ANUARI DE FILOLOGIA. LLENGÜES I LITERATURES MODERNES (Anu.Filol.Lleng.Lit.Mod.)
13/2023, pp. 117-132, ISSN: 2014-1394, DOI: 10.1344/AFLM2023.13.7

LOVE DECLARATION: FROM OVID AND SENECA TO O'NEILL

ZAHRA NAZEMI
Razi University, Kermanshah - University of Cordoba
zahra.nazemi72@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-9743-9444

NASSER MALEKI
Razi University, Kermanshah
n.maleki@razi.ac.ir
ORCID: 0000-0001-6379-3114

SHOJA TAFAKKORI REZAEI
Razi University, Kermanshah
sh.tafakkori@razi.ac.ir
ORCID: 0000-0001-5995-4165

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the literary topos of the "declaration of love" by examining its origins in selected Roman texts and its reinvigoration in Eugene O'Neill's modern play, *Anna Christie* (1921). The classical "declaration of love" is argued to encompass various stages, including admiration of the beloved, praising the lover, encouraging the pursuit of love and enjoyment of youth through marriage (*carpe diem*), expressing emotions, and extending an invitation to partnership. By analysing the recontextualization of this topos in O'Neill's four-act play, it is established that while *Anna Christie*'s plot does not directly imitate any classical myth, the incorporation of the topos can be likened to the structure found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, specifically the myth of Vertumnus and Pomona, as well as the ambiguous expression of love by Phaedra in Seneca's tragedy. Consequently, the connection between these texts is based on the presence of a shared structure (classical topos) rather than direct influence or reception.

KEYWORDS: literary topoi, love, modern American drama, Eugene O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, classical literature.

DECLARACIÓ D'AMOR: D'OVIDI I SÈNECA A O'NEILL

RESUM

Aquest treball té com a objectiu explorar el tòpic literari de la «declaració d'amor» examinant els seus orígens en textos romans seleccionats i la seva revitalització a l'obra moderna d'Eugene O'Neill, Anna Christie (1921). S'argumenta que la «declaració d'amor» clàssica engloba diverses etapes, incloent l'admiració cap a l'estimat, elogiar l'amant, fomentar la recerca de l'amor i el gaudi de la joventut a través del matrimoni (*carpe diem*), expressar emocions i estendre'n una invitació a la companyia. Mitjançant l'anàlisi de la recontextualització d'aquest tòpic a l'obra de quatre actes d'O'Neill, s'estableix que si bé la trama d'Anna Christie no imita directament cap mite clàssic, la incorporació del tòpic s'assembla a l'estructura que es troba a Les Metamorfosis d'Ovidi, específicament en el mite de Vertumno i Pomona, així com l'expressió ambigua de l'amor per

Data de recepció: 15/VI/2023
Data d'acceptació: 04/IX/2023
Data de publicació: desembre 2023

Fedra a la tragèdia de Sèneca. En conseqüència, la connexió entre aquests textos es basa en la presència d'una estructura compartida (tòpic clàssic) més que en una influència o recepció directa.

PARAULES CLAU: tòpics literaris, amor, drama nord-americà modern, Eugene O'Neill, Anna Christie, literatura clàssica.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Literary topoi play a crucial role, constituting a significant part of our daily existence. Like the air we breathe, they often go unnoticed but are deeply ingrained in life itself. These topoi permeate various aspects of our lives, from the books we read and the movies we watch to the advertisements we encounter and the expressions we use (Nazemi 2023). In essence, they function as the soundtrack of our existence.

Understanding the origin and function of literary topoi can be immensely beneficial, especially when it comes to effectively incorporating them into our speeches. By recognizing that these ideas are not novel but rather recurring motifs deeply rooted in classical literature and tradition, we can better appreciate the depth and richness of what we read and observe (Nazemi 2022b: 93).

Moreover, delving into the historical significance of these motives reveals that they are reflections of shared experiences with our ancestors, maintaining their relevance even in the contemporary era. By acknowledging this connection, we gain a deeper appreciation for the enduring aspects of human experience and the timeless subjects that continue to resonate with us today.

A literary topos refers to an idea, image, or plot scheme that is neither overly general nor overly specific, strategically positioned within a specific literary structure and evolves throughout literary history (Laguna Mariscal 1999: 201).[2] While pinpointing the precise origin of a topos remains elusive (Escobar 2000: 137-138), it is evident that they have a rich history in the classical tradition. In literary criticism, the term "topos" is occasionally employed interchangeably with "motif" (Abrams & Harpham 2015: 230). However, in a recent study, following Laguna Mariscal's definition of topoi (1999), Nazemi *et al.* (2022) clarified the distinctions between the two terms.[3] It was suggested that

[1] This article is derived from a PhD dissertation co-supervised by the University of Cordoba (Spain) and Razi University (Iran). The authors wish to express their gratitude to Professor Gabriel Laguna Mariscal for his valuable suggestions. Additionally, we extend our thanks to the SELGYC association for their generous support.

[2] My studies seek to define a literary topos, most of which follow Curtius's definition as "rhetorical commonplaces" (1983: xii). See for example, Aguiar e Silva (1972: 390), Leeman (1982: 189), Escobar (2000), and López Martínez (2007).

[3] Some critics have previously sought to distinguish between the terms "topos" and "motif". See, for example, Márquez (2002: 254-255) and López Grégoris (2021: 708). However, they avoid

literary topoi and motifs are akin in their level of concretion. However, the key distinction lies in the fact that topoi, unlike motifs, must originate from the classical tradition and continue to resurface in modern literature. Based on this proposition, we can readily classify the "declaration of love", a timeless human experience frequently portrayed in literature and the arts, as a classical topos. This topos embodies its own distinct structure and has evolved significantly throughout history.

2. LOVE DECLARATION

"Declaration of love" refers to the verbal expression of one's affection towards a loved one. It serves as a vital element in the process of courtship, aiming to convey one's feelings to the beloved and encourage them to engage in a romantic relationship (Laguna Mariscal 2011: 129). As per Laguna Mariscal's definition of topoi, a "declaration of love" carries an intermediate semantic content. It is more specific than the broader theme of love or confession, yet not as limited as a mere leitmotif. This concept finds its presence in literary works of various genres, representing a universal human experience. The underlying ideology emphasizes the significance of verbal communication as a means to foster love. The semantic content includes diverse sub-motives, such as the simple expression of emotions, enumerating love's symptoms, or delivering persuasive speeches. These expressions can be conveyed directly by the lover or through a third party acting as an intermediary (Laguna Mariscal 2011: 129). The table provided below illustrates the semantic content associated with a "declaration of love":

Level	Literary Terms	Example
General	Theme	Love, declaration, confession, etc.
Medium	Motif / Topos	Declaration of love
Specific	Sub-motifs	– Expression of love – Enumeration of love's symptoms – Deliverance of persuasive speeches

TABLE 1. The semantic content of "declaration of love"

A "declaration of love" is expressed through a specific form which includes different formal stages:

1. The subject feels attracted to or in love with someone.
2. He/she finds an opportunity to approach the beloved and express his/her feeling. In some cases, a third person mediates and informs the loved one. The declaration includes all or some of the following elements:[4]

offering in detailed characteristics of topoi as well as practical applications of the terms in literary texts.

[4] These stages are not necessarily chronological. The order may change in different representations of the topos.

a. Admiration of the beloved (normally for his/her beauty or appearance).
b. Encouragement to marriage and to take advantage of youth (*carpe diem*), which also serves a key element of invitation to marriage in classical texts.[5]
c. Self-praise of the lover in terms of moral attitudes or strength.
d. Indirect expression of love or enumeration of love symptoms.
e. Invitation to reunion, partnership, or marriage.

According to Laguna Mariscal, for a literary element to be considered a topos, it should exhibit "recurrence in the history of occidental literature" (1999: 201). This characteristic sets it apart from mere motifs. While the exact origin of a topos may remain elusive (Escobar 2000: 137), we can explore its significant representations in classical tradition to establish its recurrent nature. The table below summarizes how the "declaration of love" can be viewed as a literary topos based on Laguna Mariscal's theory:

Characteristics of a topos	"Declaration of love"
Conceptual content	– A narrowed-down theme of love – Includes various sub-motives – Possesses an underlying ideology
Literary form	– Incorporates two phases and five sub-elements
Historical tradition	– Shows recurrence in the classical tradition (works by Euripides, Homer, Ovid, Seneca, etc.) – Develops towards modern literature (O'Neill's *Anna Christie* as an example)

TABLE 2. "Declaration of love" as a literary topos

The history of love declaration in Western classical literature can be traced back to Homer. In book VI of *Odyssey*, the "declaration of love" is done through the subject's enumeration of the symptoms of love such as "amazement", "grief" and "fear":

> I marvelled long at heart, for never yet did such a tree spring up from the earth. And in like manner, lady, do I marvel at thee, and am amazed, and fear greatly to touch thy knees; but sore grief has come upon me. (Homer 1919: 6.166-170)[6]

Ovid touches upon this topos on various occasions. *Amores* I.3, for example, includes a direct "declaration of love": "Accept him that will serve thee all his youth, / Accept him that will love with spotlesse truth" (1973: I.3.5-6). In this elegy, the lover mentions his persistence and fidelity as part of his persuasive speech to encourage the beloved to accept his love (Laguna Mariscal 2021: 70):

> Non mihi mille placent, non sum desultor amoris:
> Tu mihi, siqua fides, cura perennis eris.

[5] See Laguna Mariscal's analysis of this element in Statius's *Silvae* (1994: 271).

[6] See also Laguna Mariscal (2011: 129). Traver Vera dedicates an entry to the history of "love symptoms" as an amatory motif in classical Latin literature (2011: 398-402).

Tecum, quos dederint annos mihi fila sororum,
Vivere contingat teque dolente mori! (Ovid 1907: I.3.15-18)
I love but one, and hir I love change never,
If men have Faith, lie live with thee for ever.
The yeares that fatall destenie shall give,
lie live with thee, and die, or thou shalt grieve. (Ovid 1973: I.3.15-18)

Similarly, in Book I of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Apollo addresses an eloquent speech to Daphne to persuade her into accepting his love. His effort, however, is not successful due to Daphne's determined resentment. According to this story, Cupid shoots one amorous arrow to Apollo and one spiteful arrow to Daphne. As a consequence, Apollo falls in love with Daphne, who, in turn, resents him (2008: I.482-500). In this speech, Apollo tries to achieve Daphne's trust by talking to her gently and assuring her that his intentions are not evil (1.505-524): "I am no foe to fear" (506). This attempt also fails because Cupid has already planted resentment in Daphne's heart and determined their story.

In Book XIV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, there is another elaborated demonstration of this topos. Vertumnus falls in love with Pomona's beauty (14.674-676). Pomona is devoted to gardening and does not get involved in romance: "she never felt the least desire of love" (14.648). Thus, disguising himself as an old woman, Vertumnus enters her garden and gives a persuasive speech. First, he admires the girl: "And you're more charming still" (14.659). Then he talks about the necessity of marriage and taking advantage of the time before it is late. He uses bucolic language to instruct Pomona of the necessity of marriage in young age (*carpe diem*):[7]

haec quoque, quae iuncta est, vitis requiescit in illo:
si non nupta foret, terrae acclinata iaceret.
Tu tamen exemplo non tangeris arboris huius
concubitusque fugis nec te coniungere curas.
Atque utinam velles! Helene non pluribus esset
sollicitata procis nec quae Lapitheia movit
proelia nec coniunx nimium tardantis Ulixei.
Nunc quoque, cum fugias averserisque petentes,
mille viri cupiunt et semideique deique
et quaecumque tenent Albanos numina montes. (Ovid 1892: 14.665-674)

Praising the two companions, vine and elm,
'But had the tree', he said, 'not wed the wine,
Its only value now would be its leaves.
So too this clinging vine that rests at ease
Upon the elm, had it remained unwed,

[7] A famous similar imagery was used by Robert Herrick in the poem "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (1648) which is considered one of the most popular representations of *carpe diem*:
Then be not coy, but use your time
And while ye may, go marry
For having lost but once your prime
You may forever tarry (13-16).

Would straggle prostrate, sprawling on the ground.
But you, unmoved by this tree's lesson, shun
A husband, and will link your life with none. (Ovid 2008: 14.665-672).

Vertumnus, disguised as an old woman, praises the lover and his characteristics as a young man who is faithfully in love with Pomona and would do anything to please her:

nec passim toto vagus errat in orbe:
haec loca magna colit; nec, uti pars magna procorum,
quam modo vidit, amat: tu primus et ultimus illi
ardor eris, solique suos tibi devovet annos. (Ovid 1892: 14. 680-683)

Nor does he love,
As young men mostly love, each latest girl;
You will be first and last; to you alone
He'll dedicate his life. (Ovid 2008: 14. 682-685)

It is interesting to note that in classical Latin love elegy, fidelity is considered an ideal form of love and a key component of the "declaration of love" (Laguna Mariscal 2021: 69).[8] That is perhaps one of the reasons behind Vertumnus's insistence on this code as one of the positive qualities of the suitor.

This part of the story also includes the expression of feeling by Vertumnus, though disguised as an old woman: "he only longs for you" (Ovid 2008: 14.693). Finally, after narrating tales of girls who neglected their lovers and caused their death, Vertumnus is capable of convincing Pomona to accept his proposal: "No need of force. His beauty wins the day, / As she with answering love in borne away" (14.771-770). As we can see, the speech encompasses all the stages of the topos of the "declaration of love": an invitation to marriage (in general terms), self-praise by the lover, admiration of the loved one as well as the final expression of feeling.[9]

This approach to the "declaration of love" reaches Renaissance literature. Christopher Marlowe's "The passionate Shepherd to his love" (1599), for example, includes the shepherd's invitation of the loved one with the same formal stages. In this poem, the subject enumerates the positive consequences of the reunion of the lovers in a bucolic context and encourages the beloved to reunite with him: "Then live with me and be my love" (24).[10] While its in-depth examination and analysis are beyond the scope of the present study, the reference

[8] Laguna Mariscal, for example, mentions verses from Catullus (LXXXVII) and Ovid (*Amores* I.3) where the lovers insist on their exclusive fidelity as a quality of their love (Laguna Mariscal 2021: 69-70).

[9] A similar structure is offered in Statius's *Silvae* I.2 where an invitation to marriage is presented. See (Laguna Mariscal 1994: 265-266).

[10] Critics argue that Marlowe's writing of this poem was highly influenced by Ovid for its "sensuality and wit" (Henderson 1995: 122) as well as its interrogation of "pastoral and love lyric" (Brown 2004: 114).

to this poem served to highlight the persistence of the topos towards the Renaissance period and further in modern literature.

It is important to remember that the universal nature of topoi as well as their variable extension (Escobar 2000: 138-140) allows them to develop in any literary genres. Thus, their representation is not limited to poetry. As an example, we could refer to the confession of love by Phaedra in classical Greek and Roman tragedies. In Euripides's *Hippolytus*, a text O'Neill was particularly familiar with, the "declaration of love" is done by Phaedra's nurse who plays the role of an intermediary. This is while Phaedra, "struggling with her desire and unwilling to undermine her modesty" (Roman & Roman 2010: 235) prefers not to reveal her passion:

> No, by the Gods !—foul words are thy fair words !— / No farther go: I have schooled mine heart to endure / This love: but if thou plead shame's cause so fair, / I shall be trapped in that sin which I flee. (Euripides 1912: 503-506)

Interestingly, once Hippolytus is dead, Phaedra takes full responsibility and does not blame the nurse who caused all the trouble (Gérard 1993: 34).

On the contrary, in Seneca's *Phaedra*, the lover confesses her passion directly to the beloved. According to this tragedy, Phaedra has long been passionately in love with her stepson, who hates all the women: "I hate them all. I dread and shun and curse them all. Whether from reason, instinct, blind and causeless madness, this I know – I hate" (1907: II. 566-568). Phaedra is burning with passion and desire for Hippolytus: "raging passion forces me to take the path of sin" (I.179-180).[11] However, fearing her loss of honour and his rejection, she does not dare to express her feeling.

In this tragedy, Phaedra's nurse performs part of the stages of the topos by advising Hippolytus to seek women's company. She encourages Hippolytus to take advantage of the youth and enjoy the pleasures of love before it is late (II.443-450). Later, Phaedra meets Hippolytus. She begins by enumerating the symptoms of love such as "grief" and "floods" of the soul (II.587-588), speechlessness (II. 606-607) and total change (II.668), which are all among the typical love symptoms in classical Roman texts (Traver Vera 2011: 400-402). Forced by Hippolytus's insistence and "desperate by the conflict between her guilty conscience and her love", Phaedra confesses her love indirectly hoping that Hippolytus is capable of understanding "the hidden meaning of her words" (Van der Poel 2006: 169). She states that she is madly in love, not mentioning who the beloved is:

> Pectus insanum uapor
> amorque torret. intimis saeuit ferus
> [penitus medullas atque per uenas meat]
> uisceribus ignis mersus et uenas latens

[11] Her extreme passion could be considered a form of madness. See Gill (1997: 216).

ut agilis altas flamma percurrit trabes.

my maddened heart with burning love is scorched.
My inmost marrow is devoured with love;
And through my veins and vitals steals the fire,
As when the flames through roomy holds of ships
Run dating. (Seneca 1907: 640-644)

A similar case occurs in Phaedra's epistolary speech in Ovid's *Heroides*: "am burning with love within; I am burning, and my breast has an unseen wound" (1914: IV.15-20). In both examples, the speakers describe the experiences of love similar to a physical illness.

In Seneca's tragedy, Phaedra's speech is unclear and confusing for Hippolytus, who supposes that she is talking about her passion for her husband Theseus, so he "urges Phaedra […] to speak out clear language" (Van der Poel 2006: 169). This is when Phaedra clarifies her speech by declaring her love directly to her son-in-law:

respersa nulla labe et intacta, innocens
tibi mutor uni. certa descendi ad preces:
finem hic dolori faciet aut uitae dies.
miserere amantis.

And thou alone has wrought the change in me.
See, at thy feet I kneel and pray, resolved
This day shall end my misery or life.
Oh, pity her who loves thee— (Seneca 1907: II.668-671)

Clearly, in this tragedy, the "declaration of love" includes several stages such as presentation of a persuasive speech about the need to marriage and enjoy women's company, enumeration of love symptoms, expression of love and pleas for reunion. There are many more examples in classical Greco-Roman texts, an analysis of which is beyond the scope of the present research. Nevertheless, by presenting a short reference to these examples, I sought to demonstrate the topicality of "declaration of love" according to Laguna Mariscal's definition.

A similar discourse is recreated in O'Neill's *Anna Christie* (1921), a modern play that, unlike some other tragedies by O'Neill such as *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), has not been considered by critics an imitation of any specific classical text. In fact, *Anna Christie* is one of the few plays by O'Neill which ends apparently happily but the happy ending cannot "compensate for cruelties perpetrated in the past" (Sternlicht 2002: 49).

Bearing in mind the fact that O'Neill was a fervent reader of classical literature (Black 2004: 168-169; Riley 2021: 82) and the first modern dramatist to embrace the conventions of Greek Tragedy deliberately (Kennedy 2018: 15), it is not surprising to find traces of classical topoi in this play as well. In continuation, we examine the resurrection of the classical topos of "declaration of love" in this play.

3. DECLARATION OF LOVE IN *ANNA CHRISTIE*

Love, passion, and desire have always been integral elements of O'Neill's plays. However, O'Neill's characters who experience love often encounter complications. While O'Neill's plays primarily delve into the darker aspects of human existence, they occasionally feature moments of love declaration that serve as pivotal moments of connection and emotional revelation. These declarations of love are often imbued with a sense of longing, vulnerability, and profound emotional depth, reflecting O'Neill's exploration of the human condition. In O'Neill's play *Desire Under the Elms*, for example, the character of Eben finally delivers a poignant love declaration to his romantic interest, Abbey. Their relationship evolves gradually, and in a moment of vulnerability, Eben confesses his feelings for her. Another notable example of a love declaration in O'Neill's plays can be found in *Beyond the Horizon*. The play features a complex love triangle between the characters Robert, Andrew and Ruth. In a climactic scene, Robert opens his heart to Ruth, revealing his true feelings for her. It is worth noting that while O'Neill's plays occasionally feature love declarations, they are often intertwined with themes of loss, disillusionment, and the fragility of human relationships.

Anna Christie narrates the tale of Anna, a girl who reunites with her father after fifteen years of separation. She appears unwell and exhausted, not only due to the arduous journey but also because of a dark past she has endured. As a child, she resided with her cousins, one of whom subjected her to sexual abuse. Eventually, she turned to prostitution, leading to her arrest. Following her release, she decides to travel to New York to seek refuge with her father, Chris, and embark on a fresh start.

Initially, Anna feels disappointed when she discovers that Chris lives on a coal barge. However, after spending a few days at sea, she experiences happiness and a sense of security. She states, "And I feel clean, somehow—like you feel just after you've taken a bath. And I feel happy for once—yes, honest!—happier than I have ever been anywhere before!" (O'Neill 1988: II.982). One night, Chris rescues four sailors from a shipwreck. One of them, named Burke, is immediately drawn to Anna. This moment marks the beginning of the development of their love declaration.

Burke's first step is to capture Anna's attention by admiring her, a strategy reminiscent of Vertumnus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Vertumnus also showered his beloved with sweet words before proposing to her (Ovid 2008: 14.682-684). Similarly, Ulysses employed this technique when he arrived in the Phaeacian city and encountered Alcinous's daughter, Nausicaa. Recognizing that he needed her mercy, he spoke to her tenderly, appreciating her beauty and comparing her to the divine Artemis: "For never yet have my eyes beheld a mortal such as thee, whether man or woman; astonishment seizes me as I gaze upon thee" (Homer

1919: 6.160-161). In O'Neill's play, Burke admires Anna's beauty to initiate a friendly conversation with her.

> BURKE—And what is a fine handsome woman the like of you doing on this scow?
> ANNA—(*Coldly*.) Never you mind. (*Then half-amused in spite of herself*.) Say, you're a great one, honest—starting right in kidding after what you been through. (O'Neill 1988: II.985)

Interestingly, in these narratives, the focus is primarily placed on the physical attributes and beauty of the desired girl, rather than her mental, moral, and behavioural characteristics. In other words, the attraction between the lovers revolves around a more superficial, sexual, and physical interest rather than a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's personalities and values. Conversely, the girls themselves are captivated by the lover's admiration for their physical beauty and do not necessarily seek a more profound perception or understanding of their inner selves.

Burke's initial appreciation of Anna serves as a crucial catalyst for the modern lover to initiate a conversation and capture the beloved's attention. Subsequently, Burke proceeds to portray himself as a resilient and strong individual, emphasizing his ability to confront and overcome the challenges posed by the sea. This portrayal aims to establish a sense of masculine prowess and demonstrate his capacity to endure hardships.

By leveraging the initial admiration and projecting an image of strength and perseverance, the lover seeks to create a compelling narrative that will further engage the beloved and ignite her interest. The physical attraction serves as an entry point into the broader exploration of their relationship, gradually unfolding the complexities of their connection beyond mere appearances.

> BURKE—(*Delighted—proudly*.) Ah, it was nothing—aisy for a rale man with guts to him, the like of me. (*He laughs*.) All in the day's work, darlin'. (*Then, more seriously but still in a boastful tone, confidentially*.) But I won't be denying 'twas a damn narrow squeak. We'd all ought to be with Davy Jones at the bottom of the sea, be rights. And only for me, I'm telling you, and the great strength and guts is in me, we'd be being scoffed by the fishes this minute! (O'Neill 1988: II.985)

As a result, Burke firmly believes that he is "the proper lad" to marry Anna (O'Neill 1988: II.986). Initially, his high level of confidence amuses Anna, but over time, she begins to develop an attraction towards him. This situation bears resemblance to Vertumnus's self-praise when attempting to woo Pomona. However, despite the similar approach used to lay the groundwork for their respective declarations of love, the arguments presented in these speeches differ greatly. Vertumnus focused on the importance of a lover's faithfulness as a crucial virtue, whereas Burke emphasizes his physical strength and resilience. Consequently, the modern lover seems to prioritize physical attributes over moral qualities.

Burke envisions that by praising both Anna and himself, he will gather enough assets to win her love. Thus, without hesitation, he attempts to kiss her. However, Anna, who has experienced numerous instances where men regarded her merely as a material object, feels a sense of resentment towards Burke's sexual approach. She forcefully pushes him away in an act of self-protection, expressing her anger at his audacious behaviour. This moment serves as a wake-up call for Anna, reminding her of the need to be cautious and sceptical of men's intentions. Simultaneously, it serves as a warning to Burke, prompting him to immediately change his approach.

Realizing that he must take further steps to develop his final love declaration, Burke understands that winning Anna's heart cannot be accomplished easily. He apologizes sincerely and attempts to express his feelings with more respect: "I will ask your pardon a thousand times—and on my knees if you prefer. I didn't mean a word of what I said or did" (O'Neill 1988: II.987). From this pivotal moment onwards, both Anna and Burke agree to nurture their relationship based on friendship and mutual respect. Once Burke gains Anna's trust, he dares to openly express his love for her. Initially, he alludes to his affection indirectly, stating, "It's only on the sea you'd find real men with the courage to wed fine, high-tempered girls like yourself" (O'Neill 1988: II.990), while hinting at his future plans. By revising and extending the given passage, the enhanced version better captures the characters' dynamics and motivations while illustrating the transformation in Burke's behaviour and approach towards Anna.

> BURKE—(*Argumentatively.*) But there's good jobs and bad jobs at sea, like there'd be on land. I'm thinking if it's in the stokehole of a proper liner I was, I'd be able to have a little house and be home to it wan week out of four. And I'm thinking that maybe then I'd have the luck to find a fine dacent girl—the like of yourself, now—would be willing to wed with me.
> ANNA—(*Turning away from him with a short laugh—uneasily.*) Why, sure. Why not? (O'Neill 1988: II. 990)

Undoubtedly, Burke, much like Phaedra, finds himself overwhelmed by the apprehension of being rejected by his beloved, thus preventing him from openly expressing his true emotions. In his endeavour for self-expression, Burke employs tactics reminiscent of Phaedra's utilization of ambiguous language and Vertumnus's adoption of a third-person narrative. Gradually, as he fails to discern any signs of anger or displeasure from Anna, he gathers the courage to boldly declare his love, going as far as promising to go to great lengths to fulfil her desires. This technique of persuasive speech, aimed at convincing the beloved to accept their pleas, bears resemblance to the strategies employed by Ovid's passionate lovers. These lovers, too, employed similar methods, promising devotion and pledging to do anything within their power to ensure the beloved's happiness.

> BURKE—(*Edging up close to her—exultantly.*) Then you think a girl the like of yourself might maybe not mind the past at all but only be seeing the good herself put in me?
> ANNA—(*In the same tone.*) Why, sure.
> BURKE—(*Passionately.*) She'd not be sorry for it, I'd take my oath! 'Tis no more drinking and roving about I'd be doing then, but giving my pay day into her hand and staying at home with her as meek as a lamb each night of the week I'd be in port. (O'Neill 1988: II.991)

During this particular phase, both Burke and Vertumnus choose to express their love indirectly. Drawing inspiration from Seneca's portrayal of Phaedra, who employed imprecise language to convey her feelings, Burke follows suit, employing similar tactics in the hope that his beloved might grasp the underlying message: his affection for her. By deliberately choosing words that carry hidden meanings and veiled intentions, Burke aims to create an atmosphere of intrigue and possibility, allowing the recipient of his message to decipher his true emotions if they are receptive and perceptive enough. This indirect approach serves as a way to test the waters, gauging the beloved's response and openness before revealing the depth of his affections explicitly.

> ANNA—(Moved in spite of herself and troubled by this half-concealed proposal—with a forced laugh.) All you got to do is find the girl.
> BURKE—I have found her! (O'Neill 1988: II.991)

As the lover's ambiguous answers leave Anna and Hippolytus perplexed and uncertain, both individuals find themselves compelled to seek clarification regarding the true intentions of their respective suitors. It is during this crucial juncture that Burke, having reached a point of clarity, finally summons the courage to declare his love directly to Anna. Dispensing with the veil of ambiguity that shrouded his previous expressions, Burke earnestly and unequivocally expresses his deep affection for her. In a heartfelt and straightforward manner, he articulates his emotions, leaving no room for misinterpretation or doubt. This pivotal moment marks a significant shift in their relationship, as Burke sheds his reservations and embraces vulnerability, laying bare his true feelings for Anna.

> ANNA—(*Half-frightenedly—trying to laugh it off.*) You have? When? I thought you was saying—
> BURKE—(Boldly and forcefully.) This night. (Hanging his head—humbly.) If she'll be having me. (Then raising his eyes to hers—simply.) 'Tis you I mean.
> ANNA—(Is held by his eyes for a moment—then shrinks back from him with a strange, broken laugh.) Say—are you—going crazy? Are you trying to kid me? Proposing—to me!—for Gawd's sake!—on such short acquaintance? (CHRIS comes out of the cabin and stands staring blinkingly astern. When he makes out ANNA in such intimate proximity to this strange sailor, an angry expression comes over his face.)
> BURKE—(*Following her—with fierce, pleading insistence*.) I'm telling you there's the will of God in it that brought me safe through the storm and fog to the wan spot in the world where you was! Think of that now, and isn't it queer—. (O'Neill 1988: II.991)

In a parallel manner, Phaedra is compelled to confess the truth when Hippolytus mentions Theseus, while Burke's direct confession arises when Anna mistakenly imagines he is referring to another woman. Therefore, their ultimate declarations of love are driven by the urgent need to resolve the misunderstandings that arose due to their earlier use of ambiguous language.

The second act of *Anna Christie* concludes with a poignant scene where Anna assists Burke in boarding the barge to rest, while he boldly reiterates his expressions of love and proposes marriage to her. His passionate declaration is unapologetically vocalized. In this portrayal, O'Neill incorporates the elements of a classical topos, encompassing the lover's admiration for the beloved, the enumeration of the beloved's qualities, indirect references to love, and ultimately, a brave and direct confession of heartfelt emotions.

However, what sets O'Neill's rendition apart is the absence of a persuasive speech advocating for the necessity of marriage. This omission may be attributed to the modern readers' scepticism regarding the urgency of marrying before the fading of youth. O'Neill's deliberate exclusion of a persuasive discourse could potentially serve as a commentary on the patriarchal notions of marriage prevalent in classical texts, where a woman's worth was primarily valued based on her youth and physical attractiveness. An intriguing avenue for further exploration lies in conducting a feminist comparative analysis of these texts, delving into the nuanced perspectives they offer on gender dynamics and societal expectations.

4. FINAL WORDS

This study aims to explore the recurring motif of the "declaration of love" in western literature. It has been observed that this classical topos manifests in various forms and stages, typically involving the lover expressing admiration for the beloved's qualities, engaging in self-praise to justify themselves as a suitable partner, delivering persuasive speeches on the importance of marriage and seizing the opportunities of youth, and finally openly confessing their love and inviting the beloved to join them. Throughout this process, various elements and motifs can be employed to create the necessary context for the lovers to articulate their emotions.

The presence of this topos in certain classical texts was examined to confirm its recurrence. Additionally, its representation in Eugene O'Neill's play, *Anna Christie*, was analysed. It was concluded that the topos follows the same formal steps found in classical sources. However, a question remains unanswered: Did O'Neill intentionally draw inspiration from Phaedra or Vertumnus while writing *Anna Christie*? The answer could be both yes and no. On one hand, O'Neill was known to be familiar with classical texts, particularly Greek myths and tragedies, as evidenced by his deliberate adaptations of Phaedra narratives in *Desire Under the Elms* and the structure of the *Oresteia* in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Hence, it is

plausible to argue that O'Neill had certain stories in mind while crafting *Anna Christie*, whether consciously or unconsciously.

On the other hand, it is essential to recognize that literary topoi are reflections of life and naturally develop across various discourses, including literature (Nazemi 2022c: 180, Nazemi & Laguna Mariscal 2022: 412). Therefore, it is possible to discuss the revival of a topos in a specific play without explicitly seeking deliberate sources of influence. The focus should be on the fact that the "declaration of love" is a classical topos interwoven into modern drama. O'Neill's play can be studied and compared to classical texts that also feature the same theme, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or different Phaedra narratives. Consequently, the discussion revolves around parallel structures rather than direct points of influence, highlighting the evolution and literary development of the topos rather than deliberate reception (see also Nazemi 2022a: 87).

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