

# Commentary on robert frost's 'out out'

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'Out Out' is a poem that tells the story of a young boy cutting his hand off while chopping wood and then dies, and how those around him cope with the death. This poem shows many techniques which are quite common in Frost's poems; such as imagery, ambiguity and it also has a universal theme to it. This poem can be perceived to have several themes, one of which may be the lives of those living in rural areas and how they have to get on with their lives when they have lost someone close, because there is nothing else they can do. Another theme to the poem could be that of child labour in rural areas, and although the poem is set in Vermont, this is a universal theme, as child labour is known to exist all over the world.

The first line of the poem, 'The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard' does many things for the poem. For a start, the line sounds quite threatening to us and immediately we think that the saw will later become a problem or an issue. The line also personifies the saw, which further makes us believe that the saw will later play a major role in the poem. Frost also personifies the saw by using words like snarled and rattled which makes the saw seem beast-like. The word buzz is onomatopoeic which again personifies the saw.

The next line, 'And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood' describes the saw's purpose in the poem; it makes us more familiar with the saw. The next few lines set the scene of the poem, 'Five mountain ranges one behind the other, Under the sunset far into Vermont'. Some say that this is a reference to the Bible, in Psalms\*. The image that this line creates is soothing and contrasts with the first line, which can be perceived as being threatening. The phrase 'Under the sunset' is ambiguous; it can be

interpreted as a soothing image for some but for others it may resemble an ending of something more than just day.

Generally, the first five lines set the scene of the poem. They tell us more about where the poem is set and what kind of life the boy lives- a rural life.

The seventh line goes on to say 'And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled', which is a repetition of the first line. The repetition here is used to show that a long time is passing by while the saw is being used and that perhaps the job is monotonous. This line also brings us back to the reality that the poem is trying to show us. The 2 lines just before line seven gives us a soothing and peaceful image but amongst all this beauty there is this saw, a saw that Frost describes as dangerous.

'Call it a day, I wish they might have said' has a tone of regret and sympathy, showing that the persona knows what will happen to the boy, and this leaves us to think what will happen and we are left to fear the worst. 'To please the boy by giving him the half hour that a boy counts so much when saved from work.' This line shows more regret and it is at this point that we realise that the poem involves a young boy and this saddens and worries the reader even more. The line also subtly suggests that if it was 'called a day' then perhaps the incident with the saw would not have happened.

In line 14, the boy's sister comes to him to tell him that it is time for dinner. At this point we are slightly relieved, as the word 'supper' which is used in the line, relates to normality and we all feel safe in the domesticity and

regularity of our own home and therefore, we think that perhaps what we had predicted to happen would not come true.

Frost, again personifies the saw in lines 15 and 16, 'At the word, the saw, as if to prove saws knew what supper meant...' Again, Frost makes us fear the worst, and in the next line our fears come true, 'Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap- He must have given the hand'. In the last phrase of this line, Frost has used irony; when someone gives their hand it usually means they are greeting someone or making an agreement on something. Frost words it in such a way as if he is suggesting that the boy welcomed the saw. He then goes on to say in line 18 'However it was neither refused the meeting. This again implies that the boy did nothing to stop the saw from hurting him. 'The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh'. In this line we are shown that the boy did not cry at first but laughed at his careless mistake, laughed as if to stop himself from crying, or perhaps just because the fact that he had hurt himself hadn't sunken in yet.

When he showed his family what had happened he 'swung toward them holding up the hand, half in appeal but half as if to keep the life from spilling'. In this line, the words 'half' and 'spilling' create very gory pictures in our minds. 'Half' shows the image of half a hand, and 'spilling' shows the image of red blood rushing out from his cut hand.

'Then the boy saw all-'. In this line Frost has used the word saw as a homonym; it could mean that he 'saw' his life flash before him or it could mean 'that he had sawed off all of his hand'. The pause after the word 'all'

creates suspense and emphasis and once again we are left to think of the consequences and of what will happen to the boy.

In line 25 we are told the boy's response 'Don't let him cut my hand off - the doctor, when he comes. Don't let him sister!' This makes the whole poem even upsetting because throughout the poem we are told the story from an outsider but here in this line, we are suddenly given the boy's view on the accident.

The poem reaches an anti-climax in line 32: 'They listened at his heart. Little - less - nothing! - and that ended it.' As readers, it is almost impossible to believe that the boy died from the incident, and the fact that the word 'death' is not mentioned makes us want to believe that the boy is not dead but has survived. However, some would say that the anti-climax was right at the end of the poem: 'And they, since they were not the one dead, turned to their affairs'. Here, we would expect the family to grieve and not be able to carry on the way they used, because that is how we would expect people to react in today's world. The reaction that the boy's family has showed is that of stoicism and in today's world, even if we do not realise it, examples of stoicism are common.

Throughout the poem, we can see many of Frost's common techniques that he uses in many poems. For example, in line 6 he uses ambiguity with the word 'sunset' which was mentioned earlier on in this commentary. Many of Frost's poems are in a conversational tone such as 'Mending Wall', 'Home Burial' and 'After Apple-Picking'. To make the poem more conversational in

'Out Out', Frost has used words such as 'so', so as to make it seem like a live conversation. It could also have been used a gap-filler in the poem.

Overall, I think that 'Out Out' is a poem to represent the sadness and grief that families have to go through when they lose someone close and how they have to carry on with their lives just because there is nothing else they can do. It is the harsh truth of losing someone close to you, someone you love.