

Poetic justice in Cilappatikaran-Reinforces Ethical and Moral Principles

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ABSTRACT

According to the Cambridge dictionary *poetic justice* is defined as an occasion when something bad happens to a person who seems to deserve it usually because of bad things that person has done or it can be understood as a punishment or a reward that you feel is just. In literature, poetic justice refers to an outcome in which evil characters are punished and virtuous characters are rewarded. The term was coined by the English literary critic *Thomas Rhymer* in the 17th century, who was a literary critic and who introduced principles of French neoclassicism. He introduced this term when it was believed that a work of literature should uphold moral principles only and instruct the reader for correct moral behaviour. Twists of fate usually provide the episode of poetic justice towards the end of the story.

The device of poetic justice has been replaced not only in modern literature and writings but also in contemporary digital presentations like popular Cinema too. The contemporary writers' times are offering in their presentation more an ironic twist of fate related and resulted from the character's own actions.

INTRODUCTION

The main idea behind the use of poetic justice is to celebrate morality, to correct people and check the way the Society should behave. Therefore this idea was coined in 1677-78, but was already popular in much older times, whose reflection we get from Plato's *Republic*.

Historical overview of Poetic Justice

The idea of poetic justice was already popular in older times before Rhymer popularized it in 1677. Plato in his *Republic* openly complains that the literary works being produced at his time were of much deteriorated quality as they depict the stories about human beings (392a) to present unjust people being happy and just people as unhappy. He reasons that they are not treated according to their merits or demerits which do not send a good message to the society.

The same complaint is even noticed by Aristotle when he says that the presentation of a tragic hero's journey will not create any pity and fear in the audience unless the hero is virtuous, in his *Poetics*. The quality of virtue symbolizes a just man of good deeds. Therefore he strongly advocates that the sequence of action for a tragic hero must follow the frailty which leads to *hamartia*, leading a change in fortune moving toward his end or climax of the novel. This will make the audience realize that in spite of being a good character of action, every character has a flaw which forces them to commit sins and errors in their life. This eventually leads to the consequences of climax and will provide dramatic pleasure to the audience. This dramatic pleasure is eventually achieved by poetic justice.

Now, since we observe that somewhere poetic justice is related to giving moral lectures, and providing closure to the story, some critics have also raised questions about whether the success of the literary work depends only on the presence of poetic justice in a text. Is it that important for the worth of the literary work?

How its presence affects the literary text

If we truly understand the presence of poetic justice in any literary text and poetry, then it helps in making the text didactic, therefore delivering a moral teaching to the readers. Poetic Justice brings end to the story which is essential to generate moral satisfaction when one sees the culprit being punished. The readers are delighted to see the generous characters being rewarded. It becomes more effective in the genre of fiction. This is generally seen when a character has proven himself to be beyond hope and in a dramatic twist, he will be punished in a manner that matches his crimes. Furthermore, any characters whom he has wronged will be rewarded for upholding moral character. There are many modern examples of poetic Justice seen in classical literature and even in modern texts.

Oedipus Rex, by Sophocles, contains one of the most famous examples of poetic justice. Oedipus defies the gods in trying to escape his fate and tries to escape to the kingdom of Thebes. He winds up in a fight with the king and marries the queen. Turns out, the man he killed was his father and the woman he married was his mother. Poetic justice is served because he tried to defy his predetermined fate and had to suffer punishment for going against/angering the gods. In Disney's The Little Mermaid, poetic justice is seen when the evil witch character, Ursula, is killed as punishment for trying to appoint herself ruler of the entire ocean through the use of trickery and manipulation. Ariel is rewarded with her voice and getting to keep her legs so that she can marry Prince Erik.

The character of Mr Bumble in Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist sees the effects of poetic justice due to his mistreatment of orphans. Mr Bumble was a beadle (church official) in the town where Oliver was born. Mr Bumble was in charge of the orphanage among other things and was cruel and sadistic to the children. When Mr Bumble marries for money, his fate takes a turn for the worse when his wife begins to beat and humiliate him just as he did to the children of the orphanage. Both he and his wife wind up poor, working for pennies.

In the work Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator murders the old man he lives with because of the old man's creepy eye. The narrator buries him under the floor of his room but continues to hear the beating of the old man's heart. Eventually, he is driven completely mad and confesses to his crime. Although no character is directly rewarded in this case, the overall sense is that justice will come to all who do bad deeds.

In the Tamil classical text *Cillapatikaran*, by *Ilango Adigal* the protagonist Kovalan was given a death sentence from the king of Madurai for stealing the silver jewellery of the queen, which he never did but in his past he did commit mistakes and proved disloyal to his honest dedicated wife Kannaki. When his wife Kannaki came to know about this unjust decision of the King, she cursed the whole city and tears off his breast in anger and pain of her lost husband.

This novel establishes the poetic justice in a very beautiful manner by rewarding the female protagonist Kannaki the status of Goddess in the end of the novel for being always loyal, dedicated and dutiful wife for her husband. On the other hand, though Kovalan was punished for misunderstanding by the king he

ought to receive punishment for betraying his own loving wife for another court woman. But its presence and absence are also a matter of debate by many Scholars. According to them, the absence or presence of poetic justice should less be concerned with awarding punishment and virtue and more matters for the influences cast by literature providing moral and justice to the character.

We expect generally that the basic function of a text is to give moral value by simply this device of poetic justice. But as we know that literature reflects the society in whose response it is created. Poetic justice was very much applicable to reflecting the traditional society and its people who are either good or bad. But with the passage of time and many ages literature and modes of reflection had greatly changed. The characters have undergone changes due to the experience they face in the story and alter their perception of the world. The world is changing around them and they must adapt it to survive. The characters as cast in the story have changed too.

Contemporary literature is a real literature which represents reality of life. The mundane everyday experience as they are in real life. It shuns flower language, exotic settings and character. Realist depiction avoids idealization. It shuns flowery language, exotic setting and character. Realist depiction avoids idealization.

CONCLUSION

One of the most contentious literary topics is poetic justice and its usage as a important literary device is very relevant in contemporary literature. It has been viewed as both a fulfilling of the need that literature be moral, practical, and instructional, on the one hand, and as said to demonstrate the inadequacy of such a demand. However, some who support poetic justice continue to underline their use in recognising virtue and the impact of literature on ideas and actions related to justice. In her reflections, Martha Nussbaum refers to poetic justice as an ethical turn. Literary writings are therefore, expected to uncover and express moral ideas in a way that encourages the reader to participate in the stories being told.

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