it is associated with the concept of the mother in relation to her daughter: the mother is the home, the refuge, protection, security, and tenderness, while the daughter is the pearl hidden within the shell, since one of its meanings is the covering of the pearl. This is from Jamal's perspective. As for Nadia, she perceives in the arrangement of colored shells—forming a necklace—a profound image marked by attachment, adherence, loyalty, and submission. Indeed, the shell carries a meaning greater than its physical size: it is the home that contains tranquility and safety. It is therefore not merely a casing that once contained a soft-bodied creature and then abandoned it; rather, it is characterized by strength and solidity—some shells are lustrous, others dull in color.

This same idea extends to the depiction of the sea's neutrality, alluding to coral formations, which are in fact colonies of marine organisms displaying dazzling colors. When illuminated beneath the sea, they evoke a poetic sensation. As the text states: "The colored shell necklace around her neck carries a deep meaning of attachment, adherence, loyalty, and submission... thus, the shell is not merely a shell; it is a home, an artifact—or an artistic project. A companion who has lost its companion, cast ashore at a waiting station ... and the girl strives to overcome the negative meaning associated with the shell" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, pp. 77-79).

Accordingly, the attraction to the world of the sea and its elements becomes a form of recalling moments of a beautiful past, particularly through the theme of motherhood, security, and attachment—most vividly expressed in her bond with the sea. Indeed, she "immersed her feet in the water and leaned against a rock by the sea" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77). She submerged her feet in the water and rested against a rock—a symbol of solidity and firmness—to affirm her rootedness and attachment to a place that is part of her, just as she is part of it.

As for the sea and water, their presence was equally significant within this short narrative text, reflecting the deep connection of the theme of the sea with the imagination of the storyteller, as well as with her memory, which is captivated by everything that forms the wondrous image of this space—a space that orchestrates meetings and separations, sows pain and hope, transmits fear and reassurance, spreads love, generates life, and sketches death. She addressed this when she wrote: "Tomorrow, the tears will meet in the expanse of the sea—her evening tears and his nightly tears will dissolve in the great estuary water, yet together they will come to know the identity of this water; water will recognize water, and its particles will fuse..." (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 80).

Since the sea is a space of connection and openness to the world, as well as an open temporal horizon, it produces a mentality and a type of behavior different from that found in inland or desert regions. The sea inspires a desire for exploration, for connection with others, or for receiving and communicating with them—a desire that necessarily generates a different mindset and makes people more willing to establish human relationships (Saleh Walaa, 2010, p. 120). The sea thus forms a focal point of dense semantic radiance, infusing the narrative text with artistic and imaginative energies across multiple readings, engaging psychological, emotional, existential, and social dimensions.

The storyteller did not stop there; she extended her treatment to anthropomorphism, convinced that when "the narrator humanizes manifestations of the external world, incorporating them into their artistic work, and allowing them to perform a new human function, they contribute to creating the overall atmosphere the artist aims to achieve, aligning with human beings, their emotions, and thoughts, so that they share in suffering, oppression, and joy. This juxtaposition arises from a personal and artistic need to interpret events in a distinct internal way and to depict life creatively, with a new vision characterized by comprehensiveness and absolute humanity" (Ahmed Morshid, 2003, p. 8).

A discerning reader will recognize in the storyteller's anthropomorphization of the sea an example of an experienced narrator whose humanistic vision of the universe manifests depth, beauty, and vitality. Indeed, "the sea is indifferent; it expands and contracts, playing its game with neutrality, performing its melody: the beginning and the end—the wave departs to return, in renewed repetition." One might imagine the sea as a human required to respond to situations that spark attention; the storyteller attributes to it a psychological human state: indifference and a loss of sensation when it expands and contracts, when it plays and performs its melody without concern. Moreover, she conveys a sense of boredom as an emotional feeling, allowing humans to recognize when they are performing an activity that brings neither intellectual enjoyment nor satisfaction, due to the monotony of repetitive action.

Even "the neutrality of the sea—the blue façade, laden with evening presence, emptiness, and empty dreams" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77) and "water embraces water... tomorrow, the tears will meet in the expanse of the sea—her evening tears and his nightly tears will dissolve in the great estuary water, yet together they will come to know the identity of this water; water will recognize water, and its particles will fuse..." indicate unity, inclusion, connection, intimacy, wholeness, grasping, meeting, and tender embracing. Through this, the storyteller gives water an identity by which it senses itself and its individuality, understanding its value—an identity with distinct features and authenticity, much like a human being who possesses an absolute reality and intrinsic attributes.

The Sea as Human Memory

The sea enticed the creative storyteller, drawing her toward writing that is engaging, detailed, and precise, in which she fully exercised her imagination. She attended to the minutiae concerning characters, events, and specific scenes, captivated by this enchanting space, which she filled with dense symbols and abundant meanings. The sea serves as a symbol of life's renewed movement and energy, as well as a symbol of motherhood in its generosity and fertility. It also represents purity and clarity, while simultaneously echoing in its turbulent waves an eternal struggle between life and death, calm and agitation, silence and roar, elevation and descent, ebb and flow.

Just as this space inspired the storyteller and provided her with positive energy that she channeled into creativity, so too did it inspire words, expressions, and ideas, which submitted themselves to her, carrying within them a visual memory. She gathered her sensations to navigate diverse human worlds, ultimately anchoring them along the shores of her story's pages. There, the sea connects with a network of sensory, chromatic, kinetic, auditory, and visual images—some explicitly presented, others implied—but all arranged with an artistic and integrated style, in which events are ordered and harmonized with characters, dialogue, and descriptive scenes. This arrangement grows progressively, intending to heighten the effect on the recipient and stimulate the imagination of events that, in reality, comprise multiple occurrences, reflecting her expertise, culture, and knowledge of the depths of this expansive horizon.

Indeed, the sea is described as “spacious and boundless, its horizon distant under the undefined expanse of the universe. The sea moderates the heat, its ports connect with large ships and loading docks, massive iron gates, stacked goods, crates, and containers... the lives of fishermen are linked to the sea's conditions, and in summer, alleys and beaches transform into beehives” (Mohamed Djibril, 2000, p. 22). This is evident in the selected excerpts from her narrative text. Among the auditory images that give the text a particular resonance, she writes: “And the marble dew whispered, rising like the moon from the palm of the hand” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76), and: “It performs its melody: the beginning and the end—the wave departs to return,” as well as: “And this oar, the roar of the waves, and the voice of Fairuz fill the expanse... and she is alone, unable to hear Fairuz and the music of the sea in her language” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79). She also writes: “Hila hop, hila hop... the sailors cried out,” and: “The seagulls departed, ceasing their cries and calls” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 80).

These auditory images—the melody and music of the sea, the sailors' cries on the open water, the seagulls, and the voice of Fairuz filling the space—collectively create a magical soundscape of the sea. This enhances human mood, generating psychological comfort and inner calm, releasing hormones that soothe the body both psychologically and physiologically, renewing energy and providing positive vitality for work and life, thereby restoring vigor and efficacy.

Regarding olfactory imagery, it relies on the sense of smell, which activates the nose to capture the scent of the sea, permeating the brain, influencing it with its enchanting fragrance, refreshing it, restoring mental energy and vitality, and providing bodily balance and relaxation. This is evident in her words: “The girl's scent mingles with the scent of the sea” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76), and: “The girl follows the labyrinth in a state of relaxation, her senses numbed” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77). This granted the girl an inner capacity to resist anxiety and a bad mood, enhancing her psychological rejuvenation and spiritual well-being.

The sense of taste is also present in her narrative, activating the recipient's full sensory perception and allowing them to savor the taste of seawater mixed with the saltiness of tears, both being saline waters: “Evening spilled into the girl's eyes; her eyes overflowed with salty water flowing into the sea, water mingling with water, dissolving into water—a private message she sent” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 80).

As for chromatic imagery, the storyteller employed a spectrum of soothing colors, evoking joy and tranquility at times, as in: “They are wrapped in foam and dreams, along a path tinged with a new blue” and “The girl with the red skirt... toys with the colored shell necklace around her neck” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77). She also notes: “the color of his eyes, mirroring the hue of seaweed” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79). In contrast, darker colors convey sadness, loneliness, anxiety, and fear, for instance: “The neutrality of the sea—the blue façade, burdened with evening presence, emptiness, and hollow dreams” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77), and: “They advanced inward into the dark blue, the murky color,” which may portend peril. She also observes: “She does not have enough courage to hear the song alone, for the sea would extend vast and dark, and she is alone without a sail” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 78). This suggests that the sea, particularly at night when visibility is lost, evokes awe, anxiety, and immobility, intensifying human sensitivity to surrounding stimuli and heightening perception of any unusual sound, touch, scent, or movement. The girl's courage diminishes, illustrating this effect.

Because the sea is so dynamic, the storyteller concentrated on kinetic imagery, frequently incorporating it into her narrative as an inseparable part of movement and activity. This serves as a method of expressing ideas, emotions, and concepts through bodily responses to a stimulus, such as the sea and its waves. The text is replete with such

imagery: “A boat fleeing in the depths of the night,” “The boats depart into the depths of the night as if a swing swaying in the hands of the wave,” “Wounds are streams in the expanse of their meaning, and in their manifold faces they end in the wider infinite estuary” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 78). These are all visual scenes imbued with sensory beauty, enriched with stylistic and rhetorical devices, enhancing the narrative’s aesthetic radiance.

Moreover, she employed repetition explicitly to achieve textual cohesion and harmony, reinforcing and consolidating meaning, as seen in: “He departed on a boat in the silence of the night,” “A boat fleeing in the depths of the night,” “And the boats depart into the depths of the night”; “The sea would extend vast and dark,” “And the emptiness extends immensely, and the dreams diminish”; “And this oar, the roar of the waves,” “And the waves roar”; “Water mingled with water,” “Water dissolved into water,” “And the water embraces the water,” “Water will know water” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012).

She narrated these within sentences and phrases that expanded on the image of the sea with all its details, conditions, and states, presenting it as a spatial narrative element with influential, almost humanized, qualities—not inferior in value to other components such as characters, events, dialogue, time, and narrative fabric. In fact, it may surpass them, particularly when it is the central subject of the creative work. The sea, as an objective equivalent, combines positive features—such as vastness, openness, and spaciousness—that instill comfort, tranquility, and serenity in humans, alongside negative aspects—such as depth, fissures, and agitation—that evoke fear, awe, and vulnerability, suggesting the potential for betrayal:

“Despite herself, she gazed at the horizon with vague anxiety, immersed her feet in the water, and leaned on a rock by the sea. Circles beget circles, and the girl follows the labyrinth in a state of relaxation, her senses numbed. The boats depart, and no one restrains her from leaving, and the hearts hang like small birds flapping wildly” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77).

Does the Sea Have a Language?

The language of the sea in the short story plays with the reader as its waves play with humans, seducing them with its rebellious movements and tossing them with its ebb and flow, asserting its power without coercion or intrusion upon the many intimate spaces where the storyteller’s language luxuriates. This language is composed of words drawn from a private lexicon, in which both explicit terms and symbols carry strong presence, sound holds even greater weight, and emotions shine most vividly.

The direct lexical items appear with their common and latent meanings, such as foam, waves, shore, water, neutrality, and sea down (*zghab al-bah*). For example: “The boy walking toward school on foot and the girl following his steps walk alongside the sea, wrapped in foam and dreams,” “And the boy’s body covered with sea down,” “The neutrality of the sea, the blue facade” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012). Notably, the word *sea* itself consists of two strong voiced letters surrounding a soft unvoiced one, reflecting the essence of its meaning and qualities, fluctuating between high and low waves; it embodies expansiveness and undulation, rising and falling, shouting and whispering—expressing both entreaty and apprehension. As the text illustrates: “The sea extends vast and dark, and she is alone without a sail... The waves roar, and the emptiness stretches immensely, and dreams diminish... The boats depart, and no one restrains her from leaving, and hearts hang like small birds flapping wildly” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77).

Sound emanates from the waves in their playful caresses at times and in their violent clashes at others, alternating between soft whispers and loud turmoil: “The sea does not care; it extends and recedes, playing its game with neutrality, performing its melody: the beginning and the end. The wave goes and returns, the repetition renewed, circles beget circles” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012).

Emotions reside in the sea’s depths, captured by the storyteller through luminous and hazy expressions, casting them into the hearts of readers of all kinds, allowing them to dive deeply into the story’s pages with only their procedural tools, to uncover profound meanings and reconstruct beauty within a state of ecstasy. For the sea is a truly vital world, inseparable from life: it contains resistance and determination, anger and tumult, loss and gain, as well as dreams and surrender. As the story describes: “According to the anticipation in the trembling of the spirit, and the marble-like dew rising like a moon from the palm of the hand, and the eyes looking toward the birth of an extraordinary moment resembling the moment of birth, or the illumination of Laylat al-Qadr and the crescent of Eid in childhood” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76); and: “The girl questions and distances herself as much as possible from negative interpretations; for the sun rises over the universe, and the sea extends. According to her readings—according to what the books say—negative meaning is a choice, which she seeks to combat. Every wound is a treasure, granting life new meaning and richness. The wounds are streams in their expansive meaning, and in their manifold faces, they reach the widest, infinite estuary” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 78).

A careful reader of this short story will recognize how they interact with its characters, sensing the depth of the events in their joyful, sorrowful, or painful atmospheres, and perceiving the power of the author’s expression in

conveying emotions, with a precise balance that avoids exaggeration. On this basis, the creative lexicon of the Algerian environment celebrates the sea as an essential value for the continuation of life, and the short story “Light Blue... Dark Blue” is narrated by the storyteller in a style whose aesthetic derives from the depth and expansiveness of the sea.

The Heroes and Characters of the Sea Amid the Event

It is not necessary for a creative writer to be a sailor in order to describe the sea in their narrative; nor is it necessary to specialize in maritime literature or dedicate standalone stories or novels to the sea to be recognized as a writer of the seas. Rather, it suffices for the author to employ a lexicon comprising a range of words and expressions—explicit or implicit—across their creative works, which grants them the status of a literary narrator, able to join the ranks of those who write about the sea and its world. The sea, after all, is too vast to be confined to specific characters or events, and conversely, characters—whether real or fictional—transcend the sea in consciousness and thought, while the sea surpasses them in force and intensity.

The storyteller endows her two protagonists with physiological and moral traits drawn from their environment, including strength, height, beauty, daring, adventure, courage, vigor, and desire. These qualities reflect the *futuwa*, the virtue of youth between adolescence and manhood, encompassing moral virtues such as generosity, bravery, assistance, piety, tenderness, and chivalry. They are powers of the soul, representing the complete human being who aspires toward wide horizons to contemplate and reflect on the divine order. It also conveys a strong manly figure, capable of imposing protection over a neighborhood or region, taking compensation from those he guards.

The author employs the word *boy* more than twenty-two times, as in: “The girl’s scent mingles with the sea’s scent, and the boy’s body is covered with sea down; the boy accelerates while the girl slows, the girl accelerates while the boy slows” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77). She continues to describe him whenever necessary: “The tall boy with curly hair departed on a boat in the silence of night, and the neutrality of the sea, the blue facade, marked its evening presence heavy with emptiness and hollow dreams. He wrote his name on the rock: Jamal, followed by question marks and infinite dots” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 77).

The narrative deepens this enigmatic character, leaving the reader uncertain of his identity—is he a father, a brother, a lover? A relative or a distant acquaintance? Or merely a schoolmate whose friendship evolved into love? Even the character himself seems uncertain: “He wrote his name on the rock: Jamal, followed by question marks and infinite dots” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79). His presence is further imbued with sensory and emotional significance: “From the moment eyes look toward the birth of an extraordinary moment resembling birth itself, or the illumination of Laylat al-Qadr and the crescent of Eid in childhood... her steps accompanied him ever since she recognized the meaning of morning opening her eyes to his face and the color of his eyes that mirrored the seaweed” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79).

Similarly, the sailors in the story carry traits, behaviors, legends, and visions shaped by the sea and their confined ship: “They have characteristics defined by the sea, behaviors shaped by the sea, and legends, stories, and visions linked to the vast sea and the narrow vessel” (Abdelhamid El-Mohadine, n.d., p. 227). This reflects the harshness of life when fate casts them into the dark night within a cramped boat, struggling against roaring waves, uncertain where they will be cast and whether they will return: “If life is this sea voyage, and this oar and the clamor of waves and the voice of Fairuz filling the expanse, overcoming its loneliness and darkness, if life is a small boat carrying them forever, a swing rocking between the hands of the waves... The girl sighed, her eyes fluttering in a moment of sudden wakefulness. In a moment, life transformed into a fleeing boat in the depth of night” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79).

Similarly: “The water does not reveal, the phone does not ring, and the waves roar, and the emptiness stretches immensely, and dreams diminish, while the girl strives to overcome the negative meaning in the shell, her stature growing with anticipation, and the boats depart into the depths of the night” (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79). In their departure, the narrative leaves an imprint of the tragic reality of human life.

The Sea as a Space Shaping the Characters: Jamal and Nadia

The question remains, awaiting a conclusive answer: was the sea a functional space in embodying the dimensions of the story’s characters—Jamal and Nadia? The author carefully selected names connected to the sea in its color, expanse, depth, purity, awe, and the sense of order, relaxation, and harmony it inspires. *Jamal* connotes beauty and virtue; it is a masculine name meaning excellence in appearance and behavior, as well as complete adornment, reflecting good character and ethical conduct. *Nadia*, a feminine name, means “dewy” or “moist from dew or rain,” and etymologically comes from Slavic and ancient Greek roots meaning “hope.”

The storyteller endows Nadia, too, with rich, positive character traits. She writes: “The girl’s scent mingles with the scent of the sea... she rubs the handkerchief with her left hand, while her other fingers—the bitten nails—play with

the colorful shell necklace around her neck, in a kind of deep meaning of attachment, clinging, honesty, and submission..." (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76). Nadia's psychological states unfold across morning and evening, revealing a range of emotions: joy, fear, and anxiety due to solitude. Alone without a sail, she cannot bear to hear Fairuz's voice by herself and lacks the courage to do so. Yet, despite herself, she gazes at the horizon with vague anxiety, sighs, and opens her eyes in a moment of sudden awareness as the evening spills into her heart and eyes: "Her eyes overflowed with salty water, flowing into the sea; the water mingled with water, dissolved in water, a special message she sent" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, pp. 79-80).

The author tightly controls the material and moral particularities of Nadia, presenting her as a composite of diverse emotional and behavioral responses. She is a playful, energetic child with a positive consciousness, rejecting negative readings: "The girl in the floral skirt jumps rope and then disappears each evening... she reappears on the balcony and disappears in haste, as if performing a farewell greeting, returning reassured" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76). Nadia herself affirms her rejection of negative meaning, seeing it as a choice, while positive meanings are limitless: "The girl questions and pushes away as far as possible the possibilities of negative meaning; because the sun rises filling the universe, and the sea expands... according to her readings, negative meaning is a choice, which she seeks to fight. Every wound is a treasure, granting life new significance. Wounds are streams in the expanse of their meaning, and in the multiplicity of their faces they end in the widest, infinite estuary" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76).

The events of the story are rich and diverse, often intersecting with the sea itself. They range from Nadia's solitary play—"The girl in the floral skirt jumps rope"—to her playful interactions with Jamal: "The boy accelerates while the girl slows, the girl accelerates while the boy slows... a game of shadow and light, dream and wakefulness." The events unfold within the sea's calm and playful waters, enjoying its sand and shells: "Circles beget circles, and the girl follows the labyrinth in a kind of relaxation, her senses numbed" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76). Her fingers play with a colorful shell necklace as noted above, while the pivotal event involves the departure of the sailors' boats: "They ventured inward into the dark blue, the somber color, the secrets, the spoils, and doom" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 79).

From the narrator's perspective, the sea remains an expressive, procedural tool, rich in aesthetic qualities, designed to reach the reader's heart emotionally and influence their mind persuasively.

Beyond the Centrality of the Sea

Just as water—"rivers, seas, oceans"—covers two-thirds of the Earth's surface, it occupies a significant place in Algerian narrative space, serving as a setting in which events unfold, characters move, and parts of the text interweave, while also engaging the reader. The sea functions as a symbol of life's dynamism and vitality, even under the constant awareness of its dangers and perils. Yet this does not prevent the girl in the floral skirt from immersing herself in the sea and relaxing in its waters despite her anxiety and lack of courage, nor does it prevent the boy from riding its waves in pursuit of treasures and secrets.

The sea emerges as a distinguishing marker in the formation of Algerian women's narrative, specifically in the work of the storyteller Samia Ben Dris. Despite the brevity of her story, it is dense with vocabulary and phrases evoking the sea: shells, water, the expanse of the sea, boats, blue hues, waves, ebb and flow, and the roar of surf. This reflects the female author's fascination with and love for the sea, as a space of rest, serenity, reflection, and emotional release—a space she cherishes and seeks to embrace whenever life's harshness overwhelms her. She attempts to explore this captivating, vast domain through her own self, employing her senses consciously to capture images and scenes that overflow with poetic resonance.

Since the sea functions as a narrative theme intertwined with place and connected to human experience, it becomes, in her imagination, a symbol of growth, purity, freshness, and life. In Samia Ben Dris's storytelling imagination, the sea—through its scent and movement—takes on humanized qualities, connecting deeply with the essence of the self. She constructs this imaginary world with all the procedural tools at her disposal, intensifying its symbolic and semantic dimensions, thus creating a unique aesthetic quality in a horizon imbued with meaning. This reveals the psychological and human depth of the girl, whose being roots itself in the sea as she sets her feet in its waters, adorns herself with a shell necklace, and breathes in its scent. Likewise, the boy, Jamal, identifies with the sea in its particularities, leading him to reflection and contemplation: "Water existed before language; that is, in the beginning there was water—thus one ought to say—right?"

The Enduring Role of the Sea in Samia Ben Dris's Narrative

"...And I dream of holding an exhibition for it, to restore its due credit... naturally for it" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 78). This narrative passage unveils the emotional state of the protagonist, Jamal, whose love for the sea elevates him to a plane of emotional and cognitive transcendence. He perceives himself as a thinker correcting misconceptions, striving to restore order and purify human consciousness from the impurities of life by ascending to alternative

realms that reestablish balance and identity. All these qualities distinguish Jamal's character, revealing his temperament and behavior, and making his image tangible in the reader's mind. As Ceza Qassem (1985, p. 115) observes, "the life of a character is explained by the nature of the place to which it is connected."

While the author's engagement with the sea energizes her writing, it simultaneously enriches the interpretive experience of the reader, especially when the story addresses the existential issue of sailors confronting dangers to secure their livelihood—a perennial concern of the human condition. In *Light Blue... Dark Blue*, the presence of the sea manifests from the very cover, which artistically reflects the watery environment through hues drawn from the sky's blue, the green of grass, and sunlight filtering through leaves, stimulating the reader's desire to engage with the text. The opening of the story serves as "a threshold that functions as a bridge between two essential moments: silence and speech" (Abdelmalek Ashbahoun, 2013, p. 34). This is evident in the depiction of the protagonists, where words condense into gestures conveying much beyond speech:

"The girl in the floral skirt jumps rope and disappears as evening falls. The tall, silent boy watches her between the mulberry leaves, his gaze reaching the garden, then the window where the curtain moves lightly. The girl reappears on the balcony, disappearing again in haste as if performing a farewell gesture; he returns reassured" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 76).

The sea, with its mesmerizing beauty, inspires the narrator's imagination, allowing her to infuse it with profound emotional resonance. It provides abundant symbolic material: shells, coral reefs, seaweed, the ebb and flow of water, each detail generating layers of meaning. The intertwining of the sea with the narrator and her characters motivates the renewal of life itself:

"The girl returns home each evening, looks toward the balcony as a habit, moves the curtain, the evening spills in, streetlights glow, and her candles extinguish" (Samia Ben Dris, 2012, p. 78). "Tomorrow the tears will meet in the open sea—her evening tears and his night tears—melting into the water; yet they will come to know the identity of this water, the water will recognize the water, and its particles will merge... In the beginning, there was water..."

Thus, the sea remains a central element in the artistic construction of the narrative. Within its domain, characters act, express themselves, and derive extraordinary vitality that transforms ordinary individuals into heroes endowed with charisma, even amid the sea's potential perils. The theme of the sea engages with fundamental human concerns—both tangible and intangible—and holds a place in collective memory and the personal memory of the creator. By animating the sea with human traits and investing it with narrative significance, the author transforms it into a refuge for the weary and the lovers, a source of both challenges and solace. The sea becomes a space where the creative mind can dive to uncover treasures, gathering its water, sand, pearls, and shells to weave tales, stories, and novels whose thematic richness and aesthetic beauty know no bounds for the reader.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that maritime space in Samia Ben Dris's short story functions as a complex and dynamic narrative mechanism that transcends its conventional role as a physical setting. Rather than serving as a mere backdrop for events, the sea emerges as an active agent that shapes narrative progression, character psychology, and thematic development. This aligns with contemporary narratological perspectives, which conceptualize space as an integral component of narrative structure (Bal, 2009; Herman, 2002).

From a semiotic standpoint, the sea operates as a multilayered signifying system, generating meanings through its interplay with linguistic, visual, and sensory elements. The repeated use of maritime imagery—such as waves, shells, and chromatic variations—creates a dense symbolic network that reflects the dual nature of the sea as both a source of life and a site of existential uncertainty. This duality resonates with Lotman's (1990) notion of cultural semiospheres, within which meaning is produced through the interaction of contrasting elements.

The analysis also demonstrates that the sea plays a crucial role in mediating the relationship between text and reader. Through the use of descriptive density, repetition, and sensory imagery, the narrative invites readers to engage actively in the process of interpretation. This supports Iser's (1978) theory of aesthetic response, which emphasizes the reader's role in actualizing textual meaning. The indeterminacy of the sea's symbolic function allows for multiple interpretations, thereby enhancing the text's openness and interpretive richness.

Moreover, the anthropomorphization of the sea contributes to its narrative centrality, transforming it into a quasi-character with emotional and psychological attributes. This technique not only intensifies the aesthetic experience but also reinforces the interconnectedness between human and natural worlds. As Bachelard (1994) suggests, such representations enable literature to explore the intimate relationship between space and human consciousness, revealing deeper layers of meaning.

The study further highlights the importance of sensory imagery in constructing the narrative's aesthetic framework. Auditory, visual, and tactile elements combine to create an immersive experience that engages the reader's

imagination and emotional response. This aligns with Ryan's (2014) concept of narrative immersion, which underscores the role of sensory detail in enhancing reader engagement.

Finally, the findings suggest that maritime space functions as an epistemological framework through which broader themes—such as identity, memory, and human existence—are articulated. The sea becomes a site of reflection and transformation, enabling characters and readers alike to confront fundamental questions about life, loss, and belonging. In this sense, the narrative transcends its immediate context, offering insights into universal human experiences.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that maritime space in Samia Ben Dris's narrative operates as a central aesthetic and epistemological construct, shaping the text's narrative structure, symbolic meaning, and readerly engagement. By integrating perspectives from spatial narratology, semiotics, and reception theory, the research provides a comprehensive analysis of the sea as a dynamic and multifaceted narrative element. The findings confirm that space in literary discourse cannot be reduced to a passive setting; rather, it functions as an active agent that influences all aspects of the narrative. The sea, in particular, embodies a rich spectrum of meanings, reflecting its dual nature as a source of harmony and conflict, stability and transformation. This duality enhances its capacity to generate complex interpretations and to engage readers in a process of continuous meaning-making. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader field of literary studies by highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in analyzing narrative space. By bridging theoretical frameworks and textual analysis, it offers new insights into the role of space in shaping literary experience and interpretation. From a practical perspective, the research underscores the significance of spatial analysis in understanding contemporary narrative forms, particularly in contexts where cultural, psychological, and aesthetic dimensions intersect. It also opens avenues for future research, including comparative studies of spatial representation across different literary traditions and the exploration of digital and multimodal narrative environments.

In conclusion, maritime space in Ben Dris's work exemplifies the transformative potential of literary space, demonstrating how physical environments can be reimagined as powerful sites of aesthetic expression and intellectual inquiry. Through its intricate interplay of form, meaning, and reception, the narrative invites readers to engage deeply with the text, reaffirming the enduring relevance of space as a fundamental category of literary analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in full compliance with internationally recognized ethical standards for research and publication. As the research is based on literary analysis and does not involve human participants, animals, or confidential data, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, the study adheres to the ethical principles outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics, including integrity, transparency, and academic honesty. All sources have been appropriately cited, and the work respects intellectual property rights and academic integrity norms.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, without any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could influence the outcomes or interpretations presented in this study.

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Data Availability Statement

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