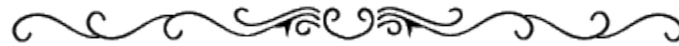


Romantic Eighteenth-Century Poetry
Third Year / Second Course/ Morning Classes 2020-2021
Instructor : Dr. Hayfaa Mohammed Shareef
William Blake's poem "The Lily"

William Blake



The Lily

From Songs of Experience

**The modest Rose puts forth a thorn,
The humble sheep a threat'ning horn:
While the Lily white shall in love delight,
Nor a thorn nor a threat stain her beauty bright.**

Analysis of the Poem

This four-line poem states simply that the Lily is the superior flower, in that it offers no harm or defense of itself to one who would love it. The rose is given as a contrast with its thorns, and the sheep's defensive horns are also cited. The Lilly is offered as a form of perfect love in its innocence and honesty. The poem uses personification and figurative meaning to describe several concepts of “love”—one being romantic and passionate, another being loyal and submissive, and the final being pure and strong. These concepts are represented through things, and by examining these items in simple terms, Blake reveals his underlying meaning. Just as “the Lily” is superior to the “Rose” and “Sheep,” the “love” that is pure and strong can endure beyond the other options.

Analysis of Line 1:

By addressing the “Rose” as a capitalized word, Blake has treated the concept as a proper noun. Through elevating the Rose’s importance, the “Rose” is not just a flower in a garden or a decoration in a vase, but rather everything the “Rose” symbolizes. It symbolizes “love,” passion, softness, “beauty,” and elegance. By contrast, Blake refers to the “Rose” as “modest.” Blake describes this flower as romantic and lovely. Of course, a “Rose” is not capable of being “modest” or arrogant, so the reader can

know that Blake is using personification to broaden the meaning of the poem. In spite of its beautiful and modest characteristics, Blake notes the “Rose puts forth a thorn.” This represents its fault. As a representation of what is “beaut[iful]” and elegant in the world then, the “Rose” reveals that there is no perfection to be found in them, as a “thorn” is noted as present

Analysis of Line 2 :

The “Sheep” is also capitalized to indicate shyness and timidity, and a tendency to follow others. Still, even that “Sheep” has “a threat’ning horn,” which indicates that even in this submissive and gentle creature, something exists that could do physical harm to another. Regardless, a “horn” can be dangerous, so those dealing with “Sheep” should be aware of the “threat,” even if it is small.

Analysis of Line 3 :

A second flower is named within this third line: “the Lily.” It is treated as a capitalized idea to show its characteristics—purity, innocence, hope, and strength. These traits are noted as the ones in which “love [will] delight,” which is an interesting choice of words given that the “Rose” is often noted as the most romantic of flowers. Therefore, there are symbolic meanings of each flower. Whereas the “Rose” is about passion and romanticism, “the Lily” is pure and strong. The Lily's qualities seem to represent long-lasting love that will endure. The Lily is noted as “white,” which symbolizes its purity and cleanness, like freshly fallen snow. This increases the greatness of “the Lily” by saying that it “shall in love delight.”

Analysis of Line 4 :

The two qualities that were noted as negative with the “Rose” and “Sheep” are addressed as things “the Lily” does not have—“a thorn” and “a threat.” Yet, these details refer as not staining the beauty of the lily. The verb "stain" refers to the lily's cleanness as a positive aspect of “the Lily.”

The “Rose” is connected to “beauty”, but here, “the Lily” is noted for having “beauty bright.” Blake is saying that its “beauty” is more significant than that of the “Rose.” What this leads to is the notion that honest elements of purity, strength, and “love” are more valuable than more praised details that come with a harsh twist and hidden dangers. Thus, a person should strive to find the pure “love” that comes without “threat”—like “the Lily.” The rose and the gentle sheep both have means of protecting themselves and protecting themselves. The lily delights in love, lacking anything to defend itself and this leaves its beauty totally pure.

Theme of the poem:

This is a simple poem in which Blake uses the lily flower image to reflect on the nature of true, unrepressed, love. The rose is a beautiful flower appealing, with enchanting fragrance. However the thorns are considered as a drawback, it acts as a symbol of resistance against all pervading emotion of love. On the contrary, Lily with a pure white colour and being devoid of thorns is considered superior by the poet. The poet praises lily because of its free and frank acceptance of love which makes her more beautiful and joy forever.

Love often accompanies danger and treachery. Much like a lovely rose plant which is covered with thorns and a sheep with a threatening horn; both of them threaten their lovers who dream of owning them.”The lily” on the contrary is the embodiment of true and pure love. The poet emphasize on the fact that purity does not involve rejection or refusal to the warmth of love.

Symbolism of The Poem:

1-The rose is a symbol of love and it is modest but it still has a thorn. It seems to be protecting itself; whoever approaches it risks pain and harm.

2-The sheep is a symbol of simplicity and vulnerability, and it has horns which keep others away. They are a threat.

3-The significance of the lily: the Lily is a symbol associated with the colour white, thereby representing purity. The lily therefore represents pure love which has no barriers to others, no prohibitions, because it is free of possessiveness over itself. The white lily is neither too humble nor too arrogant. Yes she accepts the joy of love. Unlike the sheep and the rose, the lily puts no resistance to love. Thus her beauty suffers no stain. The lily, thus, becomes a symbol of candid expression of joy and love.

Blake, therefore, turns upside down the contemporary ideas about purity, which the lily would normally denote. The purity of the lily lies in guilt-free freedom such as that of Adam and Eve before they fall to earth as a consequence of their rebellion against God. These ideas are taken ideas from the Bible --the Garden of Eden.

4-The thorns that grow in a rose tree symbolize the resistance it puts forth. Rose is soft flower that abstains from love (via her thorns). The sheep's horn is a symbol of resistance and defense that it needs for protection.
