

CALL FOR PAPER: POETRY JUSTICE: LEGAL, ETHICAL, AND AESTHETIC JUDGMENTS IN LITERARY TEXTS

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Schloss Hohentübingen, Fürstenzimmer
July 26 - July 30, 2015

The first textbook definition of the concept of poetic justice goes back to Thomas Rymer's *The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd* (1678). According to him, the term signified "the distribution, at the end of a literary work, of earthly rewards and punishments in proportion to the virtue or vice of the various characters" (Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms* 299-300). The introduction of virtue and vice into the concept immediately refers to a moral dimension; on aesthetic grounds, however, it was soon (and has continued to be) criticized.

Poetic justice, as examples from literary texts across the genres illustrate, may be realized in various ways – and sometimes the term may mean much more than the distribution of earthly rewards and punishments. Literary texts may suggest or even envision a justice never to be established in real life. But literary texts may likewise abstain from offering judgments at all, whereas the real world is full of them. In these cases, they may make us recognize vindictiveness dressing up as the pursuit of justice; or, as in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, they may show us the absurdity of passing judgment. Are human beings entitled to pass judgement at all, or should this be left entirely to God? If this is a valid question, the relation of human, divine and poetic justice should be taken into account.

The symposium does not primarily aim at the connection between literature and the law which has recently met with increased attention in literary studies. Rather, we are interested in papers that combine reflections on poetic justice with close readings of literary texts in the field of literature in English.

Questions to be asked may include the following:

- Is the relationship between crime, punishment and justice an example of literature mirroring real life, or does it primarily give evidence to literary art producing "another nature"?
- Is poetic justice the reason for our satisfaction with tragic action? What are the stylistic and semantic features of a text that suggest a particular idea of poetic justice, i.e. what is it that makes us see justice as an aesthetic quality?
- What is the relation between the representation of law and justice and the kind of justice provided or withheld by the action of the story, play, or poem?

Please send an **abstract** (300 words max.) to the editors of *Connotations* by **October 31, 2014**: [symposium2015\[at\]connotations.de](mailto:symposium2015[at]connotations.de)