

17th International *Connotations* Symposium
July 30 – August 3, 2023
Kurhaus Trifels (Annweiler, Germany)

“And this gives life to thee”: Textual Reasons for Canonicity

Recent debates on canonicity have focused on how canons are a product of social and historical conditions as well as of reception. Texts become canonical when they are felt to embody the spirit of an age or to voice concerns considered universal at a particular moment. But what about the texts themselves? Can any text become canonical in any way? Or are there any specific textual reasons for such an elevated status? This latter question is what our symposium wishes to address.

Textual strategies of self-authorization may well be one of those reasons. When Shakespeare ends his Sonnet 18 on the notion of its ongoing life – “So long as eyes can see and men can breathe / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee” – he anticipates that neither his (ironically unnamed) addressee nor his own work will ever be forgotten. This is one example of how a speaker – and, by implication, an author – may promote the canonicity of a text.

A second group of reasons may have to do with the choice of subject matter. Do texts just recycle well-known material or are they innovative? Is there a balance to be struck between repetition and innovation as a textual recipe for canonization? Subject matter also comes in with the ways in which texts make offers to identify their relevance. This may have to do with the way in which a text combines the particular and the general. Furthermore, textual reasons of canonicity may be sought in formal, rhetorical, and aesthetic features of a work. What is the energy of a story, play, or poem that “keeps children from play and old men from the chimney corner” (Sidney) and therefore makes it likely that it will be considered meaningful beyond its own time and place? We invite contributions that address these and further dimensions and combine the detailed study of individual texts written in English with wider theoretical perspectives regarding the textual reasons of canonicity. They may include questions of methodology: how is it possible to arrive at such reasons by analyzing texts that have been assigned a canonical status? Do we need to compare texts, and/or does it make sense to work with larger corpora to come up with plausible results?

Please send an **abstract** (300 words max.) to the editors of *Connotations*
by **November 30, 2022**:

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