

Reflection on 'Out Out' by Robert Frost

The narrator at first describes the noise made by the sawing machine as it made stove-length logs and created sawdust:

'The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard'.

Frost shows his sensual quality as a poet, when the narrator describes the pleasant whiff that the breeze blew off the timber:

'Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it'.

This description is relaxed and sensual. The mention of a breeze shows a happy and light-hearted mood. The narrator continues to show his delight in nature up to line six:

'Five mountain ranges one behind the other'.

But it is evident that most of the farmers don't pay much attention to the surrounding natural beauty:

'those that lifted eyes could count'.



Perhaps no one but the narrator lifts eyes to the beauty of the mountains at sunset. The hard working family, with a son sawing and a daughter preparing supper, didn't have time for the finer things of life.

In line seven, the narrator repeats his description of the sound

effects of the sawing machine. The word **'snarled'** shows danger, like when an angry animal is about to attack. But for a while, **'nothing happened'**. Everybody seemed safe as **'day was all but done'**.

With half an hour to go disaster struck. Perhaps the boy became impatient or tired as the day of sawing dragged on. Anyway, he had no choice but to continue. In any case, he lost concentration at a vital moment. Line sixteen shows this in a comical way. Then the saw that had earlier **'snarled'**, 'leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap'.

The narrator seems to blame the work ethic or slave-driving values of the boy's family. In line twelve, the narrator suggests the spirit of the family was mean spirited for denying the boy **'the half hour that a boy counts so much when saved from work'**. The narrator indicates that the boy freely sacrificed his hand:

'He must have given the hand'.

This is unlikely to be true. But the narrator seems to mean that the boy was used to obeying orders at home. The narrator suggests that the boy offered his hand willingly to the saw. Perhaps he was stupefied or dazed by hard work and hardly knew what he was doing. In his confusion, the boy put his hand in the wrong place. There is a slight hint that the overworked boy had a suicidal moment.

The story behind the incident seems to be that the boy was overworked.

The narrator even joked that at the word **'supper'** the saw hungrily lunged for or pounced on the boy's hand. The boy was too exhausted to react on time. He may even have deliberately let the saw slice his hand:

'Neither refused the meeting'.

The dazed boy reacted strangely, with a **'rueful laugh'**. It is as if the boy was a little insane, laughing guiltily at giving his hand to the saw. Did he do it to spite his father's endless work demands? Is the boy accusing his demanding father of causing this? Then it appears he came to his senses, but too late.

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He began to seek their forgiveness. His upraised hand was a gesture that was **'Half in appeal'**. Did he feel guilty at his impulse or carelessness?

It finally dawned on the boy that his life was gushing out of his body in his **'spilling'** blood.

Another reason he held up the hand was to stop the loss of blood. The narrator shows that the boy, though still a child, knew his fate or doom:

'though a child at heart—he saw all spoiled'.

He knew his life was over. He knew he played an important role in his family's hard-up existence. Now that too was ruined.

He wanted to save his hand. He feared amputation by the doctor: 'Don't let him cut my hand off'.

It is interesting that he appealed to his sister. This reveals he did not have a positive relationship with his father. There is no mention of his mother.

It is interesting that the person who waited at his bedside is described as a **'watcher'**. Again, there is no mention of personal care from his parents while he lay unconscious after the amputation.



The doctor knocked the un-named boy unconscious with **'ether'** and he faded and died after the operation, probably in his own house. Nobody showed much concern until his pulse faded:

'And then— the watcher at his pulse took fright'.

His family didn't expect him to die:

'No one believed'.

The narrator does not mention any gesture or period of mourning:

'and that ended it'.

The family seemed heartless or callous at the end. They returned to work without their family member:

' And they, since they Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs'.