

Student Essay on Theme of Death in Middle Ages Literature

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Contents

Student Essay on Theme of Death in Middle Ages Literature.....	1
Contents.....	2
Essay.....	3

Essay

During the Middle Ages, England participated in many wars including the Hundred Year's War, and encountered devastating events such as the black death. Many stories, tales and poems from the medieval time period carried this theme of death, including "The Wife of Usher's Well" and "Sir Patrick Spens."

The mother in "The Wife of Usher's Well" mourns the death of her three sons who died while at sea. Her sorrow brings her sons back so she can see them for one more day. They appear at her door step wearing hats made from birch, which is a medieval symbol for one that has come back from the dead.

Sir Patrick Spens from the tale of "Sir Patrick Spens" is called upon by the king to be captain of the king's new ship. Sir Patrick Spens knows there is a storm coming and he probably will not complete his journey. Despite his fears, he follows the king's orders and embarks on the journey. Hence the storm came, destroying the ship and drowning Sir Patrick Spens and all his men. Sir Patrick died a hero because he was loyal to his king even though he knew he would not survive his journey.

Both of these stories carried the theme of death not as a negative but as a symbol showing great respect for death. In "The Wife of Usher's Well" the sorrow from death is much lighter because the mother is given a sense of closure from her last visit. Sir Patrick Spens, through his death, is seen as a hero. From these tales, death is portrayed in a less horrible fashion.