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## ANTIGUAS PERSPECTIVAS EN EL DISCURSO MODERNO: TÓPICOS LITERARIOS EN LA BÚSQUEDA DE LA PAZ\*

### *Ancient Insights in Modern Discourse: Literary Topoi in the Pursuit of Peace*

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RESUMEN: Este estudio explora un aspecto significativo del análisis de los tópicos literarios, que permite la conexión de textos de diversos trasfondos culturales, históricos y literarios. Basándose en una investigación previa sobre la posición de los tópicos en los estudios de literatura comparada, el objetivo de la presente investigación es ilustrar cómo estos conceptos recurrentes tienen la capacidad de relacionar textos de diferentes contextos. Esto facilita un intercambio significativo entre los lectores, mejorando la comprensión de ideas compartidas y potencialmente contribuyendo a la paz y a la concordia. Además, este estudio revela que la presencia de los tópicos se extiende más allá del ámbito de la literatura y puede encontrarse en diversos medios culturales como la televisión o el cine. Para respaldar estos argumentos, el análisis se centra en

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la representación de la «locura del amor» en una serie de televisión iraní llamada *Shabrazad* (2015), dirigida por Hassan Fathi, y en la obra teatral estadounidense *A Electra le sienta bien el luto* (1931) de Eugene O'Neill. Al rastrear sus orígenes hasta el *Otelo* de Shakespeare, a su vez profundamente influenciado por la literatura clásica occidental, este análisis destaca el impacto perdurable de los tópicos a lo largo de diferentes períodos y contextos culturales.

*Palabras clave:* tópicos; literatura comparada; locura del amor; serie iraní; Eugene O'Neill; literatura y cine.

**ABSTRACT:** This study explores a significant aspect in the analysis of literary topoi, which involves connecting texts from diverse cultural, historical, and literary backgrounds. Building upon a previous investigation into the position of topoi in comparative literature studies, the aim of the present research is to illustrate how these recurring concepts can bridge texts from different contexts. This facilitates a meaningful exchange among readers, enhancing the comprehension of shared ideas and potentially contributing to peace and harmony. Furthermore, this study reveals that the presence of topoi extends beyond the realm of literature and can be found in diverse cultural mediums such as television or cinema. To support these arguments, the analysis focuses on the portrayal of «madness of love» in an Iranian television series called *Shabrazad* (2015), directed by Hassan Fathi, and in the American play *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) by Eugene O'Neill. By tracing their origins to Shakespeare's *Othello*, itself highly influenced by western classical literature, this analysis highlights the enduring impact of topoi across different periods and cultural contexts.

*Key words:* Topoi; Comparative Literature; Madness of love; Iranian Series; Eugene O'Neill; Literature and cinema.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Topoi, as conceptual contents rooted in the tradition, continue to exert influence over modern literature and culture. Curtius, who first introduced topoi to literary studies in 1948, aptly described them as «rhetorical commonplaces» due to their repetitive nature and ideological implications (1983, xiii). In Aristotelian discourse, topoi served a rhetorical function that remains intrinsic to their essence (Gómez Luque 2018, 30-31). Topoi have consistently been renowned for their recurrence and vital rhetorical functions. Far from being merely decorative elements, they serve a crucial purpose in enriching the text, guiding the reader, and effectively conveying ideas (see Leeman 1982, 189; Curtius 1983, 79; Márquez Guerrero 2002, 254-255; Escobar Chico 2000, 141-142; Laguna Mariscal 2014, 27; Gómez Luque 2018, 50).

Topoi are characterized by their enduring presence throughout the history of literature within each specific cultural background<sup>1</sup>. Tracing their exact origins can be challenging due to the prevalence of oral tradition, but acknowledging their recurring nature is of utmost significance for the verification of their topicality. The veracity of topoi in specific contexts can be ascertained by examining their syntactical development and evolution within the same cultural tradition. Consequently, the exploration of topoi aligns with the objectives of comparative literature, encompassing elements of «parallelism», «development», «evolution», and «comparison» (Nazemi 2022b, 188). Through this process, intertextual connections can be observed between texts that incorporate similar topoi, further enriching the understanding of their cultural and literary contexts.

Considering this hypothesis, topoi possess the potential to forge connections among texts of varied origins, irrespective of whether they exhibit any factual correlation. Should such connections exist, according to Genette's theory of intertextuality, the relationship adopts a «hypertextual» nature. Conversely, if the author has not directly drawn influence from a given source, we can explore «architextual» relationships between texts that incorporate similar topoi (1997, xix). López Martínez finds this relationship even more intriguing than the factual connection between authors (2007, 11). Importantly, it is the readers who ultimately delineate and decipher these intricate connections. In that case, we deal with a comparative approach to literature and not with a study on tradition or influence. This observation holds significance as it contributes to addressing our social and political challenges. Topoi can guide us in identifying connections between texts originating from various geographical, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, thereby fostering a dialogue between distant cultures and ideologies. This dialogical approach aligns with the main objectives of comparative and interdisciplinary studies, particularly the American school of comparative literature (see Nazemi 2022b, 177-178). This school advocates «the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country» (Remak 1961, 3) and additionally contributes to the process of globalization<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, much like literary adaptations<sup>3</sup>, topics represent formalized manifestations of universal experiences in different cultural traditions

1. For the definition of topoi see Laguna Mariscal (1999, 2022), Escobar (2000, 2006).

2. See Saussy's discussion on the topos «China and the world» and its relationship to globalization (2007).

3. Both topoi and adaptations encapsulate traditional concepts in modern forms, facilitating a dialogue in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, between distinct literary pieces. Hutcheon draws upon Bakhtin's concepts to elucidate that adaptations establish a link to recognizable

that have survived through successive generations. This notion resonates with Highet's assertion that «Our modern world is in many ways a continuation of the world of Greece and Rome» (1951, 1). This statement remains intriguing as it serves as a reminder that our contemporary life is not entirely novel but rather a continuation of antiquity. Throughout each literary history, these ideas have remained prevalent, enabling us to examine how characters from diverse cultures have addressed them. Through studying their approaches, we can draw lessons from their successes or learn from their mistakes. Such intertextual analysis not only enhances our understanding of an author's work but also fosters political harmony among nations with distinct backgrounds. In other words, by recognizing shared ideas, readers can forge connections and gain an appreciation for other cultures, understanding that those cultures have also grappled with similar subjects, attitudes, and life experiences. This objective remains central and vital to comparative research studies (see Nazemi 2023a).

To illustrate this, let us consider «the madness of love». This topos depicts the overwhelming nature of love, which can lead to irrational behaviour driven by intense passion, anger, or jealousy. In narratives incorporating this topos, the lover becomes possessive of their beloved and cannot tolerate any actions they perceive as betrayal. This obsession may be depicted through images of fury, frustration, or violence. Consequently, when the lover suspects any behaviour that contradicts their ideals of love and loyalty, they may act impulsively and irrationally, resorting to actions such as verbal attacks, physical violence, suicide, or even murder. This portrayal highlights the blindness and lack of rational thinking that accompanies such intense emotions.

In western classical literature, the term *furor amoris* is employed to characterize the madness of love. In Euripides's tragic play *Medea* and its subsequent adaptations, Medea, overwhelmed by Jason's betrayal, commits the horrific act of murdering their own children. In various Greek and Latin narratives, characters like Phaedra feature: she, in her despair, chooses suicide to tarnish Hippolytus's reputation and seeks revenge for his rejection.

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existing works, and this link constitutes a part of their «formal» or «hermeneutic identity» (Hutcheon 2013, 21). Nevertheless, while literary adaptations are frequently the result of a conscious endeavour (170), the evolution of classical topoi within modern texts can transpire unintentionally as well. That is the reason why earlier in our discussion on topoi, we alluded to Genette's distinctions between «hypertextual» and «architextual» links, depending on whether a work has been directly influenced by another or has evolved organically without conscious or direct efforts. For the definition of adaptations see Sanders (2006, 18) and Hutcheon (2013, 170).

In Virgil's epic *Aeneid*, Dido tragically ends her own life after being abandoned by her lover, and in Ovid's narrative poem *Metamorphoses*, tales such as those of Scylla and Polyphemus showcase acts of murder driven by passionate jealousy and anger. Instances of this literary topos abound within western classical texts<sup>4</sup>. As we can see, love-driven madness can manifest in various ways, even escalating to tragic actions such as homicide and suicide. Moreno Soldevila delves into the historical roots of *furor amoris* within the Roman tradition (2011, 245-248). In the context of ancient Rome, instances of physical violence arising from jealousy were sometimes construed as evidence of genuine affection and consequently deemed permissible (Laguna Mariscal 2011, 367). It is, therefore, unsurprising that this topos, serving as a mirror of human emotions, plays a significant and notable role within literary works in each cultural tradition.

Now, let us consider the potential of taking an Eastern text which offers a distinct contemporary representation of this universal experience, and comparing it with Western works that have been politically distant from one another. As such, we are dealing with a universal experience, that have different literary crystallizations in distant cultures. As an example, over the years, the Iran-USA political enmity has been evident. Exploring shared concepts and experiences in cultural productions from these distant cultures could potentially foster dialogue between their readers. Madness of love finds a notable adaptation in both the Iranian series *Shahrzad* (2015-2018) and the American trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931). The selection of *Shahrzad* as a television series also highlights the idea that the presence of topoi extends beyond literature<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. SHAHRZAD AND OTHELLO: EXPLORING BONDS

The Iranian television series *Shahrzad* delves into a variety of narratives that explore this recurring topos. Notably, the central characters—Shahrzad, Farhad, and Ghobad—form a complex love triangle that serves as a focal point

4. For studies on the reception of *furor amoris* see Chen Sham (2010) and Cabello Pino (2018, 68-73).

5. Most scholarly research on topoi focuses on western classical or modern literature, neglecting other art forms such as cinema, music, and advertising. For some studies on topoi in cultural productions refer to Ramírez de Verger (2001), Martín Rodríguez (2010; 2014, 43-45), González Vaquerizo (2016), Laguna Mariscal (2019, 137), Vega (2018), Invernón Martínez (2020) and Nazemi (2023a, 2024).

for this motif. Shahrzad and Farhad have shared a profound romantic connection over the years, yet irresistible circumstances force Shahrzad into a marriage with Ghobad, the son of a wealthy mafia, to safeguard Farhad. As the storyline unfolds, Shahrzad finds herself compelled to sever ties with Ghobad, a decision imposed against the couple's true wishes. After the divorce, she resolves to reunite with Farhad, her beloved, and formalize their union. This course of action intensifies Ghobad's anger, driving him down a path of revenge and persecution against Farhad. In doing so, he aims to penalize Shahrzad for her rejection and rekindle her fondness. He intermittently thwarts Shahrzad's opportunities to see her son or harbours intentions of meddling with Farhad's career, potentially leading to Farhad losing his job.

In parallel, the series interweaves a secondary narrative that revolves around a couple intimately connected to Farhad and Shahrzad. This pair also grapples with the tumultuous emotions of madness of love, which is perhaps more related to our discussion here. Babak, a literature student, becomes increasingly suspicious of his fiancé's involvement with a militant named Teymouri. Every evening, as they perform their roles on the theatre stage, Teymouri takes his place among the audience. He arrives bearing bouquets of flowers for Maryam, Babak's fiancée. Teymouri pretends to make efforts to dissuade the government from banning the play, all with the aim of inspiring Maryam and capturing her attention. Ultimately, Maryam becomes weary of Babak's jealousy and allured by Teymouri, expresses her aspirations for career growth, and makes the decision to end her relationship with Babak.

Babak's suspicions are seemingly validated when he observes Maryam and Teymouri walking together down the street. During this encounter, Teymouri is seen offering a wedding ring to Maryam as part of a marriage proposal. This triggers a strong wave of anger and jealousy in Babak. In a fit of rage, Babak confronts them and shoots Teymouri. Amidst a heated altercation, Teymouri's attempt at retaliation results in a tragic outcome: an accidental shot takes the life of Maryam, Babak's fiancée, who valiantly shielded Babak. The loss of his beloved leaves Babak shattered, burdened by remorse and guilt, ultimately driving him to take his own life.

This reinterpretation takes its creative cues from Shakespeare's *Othello*, as each evening in Tehran, Babak and Maryam also bring forth a rendition of this theatrical masterpiece, and intriguingly, the tapestry of the play begins to interweave with their personal lives<sup>6</sup>. Parallels emerge between

6. We are indeed witnessing a transcultural adaptation or appropriation (in Hutcherson's terms) of *Othello* in *Shahrzad*, evident in both the love triangle involving Shahrzad, Ghobad, and Farhad, as well as Babak, Maryam, and Teymouri (see Nazemi 2022a, 202-207; also, Yazdanjoo, Asadi Amjad and Shahpoori Arani 2018, 9).

Shakespeare's story and their own reality, where a profound connection is established. In both worlds—Shakespeare's realm and their own—there runs a shared theme of profound jealousy, unrestrained fury, a sorrowful downfall, and ultimately, a self-inflicted tragedy that envelops the lovers.

In the discussions about the origins of *furor amoris* in western classical literature, we noted that, within the Roman tradition, instances of violent actions stemming from jealousy could be taken as evidence of love. Curiously, Othello touches upon this very notion when, following his role in the sorrowful demise of Desdemona, he claims that his feelings were not driven by jealousy but rather by an overwhelming love: «Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely, but too well; / Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, / Perplexed in the extreme» (5.2.403-406)<sup>7</sup>. Both lovers cause (directly or indirectly) the murder of their beloveds driven by the overwhelming and maddening power of love. However, there is a clear difference: Othello deliberately commits the murder of his wife, whereas Babak's intention is not to kill his beloved but rather the rival, though the outcome ultimately unfolds in the opposite manner. In both works, the victims are denied sufficient time to establish their innocence, as the lovers hastily pass judgment based on minor details (the handkerchief in *Othello*, 3.4 and the wedding ring in *Shahrzad*).

So far, our primary focus has been on the narrative of Babak and Maryam, yet a similar dynamic unfolds in the triangle involving Shahrzad, Farhad, and Ghobad. During her marriage to Ghobad, Shahrzad coincidentally encounters Farhad in a coffee shop. Broken-hearted over the loss of a new lover, Farhad inadvertently shatters a vase on the table. Moved to help, Shahrzad offers her handkerchief to stem any potential bleeding. Unbeknownst to them, this gesture is witnessed by someone close to Ghobad. Incensed by what he perceives as betrayal, Ghobad erupts in anger, convinced that Shahrzad has been unfaithful. However, embodying the traits of a modern, educated, and empowered woman who values communication, Shahrzad attempts to explain the situation to Ghobad, thereby resolving the conflict (see Yazdanjoo, Asadi Amjad and Shahpoori Arani 2018, 9-11). This mode of open communication and dialogue to address issues is notably absent in the stories of Babak and Othello, as they deny their loved ones the opportunity to clarify and reconcile. In both Othello and Babak there is a lack of patience for their loved ones' justifications or explanations; instead, they act hastily based on appearances. Both characters are ardent lovers who cannot

7. For discussions on Othello's jealousy see Mussari (2010, 84-86) and Holmer (2010, 210-211).

imagine life without their beloved partners. Tragically, both characters ultimately succumb to suicide due to overwhelming guilt. Nonetheless, distinct contrasts emerge; as mentioned earlier, Othello's act of killing Desdemona stems from a punitive motive, whereas the unfortunate death of Maryam is entirely accidental. Adding to this, Desdemona remains guiltless of any unfaithful deeds (5.2), whereas Maryam begins to initiate a relationship with Teymouri after her separation from Babak.

Hassan Fathi, the director of *Shahrzad*, draws inspiration from Shakespeare's elements while crafting the script for the series, but was Shakespeare innovative in his writing of *Othello*? Shakespeare's profound familiarity with classical Greek and Roman literature is evident in numerous aspects of his works. He was inspired by a variety of sources, incorporating themes and characters from Greek tragedies, as well as from Roman history (as seen in historical plays like *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*). Additionally, he frequently utilized classical myth in his plays, showcasing his deep knowledge of classical literature. Specifically, Shakespeare's engagement with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is noteworthy, as it provided him with a rich source of inspiration (Taylor 2000). Ovid's exploration of concepts like the madness of love resonated with Shakespeare, and examples of this recurring motif can be observed in Shakespeare's works, such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, among the others.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* illustrates intense emotional outbursts driven by jealousy upon discovering one's beloved in the company of another (Nazemi 2022b, 186). Throughout Ovid's narrative poetry, numerous instances of *furor amoris*<sup>8</sup> are evident. Noteworthy is the tale of Polyphemus, Galatea, and Acis (Book XIII, 750-903)<sup>9</sup>, which closely parallels Babak and Maryam's subplot in *Shahrzad*. In Ovid's Latin poetic tradition, the envious suitor resorts to killing his rival upon witnessing him with his cherished partner. Polyphemus's actions lead to profound distress and desolation for Galatea (Nazemi 2022b, 186; 2023b, 1035).

Both Shakespeare's play and the Iranian series share elements with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, specifically when they focus on the portrayal of intense reactions driven by jealousy upon discovering a beloved with someone else. Additionally, both Maryam and Galatea attempt to rescue their loved ones: Maryam leaps to protect Babak, while Galatea returns

8. The classical term is deliberately employed here to underscore Shakespeare's adherence to the classical tradition.

9. Certainly, Ovid's storytelling is also a reimagining of the myth of Polyphemus, which has its roots in Ancient Greece. This tale was recounted by Homer and Philoxenus of Cythera.



to transform Acis into a Sicilian river: «sed sic quoque erat tamen Acis, in amnem / versus, et antiquum tenuerunt flumina nomen» (1892, 13.896-897). However, notable disparities also exist in the particulars of these stories, exemplifying the workings of polygenesis in the evolution of topoi, due to the cultural tradition in which they are based<sup>10</sup>. For example, Acis genuinely loves Galatea (XIII.754), while Teymouri is merely an infatuated middle-aged man fixated on a young woman, lacking true love. Galatea harbours animosity toward the Cyclops (XIII.758), whereas Maryam loves Babak and is only attracted to Teymouri for his social status, seeing it as a way to improve her own position and success in a male-dominated society (see Nazemi 2022a, 205). Maryam is depicted with Teymouri in the context of a marriage proposal, while Galatea is shown with Acis in a purely romantic scene, as expressed by the lines «senserunt undae; latitans ego rupe meique / Acidis in gremio residens procul auribus hausit» (XIII.786-787)<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, *Shahrzad* follows on the footsteps of Shakespeare by portraying the tumultuous nature of love, thereby establishing an intertextual link between the two works. This also exemplifies the literary crystallization of this experience within the diachronic framework of distinct cultures, what we could call a literary appropriation. Thus, we can address the notion of «tradition», as we acknowledge *Shahrzad's* debt to *Othello* as well as Ovid's influence on Shakespeare, or the influence of western classical literature, in general, on the English bard. Consequently, the development of a topos can allow readers with literary knowledge to view and compare three texts from diverse historical and cultural backgrounds: a contemporary Iranian television series, a Renaissance English tragedy, and an ancient Latin narrative poem.

### 3. SHAHRZAD AND AMERICAN DRAMA?

Now, revisiting our earlier discussion, what if we were to consider a connection between this Iranian production and an American text, despite their temporal and cultural disparities? Undoubtedly, the madness of love,

10. The recreation of topoi can arise from genetic inheritance or the concept of «polygenesis» (see Escobar 2000, 138; Laguna Mariscal 2013, 208). As such, the appearance of topoi can result from direct influence, a natural literary process (see Nazemi and Laguna Mariscal 2022, 400), or even a combination of both. In the case of polygenesis, we are not dealing with distinct topoi but variations of the same topos.

11. «And I behind a rock, / Hidden and lying in my Acis's arms» (Ovid 2008, XIII.786-787).

being a universal human experience, can manifest in myriad representations and variations. Lovers consumed by passion may display a spectrum of behaviours. Eugene O'Neill's 20th-century American trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, adeptly illustrates this topos, presenting both similarities and distinctive interpretations. This trilogy is notably an adaptation of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (Asselineau 1958; Beşe 2001; Black 2004) but echoes numerous narratives through the incorporation of Greco-Roman schemes, motifs and topoi<sup>12</sup>.

In this trilogy, Orin is deeply infatuated with his mother, Christine, while Lavinia develops strong feelings for her father, Ezra. These infatuations lead Orin and Lavinia to suspect that there might be an illicit relationship between Christine and Adam Brant. To confirm their suspicions, they start secretly observing their mother's actions. Orin's doubts are confirmed when he witnesses a romantic moment between Christine and Brant (O'Neill 1988, 2.IV). «Overwhelmed with jealousy» (Dowling 2009, 373) and encouraged by his sister Lavinia, Orin tragically shoots the man he finds in a romantic encounter with Christine (O'Neill 1988, 2.IV.994-995). This event occurs after Christine abruptly leaves the scene. Upon learning about the death of her lover, Christine is overwhelmed by despair and quickly takes her own life (2.V.1002). This heart-wrenching incident becomes the catalyst for Orin's downfall. He finds it increasingly difficult to cope with life without his love, and the burden of guilt over Christine's death weighs heavily on him. This tragic sequence of events sets the stage for Orin's eventual downfall (3.III.1043)<sup>13</sup>.

Evidently, both the Iranian and American narratives adhere to a common narrative pattern, though in distinct ways. That is why, earlier in our discussion, we mentioned that we are dealing with different literary expressions or appropriations of a shared experience framed in different cultural traditions. In both stories, lovers driven to madness by their affection end up committing violent acts that lead to the demise of their loved ones, and overwhelmed by guilt, they ultimately resort to suicide. Numerous parallels can be drawn in the progression of this topos in the two texts, which stem from distinct cultural backgrounds. Both Maryam and Christine find themselves unable to defend against the accusations made by their envious

12. For instance, consider how the motif of murder driven by love connects O'Neill's tragedies to the narratives of Medea (Nazemi 2022b, 186-188). Alternatively, observe the way in which the transformation of love from hatred reflects Homer's *Iliad* (Nazemi and Laguna Mariscal 2022, 411-412).

13. For a discussion on madness caused by guilt in O'Neill's trilogy see Nazemi, Maliki and Laguna Mariscal (2022, 205-206).

admirers. Interestingly, both are discovered outdoors in the company of their lovers and they both plan to start anew with their new partners<sup>14</sup>. Maryam, originating from the more conservative Iranian Islamic culture that prohibits relationships outside of marriage, demonstrates a greater sense of modesty. This is evident when contrasting the famous kissing scene between Christine and Brant in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (2.IV.989) with *Shahrzad's* portrayal of Maryam, who timidly discourages Teymouri from getting too close and apprehensively surveys the street, fearing societal judgment for walking alongside an unfamiliar man.

A crucial similarity arises in the depiction of this experience in these two works, which is absent in *Othello*. Orin and Babak never intend to kill their respective love interests; their actions are driven solely by circumstances beyond their control. Maryam's demise is an unintended result of Teymouri's accidental gunshot, while Christine's death is a result of her own choice to end her life. Nevertheless, it is indeed accurate that the actions of the lovers significantly contribute to the demise of their beloved. Interestingly, both narratives involve the use of a firearm for both murder and suicide. However, as the stories unfold, it becomes apparent that Teymouri is merely wounded and not deceased, while Adam Brant's fate is doomed to death.

While it is captivating to examine the similarities and disparities in the portrayal of passionate love in these two works, what is even more intriguing is their shared adherence to an older narrative structure, found in Shakespeare's *Othello*, itself influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Once again, the archetype of a Polyphemus-like character emerges within the narrative of Orin. This character, much like the one from Ovid's myth, enters the scene unexpectedly after encountering the enamoured couple, injecting an element of surprise into the storyline. The intensity of his jealousy has the power to swiftly obstruct «rational thinking», driving him to carry out an impulsive and violent act (Nazemi 2022b, 188). Strikingly, his intention is not to fatally harm his beloved, but rather to inflict emotional anguish upon her, thereby exacting a form of punishment (188).

The cherished female characters find themselves powerless to defend against the irrational anger of the envious figure. This dynamic creates a fascinating parallel structure, one that ultimately converges back to ancient sources, whether organically evolved within these narratives or influenced directly or indirectly. This exploration serves to underscore the enduring

14. Following the murder of her husband, Christine intends to run away with Adam Brant (O'Neill 1988, 2.IV.992-992).

nature of these thematic concepts, revealing that they have existed for an extensive period. Moreover, this comparative analysis encourages a deeper investigation into the contextual backdrop that birthed these two literary works. It raises the question of how the circumstances surrounding their creation facilitated the emergence of such profound subjects. For instance, in Babak's story, the central concern revolves around financial stability, leading him to lose his beloved to Teymouri, a prosperous general, against the backdrop of the 1953 Iranian coup d'état and its ensuing political upheaval. On the other hand, O'Neill's focus is similarly drawn to the upheaval and despair spawned by the American Civil War, magnifying the characters' frustrations. In essence, both stories delve into the impact of political tumult on the intricate fabric of familial relationships.

The cultural backdrop in which these works were produced holds significant sway over their interpretation and significance. Delving into Christine, we encounter a portrayal of extramarital relationships from a Western perspective. Conversely, in the case of *Shahrzad*, the narrative unfolds against a distinct backdrop. Although set in the pre-Islamic revolution era, its reception is shaped by the Islamic revolution, subjecting it to the constraints and regulations governing cinema and television during this time (see Nazemi 2022a, 206). Consequently, we shift our focus from the archetypal pre-marriage romantic entanglements like Galatea's, the false accusations of infidelity towards Desdemona, or Christine's illicit affair, to a young woman negotiating a formal marriage proposal. Teymouri's interactions with Maryam reflect a notable pattern. She deliberately avoids addressing him by his first name or using the familiar form of address (singular «you» or «تو» (*To*) in Persian), consistently opting for politeness, maintaining a certain physical distance, and avoiding any extremes. Babak's reaction, too, is partially shaped by the traditional concept of masculine honour (*Gheyrat*) prevalent in society, which compels men to safeguard their female loved ones from the advances of other men. This exploration of topoi further encourages us to scrutinize and contrast the nuances of gender constructs across these two cultural milieus.

O'Neill's profound connection to both Shakespeare and western classical literature is well-documented by the critics (see for example, Berlin 2000 and Khare 1998). His familiarity with these works permeates his writing, as evidenced by the presence of Shakespearean texts in the background of his most renowned play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Additionally, O'Neill's personal diary entries reveal his engagement with classical literature while crafting this trilogy (Black 2004, 169-172). Thus, the recurrence of the madness of love can be interpreted through the lens of Genette's definition of hypertextuality, signifying a lineage of influence from Shakespeare and

ancient Greco-Roman literature. However, when examining the relationship between *Shabrzad* and O'Neill's play, we encounter a different dynamic. While both may have drawn inspiration from Shakespeare and, by extension, from Ovid, there is no evidence indicating a direct influence of O'Neill's work on *Shabrzad*. Consequently, the connection between Fathi's production and O'Neill's play may be better understood in architextual terms, perceived by the readers. Both represent a shared phenomenon adhering to similar narrative structures, albeit varying in some details. As such, despite lacking factual influence from one another, they demonstrate a convergence in their representation of a universal human experience, framed in different cultural traditions.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Most scholarly investigations have cantered around classical topoi within the Western canon. Yet, topoi, as reflections of universal human experiences, emerge in diverse cultural traditions. This realization opens a promising avenue for further scholarly inquiry into how topoi are crystalized in Eastern culture as well. The examples explored in this study merely scratch the surface of the countless literary works that exhibit analogous structural elements. Attempting to compile a comprehensive list would be impossible in practice. Nevertheless, through an examination of how these shared notions and structural elements permeate culturally diverse works, we can gain valuable insights into how simple acts of comparison can foster meaningful cross-cultural dialogue.

This study has suggested that the existence of topoi across different cultures may constitute a process of appropriation. When the connection between texts in terms of the presence of a topos is not caused by a direct influence (tradition), the role of the reader becomes significant. Readers themselves can establish connections between narratives irrespective of cultural backgrounds, guided by the presence of a shared topos. This article has also illuminated how the Iranian *Shabrzad* series and the American play *Mourning Becomes Electra* draw inspiration from Shakespeare's *Othello* and further from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, it is argued that the relationship between O'Neill and Fathi's works does not stem from tradition or deliberate/direct influence. Instead, it is a connection created by the reader through their perception of a shared structure, developed in different cultural contexts.

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