

**Romantic Eighteenth-Century Poetry**  
**Third Year / Second Course/ Morning Classes 2020-2021**  
**Instructor : Dr. Hayfaa Mohammed Shareef**  
**William Blake's poem " The Sick Rose"**

**"The Sick Rose" BY WILLIAM BLAKE**

**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.**

**Analysis of the first quatrain ( 4 lines):**

The speaker, addressing a rose informs it that it is sick. An "invisible" worm has made it sick. This worm has stolen into its bed in a "howling storm" and under the cover of night. The poem personifies the worm as a figure of destruction and corruption that flies at night of "howling storm" in order to make the rose lose its innocence and die.

**Analysis of the first quatrain ( lines 5-8 ):**

The speaker, addressing a rose informs it that the worm has gone inside the bed of the rose in secret. The "dark secret love" of this worm is destroying the rose's life. The "bed" into which the worm creeps denotes both the natural flowerbed and also the lovers' bed. The rose is sick, and the poem implies that love is sick as well. Yet the rose is unaware of its sickness. Of course, an actual rose could not know anything about its own condition, and so the emphasis falls on the allegorical suggestion that it is love that does not recognize its own ailing state. This results partly from the insidious secrecy with which the worm performs its work of corruption. Not only it is invisible, it enters the bed at night. This secrecy

constitutes part of the infection itself. The “crimson joy” of the rose connotes perverted and unhealthy love because the rose's love is tainted with shame and secrecy.

## Form

The two quatrains of this poem rhyme : abcb. The rhythm of these short, two beat lines contributes to the poem's sense of foreboding or dread and complements the directness with which the speaker tells the rose she is dying.

## Symbolism in the Poem:

"The Sick Rose" was published in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in 1794. The poem is symbolic and the two main symbols are : the rose and the worm.

The rose exists as a beautiful natural object that has become infected by a worm. It also exists as a literary rose, a conventional symbol of love. Therefore, the rose is a symbol of love, beauty, joy, and life. The rose's fate may also represent the corruption of innocence by the harsh realities of the world. The rose is unaware of its sickness and that its innocence is affected. The rose may represent childhood that is innocent, beautiful, and full of life and joy.

The worm can be seen as a symbol of death, because worms are associated with decay and they feed upon the dead in graves. The image of the worm suggests the biblical serpent. Worms are earthbound, and symbolize death and decay.

The poem presents a contrast between life and death. The destruction of the rose has not been completed, but is ongoing. The adults who try to corrupt the life of children are represented by the worm in the poem. Their love for those is unhealthy and is not true because they exploit children for their own interests.