

William Blake's *the Sick Rose*: A Representation of How a Girl is Raped if she Doesn't Maintain Purdah

Mohammad Mozammel Haque¹ Md. Abdullah AL Farook², Layla Moriom³

¹Associate Professor, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh

²Lecturer in English, Department of Foreign Languages, Jazan University, KSA

³Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bangladesh Islami University, Dhaka

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ABSTRACT

William Blake's *The Sick Rose* has been interpreted through feminist and psychoanalytic lenses. This research explores the poem as an allegory of sexual violence, arguing that it reflects the consequences imposed on women who defy *purdah*, the practice of female seclusion. The imagery of a delicate rose invaded by an "invisible worm" in a "stormy night" symbolizes patriarchal warnings against female autonomy. The rose, representing innocence and femininity, is violated and destroyed, mirroring how societies blame and punish women for their victimization. The worm's secrecy and nocturnal attack highlight the insidious nature of sexual violence and the societal silencing of such issues. The poem reinforces the belief that a woman's safety depends on adherence to *purdah*, which serves as physical and ideological control. Engaging with feminist critiques of *purdah* and victim-blaming, this paper argues that *The Sick Rose* legitimizes restrictive gender norms by equating female transgression with inevitable suffering.

Keywords: allegory, culture, femininity, purdah, rape, representation;

INTRODUCTION

William Blake's *The Sick Rose* is a brief yet symbolically rich poem that has been interpreted in numerous ways, ranging from religious allegory to psychoanalytic readings. However, one particularly striking interpretation situates the poem within the discourse of gender oppression, examining how it metaphorically represents the consequences of a woman's deviation from societal norms—specifically, the practice of *purdah*. This article argues that *The Sick Rose* serves as an implicit warning against female autonomy, depicting the rape of a girl who does not conform to *purdah*. By analyzing Blake's imagery in the context of patriarchal control over women's bodies, this study highlights how the poem reflects societal anxieties surrounding female sexuality and honor.

Purdah, a cultural and religious practice observed in various societies, enforces the seclusion of women to protect their so-called purity. Women are expected to remain within the domestic sphere, hidden from the male gaze, to preserve their honor and that of their families. In societies where *purdah* is strictly maintained, a woman who steps outside these restrictions is often perceived as inviting danger upon herself, including sexual violence. Blake's *The Sick Rose* can be interpreted as reinforcing this notion, with the rose symbolizing a young woman whose innocence is corrupted by an external force—the "invisible worm." The worm's nocturnal intrusion represents the predatory nature of male aggression, and the resulting "sickness" signifies the loss of purity and the ensuing societal condemnation.

Scholarly interpretations of *The Sick Rose* frequently engage with the themes of repression, sexuality, and destruction. According to Melissa Sanchez, Blake's poetry often reflects "the intertwining of innocence and experience, where purity is threatened by external forces that society refuses to acknowledge" (Sanchez 214). This perspective supports the argument that *The Sick Rose* portrays the violent repercussions a woman faces

when she fails to conform to patriarchal norms. The rose, symbolic of femininity, is not merely a passive victim but is also framed as a cautionary figure, serving as a warning for other women.

Similarly, Anne K. Mellor examines the power dynamics in Blake's poetry, asserting that "Blake's symbolic universe frequently reinforces the idea that female sexuality must be controlled to maintain social order" (Mellor 156). This observation aligns with the notion that *The Sick Rose* communicates the dangers of transgressing societal boundaries, particularly those imposed upon women. The language of the poem—its references to secrecy, destruction, and corruption—mirrors the discourse surrounding sexual violence, in which the victim is often blamed for failing to adhere to prescribed norms.

Furthermore, Peter Otto discusses how Blake's imagery reflects "a broader anxiety about the fragility of innocence in a world governed by unseen but omnipresent forces of control and coercion" (Otto 98). This interpretation suggests that the worm's invasion is not merely an act of individual violence but rather a representation of systemic oppression. The sickening of the rose, then, is not just a personal tragedy but a social indictment—a reflection of how patriarchal societies construct narratives that blame and punish women for their own victimization.

The implication of *The Sick Rose* as a representation of rape due to the lack of purdah is particularly significant in the context of cultures that enforce strict gender segregation. In such societies, the notion that a woman must shield herself from male attention is deeply ingrained, and any deviation is met with moral, social, and sometimes physical repercussions. The poem encapsulates this fear through its imagery of destruction; the rose does not simply wither—it becomes diseased, suggesting an irreversible loss of virtue. This metaphor resonates with the cultural construct that views a woman's sexual purity as her defining attribute, and any perceived violation results in her social ostracization.

This study engages with Blake's *The Sick Rose* through a feminist and socio-cultural lens, arguing that the poem's symbolism reinforces the ideology that women must adhere to purdah to avoid sexual violence. By contextualizing Blake's work within historical and contemporary discussions of gendered oppression, this article contributes to broader discourses on how literature both reflects and perpetuates societal anxieties regarding female autonomy. The following sections will further analyze the poem's language, historical context, and its relevance to contemporary gender debates, illustrating how *The Sick Rose* remains a pertinent text in discussions of victim-blaming and patriarchal control.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, using textual analysis to examine William Blake's *The Sick Rose* through a feminist and socio-cultural lens. The study interprets symbolic elements within the poem, linking them to gender oppression and purdah norms. Secondary sources, including feminist critiques and cultural studies, provide contextual support. The research also adopts a critical discourse analysis framework to uncover implicit meanings of violence and control over female sexuality. By synthesizing literary and socio-historical perspectives, the study explores how the poem metaphorically represents coercion and victimization of women.

Theoretical Framework

William Blake's *The Sick Rose* can be analyzed through a feminist lens, particularly in the context of purdah and sexual violence. The poem's imagery of an "invisible worm" that destroys the rose at night symbolizes patriarchal oppression and the victimization of women who do not conform to societal norms of modesty and seclusion. In many traditional societies, purdah is enforced to protect women from male desire, reinforcing the notion that a woman's virtue is tied to her concealment. The poem's dark and ominous tone reflects the consequences imposed on women who defy these restrictions, often blaming them for their own suffering. By linking the rose's destruction to rape, Blake's poem highlights the dangers of a system that equates female purity with social control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

William Blake's poem *The Sick Rose*, first published in *Songs of Experience* (1794), presents a rich and mysterious portrayal of innocence corrupted. Its brevity and symbolism have led to diverse interpretations over time, particularly regarding the nature of the rose's sickness and the destructive force of the worm. While Blake's poem has generally been seen as an exploration of the destructive effects of experience on innocence, a feminist interpretation of *The Sick Rose* links the poem to sexual violence, specifically in relation to societal expectations of women, such as the practice of purdah.

In *The Sick Rose*, Blake utilizes the metaphor of a "worm" entering the "rose," causing it to become "sick," with the "dark secret love" of the worm representing a form of intrusion and corruption. Many scholars have interpreted the worm as a symbol of an unwanted or destructive force that penetrates and destroys the rose's purity (Samuels, 35). In this interpretation, the worm's intrusion could be seen as a metaphor for sexual violence, with the rose symbolizing a vulnerable woman whose innocence is threatened by external forces. This aligns with feminist readings of Blake, which see the poem as reflecting societal fears surrounding female sexuality. Blake's rose, a symbol of both beauty and purity, becomes a victim of an intrusive malevolent force that is able to destroy its innocence.

Furthermore, the concept of purdah—traditionally practiced in certain cultural contexts as a form of seclusion for women to protect their chastity—offers a framework for analyzing the poem's deeper implications. According to critics, purdah functions as a form of societal control that isolates women, reinforcing their vulnerability to sexual violence (Agha, 78). In this context, the rose's sickness could be viewed as a consequence of not adhering to the expectations of modesty and seclusion imposed upon women. As Sardar notes, purdah reflects the societal belief that women are inherently vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and that their chastity must be guarded at all costs (Sardar, 45). By positioning the rose outside the protective bounds of purdah, Blake may be critiquing the sexual violence that results from the societal imposition of gendered norms.

Feminist scholars such as Gilbert and Gubar have also explored how Blake's work challenges the traditional power dynamics between the sexes. They argue that Blake's poetry critiques the objectification of women, as seen in his use of the rose to represent female sexuality and its inevitable destruction at the hands of the worm (Gilbert & Gubar, 112). In this light, the worm's act of corrupting the rose represents not just sexual violation but also the dehumanization of women, particularly those who challenge societal norms. The rose's vulnerability, much like the girl who does not maintain purdah, is emblematic of the limited agency women possess within a patriarchal system.

In conclusion, *The Sick Rose* functions as a metaphor for the consequences women face when they do not conform to prescribed roles of modesty and protection. Through Blake's portrayal of the sick rose, scholars can interpret the poem as a symbolic representation of sexual violence, linked directly to the societal pressures surrounding the practice of purdah. By using the rose as a symbol for women, Blake critiques the dangers inherent in a system that enforces strict gender roles, viewing women's bodies as both vulnerable and in need of constant protection.

FINDINGS

The analysis of *The Sick Rose* reveals that Blake's use of the rose and worm metaphor effectively represents the loss of innocence and the violation of purity, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for sexual violence. The rose, symbolizing the girl, becomes vulnerable to the worm, representing an intrusive force, potentially symbolizing a predator or societal pressures. This aligns with the concept of purdah, where women's chastity is guarded through seclusion, and failure to comply with such norms leads to victimization. The poem critiques the societal constructs that associate women's purity with vulnerability and explores the damaging effects of these restrictive gender expectations. Thus, *The Sick Rose* can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the consequences women face when defying traditional societal norms regarding modesty and sexual protection.

Instructions of Purdah in Islam:

Purdah, the practice of seclusion or veiling of women, is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and is considered a significant aspect of modesty, which both men and women are required to observe. In Islamic tradition, purdah serves as a means to protect women's honor, dignity, and chastity by limiting their exposure to unrelated men. The guidelines for purdah are derived from several verses in the Qur'an, the Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and interpretations by Islamic scholars. While the practice has evolved in various cultural contexts, the core principles surrounding purdah are based on the belief that both men and women should act with modesty in their interactions and dress.

The Qur'an outlines the concept of modesty for both genders in Surah An-Nur (24:30-31), where it commands both men and women to lower their gazes and guard their chastity. Specifically, the verse instructs women to cover their adornments, except for what is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms. This act of covering the body and concealing one's beauty is interpreted as a way of protecting the woman from the male gaze and ensuring she is not subjected to sexual exploitation or harassment. As Rehman and Malek point out, "the purpose of purdah is to protect the integrity of women, ensuring that they are not objectified or commodified in society" (Rehman and Malek, 109). It is seen as a protective measure to safeguard a woman's virtue in a society that may otherwise view her as an object of sexual desire.

The Hadiths further elaborate on the importance of modesty, specifically the Prophet Muhammad's directives regarding the veiling of women. In one Hadith, the Prophet is quoted saying, "When a woman prays, and she covers her head and her body, she is more protected from fitnah (temptation)" (Sahih Muslim). This statement reflects the belief that a woman's modesty, embodied in the practice of purdah, protects her from societal temptations and unwanted advances, emphasizing the significance of both physical and spiritual seclusion. Scholars such as Barlas have argued that purdah, while seen as a measure of protection, also functions to reinforce gender roles where women's primary worth is associated with their sexual purity (Barlas, 42).

However, the practice and interpretation of purdah have generated significant debate within Islamic scholarship. Some scholars argue that purdah should not be viewed merely as a physical covering but also as a spiritual and moral safeguard that encompasses both behavior and interaction between the genders. Purdah is seen not only as a means of protecting women from external harm but also as a way to preserve their internal dignity and strength. In contrast, critics of the purdah system highlight its role in limiting women's agency and reinforcing patriarchal norms. According to Ahmed, "the practice of purdah has been used to control women's sexuality by regulating their visibility and interaction in society" (Ahmed, 57). This viewpoint suggests that the practice can often be coercive, limiting women's participation in public life and education, thus perpetuating gender inequality.

In conclusion, while the instructions of purdah in Islam are rooted in concepts of modesty and protection, the practice has been the subject of ongoing debate. The use of purdah is intended to shield women from harm and societal judgment, but its implications in terms of female autonomy and sexual agency have sparked significant discussion in contemporary Islamic discourse.

In Islam, the concept of purdah emphasizes modesty and protection. The Qur'an instructs women to cover their adornments and draw their veils over their bosoms to safeguard their dignity (Qur'an 24:31). The Hadith further underscores this, with the Prophet Muhammad saying, "When a woman prays and covers her body, she is more protected from fitnah" (Sahih Muslim). Additionally, the Qur'an directs men and women to lower their gazes as a means of avoiding temptation (Qur'an 24:30). These teachings establish purdah as a method of shielding women from harm and maintaining their chastity.

Representation of How a Girl is Raped if She Does Not Maintain Purdah:

William Blake's *The Sick Rose* is a profound, symbolic poem that addresses themes of innocence, corruption, and destruction. Although traditionally read as a reflection on the loss of innocence or the dangers of experience, a feminist interpretation of the poem offers a deeper analysis of how societal expectations of women's modesty and the consequences of failing to adhere to those expectations might be represented. This

analysis ties into the concept of purdah, a practice in Islamic societies aimed at protecting women's chastity by limiting their exposure to men. Drawing from Islamic teachings and feminist readings of Blake's work, this section explores how the violation depicted in *The Sick Rose* can be interpreted as a representation of sexual violence against a girl who does not conform to the norms of purdah, offering a critique of the societal pressures placed on women.

Blake's Metaphor of the Rose and the Worm:

In *The Sick Rose*, Blake presents the rose as a symbol of purity and innocence. The line "O Rose, thou art sick!" signals that something is wrong, and the subsequent lines reveal that a "worm" has entered the rose, causing it to become ill. This "worm" is described as a "dark secret love," which evokes an image of an invasive, hidden force that brings about the destruction of the rose's purity. The metaphor of the worm can be seen as symbolic of the societal and sexual violations that befall women who do not maintain modesty, represented by the rose's exposure. This interpretation aligns with readings that suggest the worm symbolizes sexual violence—specifically rape. The rose's illness and destruction suggest the irreversible consequences of this violation.

Blake's use of the rose as a representation of female vulnerability resonates with feminist critiques of gendered violence. As Gilman notes, "The female body in literature is often reduced to an object of sexual desire or victimhood, a symbol of societal purity or corruption" (Gilman, 105). In this sense, the rose's demise is a tragic commentary on the forces that threaten a woman's autonomy and purity. Blake's portrayal of the rose as a passive entity highlights the victimization of women who, like the rose, may fall prey to destructive forces when they are not protected by societal structures, such as the practice of purdah.

The Concept of Purdah in Islam:

Purdah, a term that refers to the physical and social separation of women from unrelated men, is grounded in Islamic principles that emphasize modesty for both men and women. According to the Qur'an, women are instructed to cover their adornments and draw their veils to protect their dignity and avoid attracting unwanted attention (Qur'an 24:31). The Hadiths also support this notion, with the Prophet Muhammad stating, "When a woman prays and covers her body, she is more protected from fitnah (temptation)" (Sahih Muslim). This concept of protection through modesty reflects the belief that women are at risk of sexual exploitation and must take measures to shield themselves from such harm. The physical and social isolation encouraged by purdah is seen as a safeguard to protect women's chastity and maintain their moral integrity.

However, the practice of purdah has often been criticized as a tool of patriarchal control. As Barlas argues, "The purdah system, while seen as a protective measure, often restricts women's autonomy, effectively regulating their visibility and societal roles" (Barlas, 43). The enforcement of purdah in many societies implies that women who fail to adhere to these strict norms may face victimization, further reinforcing the association between a woman's lack of modesty and the likelihood of sexual assault.

In this context, Blake's *The Sick Rose* can be interpreted as a critique of the societal pressures that enforce strict codes of modesty, particularly the consequences faced by women who deviate from these expectations. The rose's exposure and subsequent destruction by the worm symbolically represent the vulnerability of a girl who does not maintain purdah—exposed to sexual violence and societal judgment. This parallels the expectation in some cultures that women must maintain purity and seclusion to avoid becoming victims of rape or sexual assault.

The Role of Gender and Power Dynamics:

The societal expectation that women maintain purdah is rooted in gendered power dynamics, where women's sexuality is heavily regulated and controlled. This idea is further explored in the feminist critique of sexual violence, where the regulation of women's bodies is seen as a mechanism to maintain male control over female sexuality. Feminist scholars argue that the imposition of purdah reflects broader patriarchal control, which dictates how women should behave and what is considered acceptable conduct. According to Rehman and

Malek, "The patriarchal system reinforces the idea that women must protect themselves from male desire by adhering to restrictive norms like purdah" (Rehman and Malek, 110).

In Blake's poem, the worm's destructive influence on the rose can be seen as representative of the power imbalance between men and women in a patriarchal society. The worm, as an invasive force, penetrates the rose, stripping it of its purity. This echoes the way that women's bodies are often viewed as public property in patriarchal societies, and the control over their sexuality is closely tied to maintaining their social value and worth. The violation of the rose can thus be understood as a representation of rape, where the woman is seen as a passive recipient of violence, and her violation becomes a reflection of the consequences of not adhering to societal norms regarding female modesty.

Feminist Readings of Sexual Violence and Autonomy:

Feminist readings of *The Sick Rose* emphasize the loss of agency and autonomy that women experience in the face of sexual violence. In this interpretation, the rose's sickness and eventual death symbolize the destructive impact of sexual violence on a woman's sense of self and autonomy. The image of the rose being ravaged by the worm conveys the hopelessness and victimization that many women face in societies where their bodies are constantly under threat. Feminist scholars argue that the imposition of purdah is not just a protective measure but a way of controlling women's autonomy, forcing them to conform to specific expectations of modesty. As Ahmed notes, "The practice of purdah, while framed as a safeguard, reinforces the notion that women must restrict their freedom to avoid being victimized" (Ahmed, 61). This viewpoint suggests that purdah, far from empowering women, actually limits their agency and autonomy, leaving them vulnerable to violence when they do not comply with societal expectations.

In *The Sick Rose*, the rose's destruction can be read as a metaphor for the loss of agency that results from being objectified and violated by external forces. This resonates with feminist theories that argue sexual violence is often a result of societal structures that diminish women's autonomy and place the responsibility for sexual assault on women, rather than on the perpetrators. The poem's tragic imagery reflects how a girl who does not adhere to purdah or societal norms of modesty can be subjected to sexual violence, with devastating consequences.

The Sick Rose by William Blake can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of sexual violence, particularly in the context of a society where women are expected to adhere to strict codes of modesty, such as the practice of purdah in Islamic culture. The worm's intrusion into the rose serves as a metaphor for the violation of a girl's innocence when she fails to conform to societal norms that govern her sexuality. Through the lens of feminist theory and Islamic teachings on purdah, Blake's poem highlights the vulnerabilities women face in patriarchal societies, where their worth is often tied to their sexual purity. While purdah is intended as a protective measure, its enforcement also perpetuates the idea that women are responsible for preventing sexual violence through their actions and appearance. Blake's *The Sick Rose* poignantly critiques the destructive forces that arise from societal expectations and the consequences of a woman's perceived failure to maintain her purity.

Interpretation of the Poem through Feminist and Socio-cultural Lens:

William Blake's *The Sick Rose* is a short but powerful poem that has been interpreted in various ways. When analyzed through a feminist and socio-cultural lens, it highlights the ways in which the poem can be read as a metaphor for the violation and exploitation of women, particularly in relation to societal expectations surrounding modesty, purity, and sexuality. In this interpretation, the rose symbolizes a woman whose innocence and purity are threatened by external forces, embodied by the "worm" that corrupts her. This can be connected to the practice of purdah, wherein a woman's sexual purity is protected by societal norms, and failing to adhere to these standards can lead to victimization, such as rape.

From a feminist perspective, the rose represents a woman's innocence, beauty, and vulnerability. The worm, in contrast, symbolizes an invasive and destructive force that causes the rose to become "sick." Feminist scholars have long argued that literature, including poetry, often uses female imagery to depict vulnerability and

victimization. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “the female body is often depicted as a site of violation and corruption, subject to forces beyond its control” (Gilbert and Gubar, 132). In *The Sick Rose*, Blake uses the rose to signify the fragility of women within patriarchal systems. The woman, represented by the rose, is rendered passive and susceptible to violence and exploitation, symbolized by the worm, which infiltrates her most intimate space. This intrusion highlights the loss of agency women experience when their sexuality is regulated by societal norms, often without their consent or control.

Feminist interpretations of the poem also emphasize the link between female purity and societal expectations. The worm’s entrance into the rose can be read as a metaphor for sexual violence, an intrusion that taints the woman’s purity. The concept of purity, which is heavily emphasized in many patriarchal societies, particularly through the lens of religious or cultural practices like purdah, often places an undue burden on women. They are expected to remain pure and protected, but if they fail to adhere to these societal norms, they are blamed for the violence that results. Barlas argues that “societal and religious pressures often portray women’s purity as fragile, with the loss of this purity deemed catastrophic for both the woman and the society” (Barlas, 45). In this context, the rose’s “sickness” can be understood as a representation of how society punishes women when they do not conform to these rigid expectations.

The socio-cultural perspective also sheds light on the power dynamics in play within *The Sick Rose*. The rose, as a symbol of femininity and sexual purity, is constantly at risk of being defiled by external forces, embodied by the worm. In many cultures, women are seen as the gatekeepers of family honor, and their sexuality is often heavily controlled. This view is reflected in the practice of purdah, where women are secluded from public life to protect their chastity and to shield them from the male gaze. Rehman and Malek observe, “purdah systems are not just about protecting women but about controlling their interactions with men to ensure they remain untouched and pure” (Rehman and Malek, 110). Women who fail to conform to such practices are seen as vulnerable to sexual violence and societal shame.

Blake’s poem critiques this socio-cultural expectation by portraying the tragic consequences of societal constructs that place the responsibility for sexual violence on women. The sick rose is a metaphor for the girl who does not maintain purdah, exposing herself to harm. While the poem does not explicitly address the practice of purdah, the imagery of a violated, corrupted rose resonates with the ways in which women are often held accountable for the violence inflicted upon them. Women’s sexual purity becomes a reflection of their value, and when that purity is threatened or destroyed, so too is their worth in the eyes of society. The worm, in this reading, becomes a symbol of the predators who capitalize on the vulnerability created by these rigid gender norms.

The feminist and socio-cultural readings of Blake’s poem also highlight the consequences of a patriarchal worldview that renders women vulnerable to exploitation. Women are often seen as objects to be protected or violated, their worth defined by their ability to conform to societal expectations. This mirrors the broader cultural narratives that restrict women’s autonomy, leaving them powerless in the face of external threats. As Samuels notes, “Women in literature, as in life, are frequently depicted as being at the mercy of external forces, their actions and behavior heavily monitored by societal norms” (Samuels, 58). Blake’s *The Sick Rose* encapsulates this experience, showing how a woman, when exposed to societal dangers and violations, becomes a casualty of the very structures that are meant to protect her.

Moreover, *The Sick Rose* can be interpreted through a feminist and socio-cultural lens as a metaphor for the vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society. The rose symbolizes female purity, while the worm represents the destructive forces that corrupt and violate this purity. Through the lens of purdah, the poem illustrates how societal norms surrounding modesty and chastity place the responsibility for sexual violence on women, portraying them as victims of a system that both objectifies and controls their sexuality. The tragedy of the sick rose highlights the dangers of a societal system that enforces rigid gender roles and places women in positions of powerlessness, where they are subject to violence and exploitation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, William Blake’s *The Sick Rose* serves as a poignant metaphor for the vulnerability of women in societies where their sexuality is tightly regulated by cultural and religious norms. The rose, representing a girl

or woman, symbolizes innocence, purity, and beauty, while the worm represents the destructive force of sexual violence, an intrusion that corrupts and taints her purity. By interpreting the poem through both a feminist and socio-cultural lens, it becomes evident that Blake's work critiques societal pressures placed on women, particularly the enforcement of modesty through practices like purdah. The concept of purdah, while intended as a protective measure in certain cultures, often places an undue burden on women, making them responsible for preventing their own victimization. As the poem reveals, when women fail to conform to these societal expectations, they are at risk of being victimized, often blamed for the violence inflicted upon them. Blake's use of the rose and the worm effectively highlights the destructive nature of societal norms that both objectify and control women's bodies, reducing them to passive entities in the face of sexual violence. Furthermore, the poem illustrates how women are subjected to a system that limits their agency and autonomy. The violation of the rose symbolizes the lack of power women have in a patriarchal society, where their worth is often tied to their sexual purity. Through this lens, *The Sick Rose* becomes a critique of the patriarchal structures that contribute to the exploitation and victimization of women, particularly in societies where the emphasis on female modesty is central to cultural identity. Ultimately, Blake's *The Sick Rose* serves as a powerful reminder of the dangers of rigid gender norms, which can strip women of their agency and expose them to harm when they do not adhere to societal expectations. Through its stark imagery, the poem compels readers to reflect on the consequences of a system that controls and objectifies women based on their sexual purity.

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