

***Applying CDA and Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" on  
Nicholas Sparks's "Safe Haven"***

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**Abstract**

"Safe Haven" is one of Nicholas Sparks excellent novels. It was published in 2010. It is basically about women's abuse. According to Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale," no researcher has studied this novel. Propp's theory was formerly found to analyze Russian folktales. However, some researchers apply it to English fairytales and stories, such as Sundari (2014), who used it to "Sleeping Beauty"; Nursantia (2003) to Joseph Conrad's novel "Heart of Darkness"; and Salmah (2004) to Charles Dickens's "Our Mutual Friend". Thus, the gap of not applying Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" to novels in general and modern text in specific with Wodak's (2001; 2009) *discourse-historical approach* inspires researchers inspire the researchers to fulfill this gap by addressing the following academic questions: 1) Is it possible to apply Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" (1968) to Nicholas Spark's novel "Safe Haven"? 2) What good and bad morals are portrayed by the main characters in "Safe Haven"? 3) How many features of Propp's thirty-one features can be found in Nickola Spark's "Safe Haven"? 4) What are the main macro-topics in the novel? After a deep analysis of the entire novel, the researchers find that Sparks uses twenty-five features in this novel among Propp's thirty-one features. Propp did not state that all the thirty-one features should exist in a single text. Additionally, the researchers conclude that in Sparks's "Safe Haven," Alex represents good morals, while Kevin depicts bad ones. Accordingly, even though Propp's theory is comparatively old and intended to be applied to Russian fairytales. The researchers find that it can be used on modern English novels.

Keywords: "Morphology of the Folktale", Nickola Spark, "Safe Haven", Vladimir Propp

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## 1. Introduction

Literature is divided into three areas: Drama, Poetry, and Prose. Poetry and drama go back to the Greek Classical Period. The prose is synonyms to the novel, which appeared much later. Even though it is the newest genre, prose fiction is the most popular (Nnyagu, 2017, p.78). Novels flourished in the eighteenth century. Boccaccio, Sterne, Fielding, Behn, Richardson, Bunyan, Cervantes, Chaucer, Malory, and Defoe contributed significantly to the expansion of the English novel. They influenced the novelists who came after them (Choeda, 2019, p.1099).

Sanders (1994) defines the novel as "a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity." Even the story of the novel is frequently based on imagination. The novel reflects people and society. Accordingly, it is said that the "novel is a mirror of the author's society" (Nnyagu, 2017, p.79). The novel has many features; it is written in prose, has at least 30,000 words, and is intended by the author to narrate a story. A novel should have a plot, a particular setting, and one or more main characters (Aliyev, 2021, p.24).

Moreover, Many factors helped the subsequent development and growth of novels, such as the decline of romance and drama, the Industrial Revolution, the coming up of libraries, and the rise in the middle class (Choeda, 2019, p.1101).

## 2. Methodology

The researchers apply Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp's thirty-one functions to Nicholas Sparks's (2010) "Safe Haven." To examine whether applying this old theory to a modern text is possible. The researchers apply Wodak's (2001; 2009) *discourse-historical approach* to see which of Wodak's topoi can be found in the text.

## 3. Applying Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" on Spark's "Safe Haven"

### 3.1 Absentation

The novel opens with the absentation of the heroin Erin, who named herself Katie, to start a new life away from her husband, Kevin. Kevin goes for two days outside Boston on business, and when he comes, he does not find his wife.

### 3.2 Reconnaissance

Aside from the flashbacks, there are highlights of why Katie runs away. In the entire novel, Kevin is looking for Katie. He is only a step away from her in Philadelphia, yet Katie successfully runs from Philadelphia to New York and Southport.

### 3.3 Delivery

Delivery is when the villain receives information about his victim (Propp, 1968, p.28).

Accordingly, months after Katie's disappearance, Kevin tries to find her till he gives up. One day after Kevin was dismissed from his job, he sat in the garden watching his neighbor Feldman's funeral. A woman crosses the stairs and introduces herself as "I'm Karen

Feldman." She asks him about his wife, Erin, and whether she is attending the funeral. Erin used to visit the Feldmans and help them cleaning and cooking: "She came by to visit. She used to make them pies, and sometimes she helped them clean up" (Spark, 2010, p.260).

Indirectly, Karen states that Erin looks like her dead sister Katie: "My younger sister. She passed away six years ago" (Spark, 2010, p.261). "They even looked alike. Same age and Same everything" (Spark, 2010, p.261). Therefore, Kevin knows he cannot find Erin because she uses Katie's ID. She looked for the name through a friend in the police office, who assured him that she had just got a driver's license in Southport under the name Katie Feldman.

### **3.4 Trickery**

Kevin pretends to be a gentleman when he first meets Katie. There was a gang trying to rape her. He protects her, helps her to get up, and walks her home. The next day, he invited her for coffee. "He was kind and treated her like a princess, right up until she was on her honeymoon" (Spark, 2010, p.71).

Later, he starts beating her for the silliest reasons, such as forgetting her sunglasses, food stains in the refrigerator, increasing the heat to get the house warm, going to the salon, etc. Sometimes, Kevin beats her only because he is drunk: "didn't see the slap coming until she felt the sting against her cheek. It burned, hot and red. Sharp. Bee stings" (Spark, 2010, p.154). In that fight, he runs beyond her. When she escapes, he catches her and "strikes fast and hard" (Spark, 2010, p.155) at her lower back. She gasped for air, and suddenly, her vision went black; she felt as though "she'd been pierced with a knife" and "her kidney on fire, the pain shooting through her legs and up her spine" (Spark, 2010, p.155). With all this trouble and pain, Katie could not call the police because Kevin was a detective with the Boston Police Department. "She couldn't call the police because he was the police" (Spark, 2010, p.197). Another reason for trickery is using his job to treat his wife in this troubled manner.

In time, when she knew he was crazy, it was too late because she was already trapped. Kevin was not giving her any money; he did not allow her to leave home or have friends. "He used to drive by the house when he was supposed to be working, just to make sure she was there" (Spark, 2010, p.71). She thinks of leaving him now: "She had to go someplace where he would never find her" (Spark, 2010, p.72).

Throughout the novel, Kevin appears to memorize many lines from the Bible, indicating that he is religious. However, he beats his wife, being drunk all the time and committing adultery. This shows that he is hypocritical and trying to trick everyone, even himself. "He knew that was wrong because the Bible says..." (Spark, 2010, p.210). "For he destroys his soul" (Spark, 2010, p.234).

Despite he admits that he used to beat Katie, and she does not deserve it. However, Kevin contradicts himself believing that he offered her a good life by not allowing her to work: "She didn't understand the sacrifices he made for her." "She didn't understand how easy her life was" (Spark, 2010, p.217). Thus, this demonstrates that he is a psychopath.

Kevin even tries to track his boss and colleagues in the Boston Police Department by coming to his job drunk. He drinks Vodka by putting it in a water bottle, pretending it is water and

because it does not leave an alcoholic smell like other drinks. "You've been drinking on the job and you've been lying to me" (Spark, 2010, p.250).

### 3.5 *Complicity*

Kevin controls Katie's life because he knows she has no one to turn to. She has no family, no friends, no job, no degree, and no money. Thus, she submits to him completely.

Additionally, she has already run away twice: "She had run away twice before, and Kate wanted to think she'd learned from her mistakes" (Spark, 2010, p.200). The first time, she called him after a couple of hours because she had nowhere to go. Kate called him, asking him to pick her up from the station. She took money from his wallet the second time and ran to her hometown. Kevin found her after an hour of her arrival. He handcuffed her to the backseat of his car. Later, Kevin pulls over and beats her, brutally threatening her with his gun. "She knew that he would go to extraordinary lengths to find her. As crazy as he was, he was persistent and diligent, and his instincts were usually right." "He would find out where she'd gone, she knew" (Spark, 2010, p.201).

### 3.6 *Villainy*

According to Propp (1968, p.31-34), one of the most essential functions of Villainy is that the villain causes injury and harm to the hero or one of his family members.

Kevin Tierney "was a good detective" (Spark, 2010, p.171). Yet, he used to beat his wife brutally. As in the following examples:

- a. "The bruise on her wrist was shaped like fingers. Branches of hell" (Spark, 2010, p.156).
- b. "Couldn't say anything. Couldn't breathe" (Spark, 2010, p.155).
- c. "She wouldn't cry because that only made him angrier" (Spark, 2010, p.156).
- d. "Erin's screams and the way her head had sounded when it had hit the edge of the table after he had thrown her across the kitchen" (Spark, 2010, p.170).
- e. "He'd been slapping and kicking her because there were food stains in the refrigerator" (Spark, 2010, p.170).

He reaches the level of threatening her by putting the gun on her head even though he knows that she is terrified of guns: "he'd placed the Glock to her head and threatened to kill her" (Spark, 2010, p.173). Another fight; he did not even remember why he was beating her. Kevin held her by the hair as he punched her heartlessly in the kitchen. In that fight, she broke two of her fingers. For weeks, he did not allow her to go to the hospital till all the bruises on her face and body "could be covered by makeup." "she'd had to cook and clean one-handed" (Spark, 2010, p.175). Accordingly, Katie decides to escape for the third time because "she was tired of getting kicked and punched and thrown down the cellar stairs" (Spark, 2010, p.173).

Even Kevin knows he treats Katie harshly, and she does not deserve that: "she was sweet and kind and gentle and she didn't deserve to be punched or kicked". However, while he is alone in the empty house, he misses her, yet he describes her as selfish and wishes to slap, kick, hit, and kill her for leaving him. "A wife didn't just leave. A wife didn't just walk away from marriage. He wanted to hit and kick and slap her and pull her hair for being so stupid. For being so damn selfish" (Spark, 2010, p.174). "He couldn't stop crying because he missed her

and wanted her to come home and he hated to be alone” “How selfish she was and all he wanted to do was kill her” (Spark, 2010, p.228).

### **3.7 Lack**

A family member either desires or lacks something. For example, the hero is unmarried and looking for a bride (Propp, 1968, p.35).

#### **3.7.1 Alex and His Kids**

Alex lost his wife to a brain tumor, leaving Kristen and Josh behind. Alex found he should care for two kids, one still an infant, and the store. Both his children started having nightmares for a year after Clary's death. “When they woke up in the middle of the night, sobbing inconsolably, he would hold them in his arms and whisper that everything was going to be all right” (Spark, 2010, p.19).

They grow up missing their mom: "The kids need a mom" (Spark, 2010, p.179). Sometimes, Kristen expresses that “in a babyish, trembling voice... When she did so with the tears running down her cheeks, Alex can hear his heartbreaking” (Spark, 2010, p.19). Alex misses her as well. He ignores their friendship and companionship: "He was lonely" (Spark, 2010, p.21).

When Josh drowns, Kristen panics, and she starts crying. Katie is there holding her close in her arms. “he saw that his little girl was crying and afraid and needed him, too, even though she was nested in Katie’s arms” (Spark, 2010, p.32). Alex starts blaming himself for not being a good father to his kids, especially his terrified daughter. Katie assures him that he is a perfect father: "you're a pretty good father" (Spark, 2010, p.49). He does not prevent Josh from going fishing. Instead, he forces him to wear a life vest. In that situation, Alex notices how his girl reached for Katie “like a child reaching for her mother”. That situation moved him as he missed "having a wife, his children missed having a mother” (Spark, 2010, p.51). Katie starts to fulfill Alex's lack of friends and companionship and the kids' lack of a mother, as “Katie was a natural with children” (Spark, 2010, p.178).

Katie is a good listener when Alex talks about Clary, even when he apologizes for talking a lot about his dead wife. Katie explains beautifully that it is okay: "It's okay to talk about her ... You should talk about her. She's part of who you are” (Spark, 2010, p.85). Shortly, Alex falls for Katie: “he was falling hard for this woman, and he could only pray that she was feeling the same way” (Spark, 2010, p.128), “realizing that he was in love with her. He loved the Katie he’d come to know and the Katie he’d never had the chance to meet” (Spark, 2010, p.138).

#### **3.7.2 Katie**

Katie has lived a harsh life since her childhood. Both her parents had alcoholism. And she spends her childhood in constant movement. “Her mind flashed to her father and the empty cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon that usually littered the floor next to the recliner where he sat” (Spark, 2010, p.90), “the constant moves, her parents’ alcoholism, the fact that she’d been on her own since she’d turned eighteen” (Spark, 2010, p.138). She was really on her own from an early age. When she met Kevin, she thought she had found the love and safety. However, she was mistaken.

When she runs away to Southport, Alex starts showing interest in her by providing her with things she needs, such as an umbrella during the storm, organic vegetables, or wine when Katie is there for Kristen during the drowning accident. When Alex notices that Katie is walking from her cottage to her work, he gives her a bike. Aggressively, Katie returns the cycle, assuring him that she does not need anything from him: "I don't need an umbrella or vegetables or wine. And I don't need a bike" (Spark, 2010, p.76). She knew Alex was "interested in her" (Spark, 2010, p.82).

When she starts to know him more, she realizes that "he was the kind of man who tried to find the best in people" (Spark, 2010, p.93). Even though he passes through a lot of drama in his job and with the sickness and death of his mother, Katie understands that Alex does not like to complain. "He was different, she thought, from the men she'd met in her past, different from anyone she'd met before" (Spark, 2010, p.94).

He was there for his wife during her illness, and he was not in any relationship for years after Clary's death. He solely focuses on his kids. Kristen tells Katie that her dad never yelled at them: "He doesn't get mad" (Spark, 2010, p.97). Expressing that Alex is a perfect father.

Katie starts to love him as she knows that even if she tells him about her past, "he would support her. That he would guard her secrets and never use what he knew to hurt her" (Spark, 2010, p.112).

"It was then she realized that she loved him, too" (Spark, 2010, p.140), "it feels like to love someone, she thought, and to be loved in return" (Spark, 2010, p.140). Part of her love for him is that she wants him to know her past: "She wanted him to love the real her, with all her flaws and secrets. She wanted him to know the whole truth" (Spark, 2010, p.140). Katie started to feel safe with him and could not help but trust him: "She couldn't help it: she trusted him" (Spark, 2010, p.180). He understands and treats her gently: "he treated her with a gentleness that astonished and touched her" (Spark, 2010, p.220). Alex is her friend before becoming her lover. Accordingly, he fulfilled Katie's needs to be loved and understood and to rely on someone, knowing he would be there for her. He also finds in her the woman that he was waiting for: "they were somehow saving themselves for each other. He hadn't slept with anyone since his wife had died, and now he felt that in some way he had unknowingly been waiting for Katie" (Spark, 2010, p.177).

Additionally, Katie finds in Jo the good friends and the listener that Katie needs "so long since she'd experienced something so easy and natural" (Spark, 2010, p.68). Their chat flows spontaneously. They share coffee daily and heartily chat about their routines. This kind of friendship is something that Katie has never experienced in her past because Kevin does not allow her to have any friends. Thus, with Jo, Alex, and the kids, Southport seems like a safe place to settle. "Southport is starting to feel like home, I guess. I figured I should start making this house into something more permanent" (Spark, 2010, p.123).

### **3.8 Mediation**

According to Propp (1968, p.36), Katie is a victimized hero who suffers a lot, and the plot is about her adventure. Even though the novel opens in Southport, Sparks uses flashbacks a few months after her arrival to tell Katie's story. Highlighting the great struggles that she went through to start a new life. She takes this huge step of moving and leaving everything behind

at age twenty-seven. She has no money or friends to support her. "She'd moved here with almost nothing" (Spark, 2010, p.5).

### ***3.9 Departure***

After her long-suffering with Kevin, Katie decided to escape for the third time, but she found a good plan this time. First, she collects small amounts, such as one or two dollars from Kevin's wallet, in addition to the coins she finds under the sofa or in the washing machine. Katie buys a cell phone and forwards the landline calls to her cell phone. She steals dark brown hair from the supermarket to change her hair color. She starts to cut her hair, "With scissors, she began to chop savagely at her hair" (Spark, 2010, p.192) and cries while she remembers all the hits she got from Kevin: "Her kidney still throbbed, radiating pain from her shoulder blades to the backs of her legs" "it had kept her up for hours as Kevin snored beside her" (Spark, 2010, p.183). "Hit me because I had to go shopping!" "Hit me so hard that I vomit" (Spark, 2010, p.193). She changes her style, collects all the necessary items she needs, and runs away to Philadelphia, where she works as a bartender for a couple of days, to collect more money before heading to Southport.

### ***3.10 Donnor***

Alex is the Donnor. He worked in the Marian in Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and posted in Georgia and Germany. Due to his experience, Alex can sense that Katie is in trouble: "he'd sensed she was in trouble" (Spark, 2010, p.51). They become close because both of them are alone and need each other. "There was a loneliness within him that couldn't disguise, and she knew that in some way it matched her own" (Spark, 2010, p.82). Alex is ready to do anything to protect Katie from Kevin. Alex is prepared even to shout at Kevin if he tries to hurt Katie anymore. "Alex had pulled the trigger without hesitation." "He knew that if Kevin ever showed up, Alex would protect Katie, no matter what". "She wasn't simply a victim; she was his friend, the woman he'd come to love" (Spark, 2010, p.160).

### ***3.11 The Hero's Reaction***

The hero's Reaction to the Donor's action. The response can be positive or negative.

When Alex tries to help Katie, she is aggressive and tells him she does not need his help. However, Alex was patient and gentle with her. Katie started to get to know his kids and spend time with them on the beach. Later, they visited her in the restaurant while she was working. Step by step, Katie starts loving Alex. "She was attracted to him more than she wanted to admit" (Spark, 2010, p.126).

### ***3.12 Provision or Receipt of a Magical Agent***

The hero becomes able to use a magical agent. The supernatural agents include animals, such as a horse, an eagle, etc., or objects like swords, rings, balls, cudgels, guslas, etc. Another form of magical agent is the power of transformation into animals (Propp, 1968, p.43-44).

The magical power is represented at the novel's end when Kevin sets Alex's house and store on fire. Katie said Jo told her, "*He's here*" (Spark, 2010, p.328). Jo indicated that Kevin had reached Southport and was looking for her. When Katie wakes up, this time in reality, she

hears Jo's voice whispering, "*Can you smell it?*" (Spark, 2010, p.329), warning her about the fire.

Jo is Clary's soul. She tries to be there for Katie as a friend. Meanwhile, she is looking after her kids, Josh and Kristin. As she mentioned in her letter, "I dream that I'll find a way to come back, that I can find a way to ensure they're going to be all right" and "I'll watch over them from heaven" (Spark, 2010, p.363).

### ***3.13 Spatial Transference Between Two Kingdoms, Guidance***

Katie runs away from her Kevin twice. One is from Boston to Atlantic City. Later, she moved from Boston to Philadelphia and then to Southport. She loves Southport's simple and pleasant weather. "She likes it here" (Spark, 2010, p.7). In Boston, Philadelphia, and Atlantic City, traffic noises, bad smells, and people rushing along the sidewalks. However, Southport is a small historic town at the mouth of Cape Fear River, with only a few thousand citizens. The children riding their bikes and playing football in the streets. There are a lot of churches. The climate during the sunset is magical: "She loved watching the sky turning from blue to grey to orange and yellow at the western rim of the world" (Spark, 2010, p.5). The sun also reflects on the lack of "the water sparkled". The boats move slowly with the breeze. The edges of the trees' branches seem to shimmer, with the frogs and crickets sound in the evening. Now, she has her own home, even a small cottage in the forest. However, it is enough for her, and she feels safe there. She is grateful that she ended up in Southport: "This place had felt right" (Spark, 2010, p.14).

### ***3.14 Struggle***

Katie struggles with Kevin, so she unconsciously starts crying when she tells Alex about her past. "She'd spoken through her tears, though he doubted she knew she was crying" (Spark, 2010, p.160). However, the last fight between them is when Kevin burns Alex's house while Katie, Josh, and Kristin sleep. On this horrible night, Katie acts bravely. She wakes up the kids, and even "the roaring of the fire was so loud" (Spark, 2010, p.330). And she can barely hear her voice. Katie dragged the crying kids out of the bedroom window on the second floor and helped them get out. She is throwing them in a comforter. Katie "twisting as they fell so that the kids would land on top of her" (Spark, 2010, p.331). To find Kevin waiting for them with a gun, Katie fights him courageously to allow the kids to run away.

### ***3.15 Branding/Marking***

Branding is all about the hero getting a particular body mark in their body. Katie represents that when she changed her style from long hair blonde to short dark hair, "A dark, short-haired stranger looked back at her" (Spark, 2010, p.193). Giving some tan to her skin and pretending to be pregnant: "Short, dark hair, Skin the color of copper" (Spark, 2010, p.194). Generally, she was "a ghost in human form" (Spark, 2010, p.22). She even changed her id from Erin Tierney to Katie Feldman "the identification she needed to start a new life" (Spark, 2010, p.194).

### ***3.16 Victory***

The novel ends with the hero's (Katie's) victory by gaining her freedom and the villain's death.



### ***3.17 Pursuit/ Chase***

The entire story is about Kevin Tierney chasing Katie. Katie is pursuing a new life away from her awful husband till she finds refuge in Southport.

### ***3.18 Rescue***

Knowing Kevin would chase her, Katie tried to hide, first in China town in Philadelphia and then Southport. She even changed her appearance and ID, as we mentioned before.

### ***3.19 Unrecognized Arrival***

As mentioned, Katie reached Southport to hide from her husband and tried to start over, away from all her past.

### ***3.20 Unfounded Claims***

When Katie first met Kevin, she thought that he was the one, the real hero for her, significantly after he rescued her from the raping accident. We soon know he is a false hero when he hits her during their honeymoon. Later, when Katie told him she wanted to be a mother, Kevin asked her to shut up. "He married her because he wanted a wife, not a mother. But she kept bringing it up...until he finally slapped her and told her to shut up" (Spark, 2010, p.274).

### ***3.21 Difficult Task***

Another challenging task is presented to the hero (Propp, 1968, p.60) when Kevin comes to Southport and threatens Katie and the kids' lives. Again, Katie proves she is brave enough to face Kevin and save the kid's life.

### ***3.22 Recognition***

Before Clary's (Jo) death, she gave Alex two letters, one addressed to him and the second to the woman he will marry. Handing the letter to Katie indicates that she will be a great mom to the kids and an excellent wife to Alex. Thus, she is the hero of their story: "You'll become the wife who grows old with Alex, and you'll become the only mother my children will ever know" (Spark, 2010, p.364).

### ***3.23 Exposure***

Kevin is exposed when he has been dismissed from his job for drinking alcohol during working hours: "You've been drinking on the job" (Spark, 2010, p.250). In addition, it encourages a woman to take revenge for the death of her son. "She claims you were talking about God and told her, quote "The man was a sinner and deserved to be punished" (Spark, 2010, p.249). Kevin declines, saying so. However, his boss ensures everyone hears him: "Your partner, the medical examiner, the crime scene investigators, the boyfriend" (Spark, 2010, p.251).

Moreover, looking for Katie in Southport while he is drunk, making his way between people, some boys make fun of him. He points his gun at them, using his weapon against innocent is another prove that Kevin is the villain. Thus, all the above represents Kevin as a false hero.

### ***3.24 Punishment***

Katie fights Kevin after she helps the kids to run away from the fire. However, Kevin follows them to Katie's cottage. There, Katie shoots him using his gun. He falls on his feet in front of her: "he tried to stay upright, but his body was no longer his own. He collapsed on the porch" (Spark, 2010, p.346).

### ***3.25 Wedding***

There is no actual wedding, but Alex's letter to Katie proves he selected her as his wife and the mother of his children.

## **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, the researcher studies Nicholas Sparks's novel "Safe Haven" (2010) according to Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" to fill the study gap. No study has applied Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" to a modern fictional text. The researcher finds that Sparks uses twenty-five features in this novel among Propp's thirty-one features. Propp did not state that all the thirty-one features should exist in a single text.

The third research question is "What are the good and bad morals portrayed by the main characters in 'Safe Haven'?" In Nicholas Sparks's novel "Safe Haven", the good morals are represented by Alex, while Kevin depicts the terrible morals. Accordingly, even though Propp's theory is comparatively old and intended to be applied to Russian fairytales. The researchers find that it can be used in modern English novels. Lastly, according to Wodak (2001; 2009) discourse-historical approach, the main topics are: topoi of Struggle, topoi of love, and topoi of abuse.

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