

Essay Collection "Song of Death in Paradise"

Deadline: Nov 30, 2018

Dr. Sabine Planka, Universität Siegen, Philosophische Fakultät

"Song of Death in Paradise: Death and Garden Narratives in Literature, Art and Film"

While death and dying have often been the central aspects of several monographs, essay collections and essays in different magazines deal with death in different fields of research. The planned essay collection wants to focus especially onto the connection between death, dying and gardens/culture of gardening.

Death itself has been a central element in people's thinking for thousands of years. Some cultures accept (and have accepted) death as last phase in everybody's life and have prepared their dead for the life after death. Death is/was integrated into life as normal, the end of life is (and was) celebrated by – culturally – different rites and has meant the step into a new state of being. Other cultures 'deny' the existence of death, death is seen as a taboo that is not thematised. Therefore, death is – depending on cultural characteristics – handled differently from culture to culture: while in western cultures death is seen as ambivalent and therefore, often became fearful and was banned, other cultures celebrate death and believe in life after death. However, death is still a part of life, people live to die. Therefore, life and death are complementary to each other. The body itself is both the source of life and the source of death. Death, therefore, has been studied and viewed differently by scholars working in the field of thanatology – ethnologists, (art) historians, sociologists, theologians, literary specialists, psychologists e.g. – throughout centuries with different results: different forms of burials can be observed from an intercultural perspective through times; death is seen as a passage into another state of being or as redemption; the fear of death is thematised as well as the 'taming' of death through ritual or aesthetic sublimation or the utilisation of death to manipulate social and political ends.

In today's societies the arts and humanities have focused on death as one of their central topics, death is, therefore, closely connected to literature and film and is described / shown both as an abstractum and a personification that (re)acts – as can be seen, for example, in the medieval *danse macabre* (dance of death) – that shows the influence and power over mankind in allegorical visualisations. There are also works of art which deal with the figure of death and the state of being dead. The personification of death can also be found in various literary works such as The Brothers Grimm's "Godfather Death" (German title: "Gevatter Tod;" KHM 44) that shows a personalised death as well as Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Everyman" (German title: "Jedermann"; 1911). Also current works show death as an acting figure within the narration as can be seen for example in Terry Pratchett's novels where Death itself acts and communicates telepathically into a character's mind or in Markus Zusak's novel "The Book Thief" (2005) where Death is the narrator of the story. It seems to be logical that films integrate death as a figure, too, like "Meet Joe Black"

(1998, R: Martin Brest).

Gardens have also been studied in various ways and “have been a crucial part in mythology and literature” (Cubukcu/Planka 2018, 9) and are marked amongst others by its privateness and intimate space shown by a fence or another kind of ‘border’ that keep foreigners outside. It can be the place of architectural and artistic design, it can “express the relationship to the world as well as political thoughts and visions” (ibid.). On the other hand, some urban gardens are created in contrast to the separated private garden space: they are open spaces for different kinds of people who want to work in environmentally sustainable places.

This combination of two ‘fields’ opens new ways for further analysis. Central can be the “dying garden” in front of ecological discussions that have found its way into the genre of dystopia – with different results for mankind. Besides this “death of nature” – that can be found as a topic in literature, children’s literature, different (Science Fiction) movies, works of art and computer games – and its meaning for mankind, death and dying can be connected more drastically to gardens and garden cultures: the question occurs why a garden is, for example, often used as a crime scene by some authors (while they are themselves the owners of wonderful gardens) and where this attraction comes from, or the fact that some plants can bring death itself (some plants are shown for example in “The Poison Garden” in Alnwick Castle (UK)).

The purpose of this volume is to tackle with the special connection of death, dying and gardens/-culture of gardening across cultures. We encourage contributors to send us their proposals with a focus for example on the named combination in the fields of art history, (children’s) literature, film, comics and other media.

The timetable for the volume is as follows:

- The deadline for abstracts: November 30, 2018
- Feedback: January 31, 2019
- Submission for articles (completed): June 30, 2019
- Double peer review process and feedback of final acceptance due to: August 31, 2019
- Articles sent back to editors: end of October 2019

The publication is planned during spring 2020.

If you are interested in proposing a chapter, please email an abstract of 500 words and a short CV (maximum of 200 words, plus 3 publications) to both Dr. Feryal Cubukcu (Dokuz Eylul University) (cubukcu.feryal@gmail.com) and Dr. Sabine Planka (University of Siegen) (mail@sabine-planka.de).

Your abstract should outline your hypothesis and briefly sketch the theoretical framework(s) within death, dying, and rituals. All submissions will be acknowledged. Please note that previously published essays won’t be included in the collection. And please note that the acceptance of your abstract does not guarantee the publication of your essay.

Reference:

CFP: Essay Collection “Song of Death in Paradise”. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 7, 2018 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/18779>>.