**“OUT, OUT-“:**

Written in 1916, in the USA, Frost’s poem concerns an accident on a farm in which a boy severs his

hand with a buzz-saw and dies from his injury. Frost comments on the response of the family and

also builds up a series of images relating to the title of the poem – part of a quotation from

Macbeth, in which the hero, contemplating the death of his wife and his own demise starts a

soliloquy “Out, out, brief candle” equating life and the candle and thus pointing out how easily death

can come to all of us.

The poem is written in Free Verse –that is to say there is no rhyme scheme or regular rhythmic

pattern to the poem. Instead, the poet has freedom to place words and phrases wherever he wishes

for maximum effect within the single stanza of the poem.

A range of devices are used in the poem. The saw itself is personified as some for of wild animal –

“snarled and rattled” is repeated three times to give a sense of the continuous noise and threat that

exists whilst at the same time linking the saw to predatory animals and rattle snakes. The

personification continues in the description of the attack as the saw “leaped” at the boy, before

Frost acknowledges that the boy must have had a part in the accident himself – “he must have given

the hand”- and then focuses the reader on the object at the centre of the poem. “But the hand!”

which ends L18 is a half line, strengthened by the preceding caesura which focuses the reader away

from the emotion of the boy and onto the hand itself. The exclamation mark reflects not only the

boy’s shock but also the importance of the hand. Without a hand, a farmer is useless and in rural

Vermont, we assume, there is little future left for the boy. This is made all the more tragic when we

notice that in L12 we notice the idea of the sister arriving so that the boy might be “saved” from

work. He is distracted, wants to play in his half hour of freedom and loses control of the saw –after

all, as Frost reminds the reader, he is doing “man’s work”.

Frost sets up the scene with contrasts between the savage saw and the “sweet smells” and beauty of

the vast American countryside. The accident is set against such an idyllic landscape yet the reader

notices the time of day –sunset and the fact that the boy is later put into the “dark of ether”. The

day is ending, and so this reflects the end of the life of the boy.

As the narrative progresses from L20, the boy first gives a “rueful” laugh – almost apologetic, and

certainly understated in response before reality hits him and as he recognises “life spilling” (a half

line in which the following caesura seems to represent the finality of the statement), and Frost

delays the flow of information using parenthetic dashes to build tension as he comments on the age

of the victim before the powerful monosyllables which open L25. As he begins to fear for his life, the

boy calls to his sister (or possibly a nurse) and falls into the hands of the medics who try to save him.

In his darkness, the doctors become unnamed, unformed figures – “the watcher” who responds with

fear to the slipping pulse, and Frost uses punctuation to clearly show the stages of life ebbing from

the boy; “Little – less-nothing!-and that ended it”. As this line closes with the simple finality, the life

has lost all existence and is now merely “it” – the boy no longer has life. Frost repeats the word

“boy” several times between LL 19 and 24, stressing his youth, and now the humanity is replaced by

the reaction of the family and those present. This is not a callous disregard for the boy, but rather a

recognition that life has to continue – the world turns, seasons change and, in nature, animals die.