

reaper

b. fig. *the* (*Great, Grim, Old*) *Reaper*: Death personified.

The expression arises from the iconographic portrayal of Death wielding a scythe: cf. [SCYTHE](#) *n.* 2.

1839 [LONGFELLOW](#) in *Baltimore Lit. Monument* May 17/1 O, not in cruelty, not in wrath, The reaper came that day. **1931** *N. & Q.* 5 Sept. 180/2 One is startled by the inroads which the great reaper has made in the ranks of the Knights since the 15th Edition. **1940** A. UPFIELD *Bushranger of Skies* xiv. 161 That he happened to be the seventh son of a seventh son..was said..to account for his escapes from The Reaper. **1976** [R. LEWIS](#) *Witness my Death* v. 182 The old house had been silent, waiting with him for the Old Reaper to come again. **1977** *New Statesman* 2 Sept. 304/1 The Grim Reaper has been rather too vigorously at work among us... At least ten of the best have gone.

scythe, *n.*

(saið) Forms: α . 1 **siġdi**, **siġe**, 3-6 **syġe**, 4-7 **sith**, 5 **cithe**, (**sythy**), 5-6 **cythe**, 6 **syith**, 6-7 **syth**, **sieth**, 7 **siethe**, **seith**, **sight**, **syeth**, 3-9 **sythe**, 4-9 **sithe**; β . 5 **seth**, 7 **saith**; γ . 7 **scith**, **scithe**, 7- **scythe**. [OE. *síðe* masc., earlier **siġði* (written *siġdi* in Epinal Gl.) = LG. *seged*, *seid*, *sicht*, ON. *sigð-r* (mod.Icel. *sigð* fem., Norw. *sigd*, *sigde*, *sidde* masc.):—OTeut. **segiþjo-z*, f. root **seg-* to cut, whence the synonymous OS. *segisna* (MLG., MDu. *seisene*, Du. *zeisen*, *zeis*), OHG. *segansa* (MHG. *segense*, *seinse*, G. *sense*).

The etymologically correct spelling *sithe* was preferred by Johnson, but his authority has not prevailed against the currency of the spelling with *sc*, due to erroneous association with L. *scindere* to cut. Cf. *scissors*.]

2. *transf.* and *fig.*, esp. as the attribute of Time or Death.

1387-8 [T. USK](#) *Test. Love* I. Prol. 99 Sithen al the grettest clerkes..with their sharpe sythes of conning al mowen and mad therof grete rekes and noble. **1506** *Kal. Sheph.* (Sommer) 90 They fyght and cose on eche other wonder with the sythe of deuyls dredabyll. **c1600** [SHAKES.](#) *Sonn.* xii, And nothing gainst Times sieth can make defence Saue [etc.]. **1659** [T. PECKE](#) *Parnassi Puerp.* 112 Time devours Things; His Sithe our Legs will hit. **a1711** [KEN](#) *Hymnotheo* Poet. Wks. 1721 III. 185 See how Death preys on humane Race; Out with his Scythe the Tyrant goes, Great Multitudes at once he mows. **1809** [BYRON](#) *Bards & Rev.* 632 Whet not your scythe, suppressors of our vice! Reforming saints! **1854** [BREWSTER](#) *More Worlds* i. 16 The swarm of human life..has never been perceptibly reduced by the scythe of famine, of pestilence, or of war. **1883** [O. W. HOLMES](#) *Loving-cup Song* 29 Old Time his rusty scythe may whet.