

# The Imagery of Death in Medieval Works

## Özet

İnsanlar, ölümün egemen olduğu bir dünyada yaşarlar. Genel anlamda ölüm yaşamın mevcut olmaması olsa da, onun ne olduğunun tasavvur edilmesi, edebiyat adamları tarafından bir sır olarak görülür. Bu bağlamda, ayinler, semboller ve ölümü niteleyen felsefi görüşler, ölümün kültürel ve fiziksel özelliklerine odaklanırlar. Buna karşılık, İncil, dini metinler ve tarih kayıtlarında ölüm hakkında daha kesin bir dil kullanılır. Karmaşık yaşayan bir sistem işlevlerini yitirmeden veya modern anlamda, hücrelerin ve dokuların ölümü biyolojik ölümle gerçekleşmeden önce, insan ölüm gerçeğini düşünür ve ondan korkar. Ortaçağda ölümcül ve salgın bir hastalık olana veba, Yüzyıl Savaşları ve açlık, ölümün ve hayatın kısa hayatın kısa olduğunu ağır yapan koşulların hatırlatıcısı idiler. Bu bağlamda, bazı bireyler ahlâki değerlerden vaz geçip, ömrü kısa olan bu dünyada sefahat âlemine odaklandılar, fakat başka bireyler ahlâki değerlere odaklanıp, cennete gitmeyi umdular. Bu makale, insan açısından ölümün önemini, ölüm göstergelerini ve ölüme karşı tepkileri, incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Ölüm, veba, açlık, Yüzyıl Savaşları, dini vecibeler, Ortaçağ edebiyatı

## Abstract

Human beings live in a world beset by death. Although in general sense death is the absence of life, what it is can only be conjectured as a puzzle by the men of literature. In this context, rituals, symbols, and philosophical perspectives to death dwell on the cultural and physical aspects of death. On the other hand, a more precise language about death is used in the Bible, ecclesiastical texts, and chronicles.

Before a complex living system ceases functioning, or in modern sense, when the death of cells and tissues takes place with the biological death, man thinks of the reality of death, and he fears it. In Medieval times plague, which was a fatal and infectious disease, the Hundred Years' Wars, and famine were constant reminders of death, and the shortness of life. In this context, some individuals gave up the values of morality to dwell on debauchery in this short life, but other individuals focused on the values of morality to go to Heaven. This article attempts to analyse in human terms the significance of death, the signs of death, and the responses to death.

**Key Words:** *Death, plague, famine, Hundred Years' Wars, religious verdicts, Medieval literature.*

Man is the only creature which buries its dead. This activity presupposes some reflection and speculation about the nature and the cause of death. According to Christopher Daniell, the fact that man inter his dead can be interpreted as either originating from some instinctive inability on his part to accept the ocular evidence of physical disintegration, or as due to an equally instinctive hope for some *post-mortem* survival (Daniell, 1998, 30-59). Whatever man's reactions may be in the face of Death, one may safely assume that it appeared to him as an overwhelming force which filled him with terror. In this article, the imagery of death in some Medieval literary works will be analysed. The impact of Christianity on the idea of death was visible for the idea of salvation of human beings in the sense that Christ was faced with lethal torture and he redeemed mankind on the cross, and rose from the dead and that St. John told a story of Lazarus, who was risen by Christ, and that the Revelation of St. John the Divine talked about death, as many other Biblical references (Paxton, 1996, 20-90). Furthermore, the black death, which confused the Medieval people with its sudden appearance or reappearance (Cantor, 2001, 82; Platt, 1996, 91) played a role in the formation of the idea of death