



University of Tikrit

College of Education for Women

English Department

First year/Introduction to Literature

Lect. Dr. Salwa T. Fizee

E.mail: sfaezi@tu.edu.iq

The Sick Rose

O Rose thou art sick.

The invisible worm,

That flies in the night

In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed

Of crimson joy:

And his dark secret love

Does thy life destroy.

Introduction

The poem *The Sick Rose* by William Blake is quite deep, difficult to understand and full of various themes. We cannot conclude a single meaning to this poem. I have read a dozen of online and offline resources and will try to throw light on most of the themes which can be drawn from this poem.

The poem is very short having just two stanzas having 4 lines each. The rhyme scheme is ABCB DEFE. The poet uses personification throughout the poem. As this verse is published in *The Songs of Experience*, we find dark themes and bitter reality.

1st Perspective – Simple Summary

The poet is in conversation with a Rose, which is the symbol of beauty. He tells the *rose* that it is *sick* because an *invisible worm* (symbol of decay and destruction), which *flies in the night* full of the dreadful *storm*, has found its (Rose's) *bed of crimson joy* i.e. its lustful soul or hidden desire. Hence being experienced and using its *dark secret love*, it has now destroyed the *life* of a rose.

In simple *words*, the poet says that the experienced worm (which is hidden) has come to know the desire hidden behind *the innocent beauty* of the rose and using its pretentious and wicked love, it has destroyed the beauty or innocence or the red colour or even its *life*.

2nd Perspective – Romanticism vs Industrialisation

William Blake is a *Romantic Poet*. Hence he is against industrialisation and the problems which arose because of it. *Romanticism symbolises innocence* while industrialisation is all about the experience because the former was about idealism and the latter about realism.

Now, having said that, let us try to look at the poem in this perspective. The Rose here depicts an innocent human who lives in nature. But soon a worm i.e. industrial revolution comes which make him materialistic and hence sick. The worm is invisible because in the pursuit of money a man cannot see the dark things that accompany it.

The desire for money and worldly comfort alienates him from the society, God, family, friends and peace. Thus he becomes sick. The “night” here symbolises the dark reality of industrialisation and “the howling storm” refers to poverty, slums, diseases and the worst noise of machines in the industrial set up.

The poet says that this worm or Industrialization is successful in finding the hidden desire (of worldly pleasures) in man and hence it comes with the greed money which ultimately destroys the life of mankind.

3rd Perspective – Goodness vs Evil

The third perspective that we can find in the poem is that of Good vs Evil. It goes back to Adam and Eve. The Rose, in this perspective, can be the innocence of Adam and Eve living in the garden of Eden.

The worm i.e. Satan is hidden that flies in the night to them one night and find the hidden lust and desire of [Adam and Eve](#) and ultimately lead to their expulsion from Heaven.

4th Perspective – Religion vs Modernisation

With the [development of science and technology](#), the belief in God was attacked by Rational minds. Rather than following their religion, they started accomplishing their worldly desires.

In this perspective, the poet is referring to the virginity of young girls which is like the innocent rose. But when the sex becomes common the virginity became something outdated thing. The poet says that the rationality and the freedom of doing whatever one desires are like a worm which flies in the night (sex is more common during the night).

The idea of [freedom](#) made the people follow their desires (forbidden) which has destroyed the morale and ethics of humanity.

5th Perspective – Feminism

I think feminism has also been reflected in this poem because the theme revolves around vag-ina, phallus, virginity and the org-asm (crimson joy). The man or the [phallus is the sign of patriarchy](#) which is hidden (behind the phallus). It flies in the night and because of lustful as well as dominating nature and pretends to be true love.

However, hidden behind it is the psychology of dominance. It pretends to satisfy the vag-ina (by giving it pleasure in the form of org-asm) but in reality, it is destroying the woman-power which lies in virginity (according to the poet).

Thus this poem can be interpreted in many ways and as it is a poem, every perspective is relevant and true. Hope you understand the poem now.