

## Stylistic and Didactic Narratological Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem "OUT, OUT"

Muhammad Ajmal<sup>1</sup>, Zahoor Hussain<sup>2</sup>, Saleem Akhtar Khan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English, G.C. University, Faisalabad, Layyah Campus, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer in English, BZU Bahadur Campus, Layyah, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer in English, G.C. University, Faisalabad, Layyah Campus, Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

This paper tries to unravel Frost's poem "Out, Out" on stylistic and narratological grounds. Narratology is study of narratives whether real or fictive having at least two events in a time sequence. It is a narrative poem that is full of events told by an external narrator. A boy is cutting wood at his farm when suddenly his hand is cut with the saw and finally he dies. Frost is of the view that life is full of accidents and one should not lose one's heart rather facing the pangs of life courageously. Imagery, personification and narrativity combine to augment the beauty of the poem and provide an opportunity to explore the invisible devices in work of narrative. Bal renders Wilhelm Dilthey hermeneutic understanding of knowledge as "the projection of the self into something external, in such a way that an unfamiliar or past experience is represented in the experience of the self" (*On Story-Telling*: 31).

**KEY WORDS:** The Boy, the Family, the Saw, Death, Narrator, Point of View

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

Stylistics is the analysis of literary texts and a branch of linguistics. Widdowson (1975, p 3) defines stylistics as —the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation". Leech and Short (1981, p.15) further elaborates that style is the —dress of thoughts. It is the way of the writer to convey the message to the readers. Olorunfoba-Oju (1999, p.127) believes that "style is almost synonymous with variety; it refers in a simple way to the manner of expression, which differs according to the various contexts".

#### OBJECTIVES BEHIND THE PAPER

The main aim of this study is to reach the aesthetic and artistic beauty in Frost's poetry on stylistics and narratological grounds, besides this the following objectives are expected:

1. to explore eventfulness in Frost's poetry
2. to elucidate and validate stylistics and narrativity
3. to study the use of narrative structures, techniques and narrative content in (narrative) poetry;
4. to experiment with narratological methods and concepts in the analysis of poetry;
5. to adapt narratological concepts for use in the analysis and interpretation of poetry in order to make a contribution to narratological studies.

#### INTRODUCING THE POET

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is a representative poet of American Literature. His poems are very popular for themes and simple language. He is great adorer of nature and his poems seem ordinary but in reality are very profound and meaningful. Eventfulness is the major characteristic of his poetry that means he writes on life. Events are symbol of life. This is reality that life is of two faces, one is full of happiness and the other is teeming with misery. The winner is one who faces life boldly and has control on one's nerves.

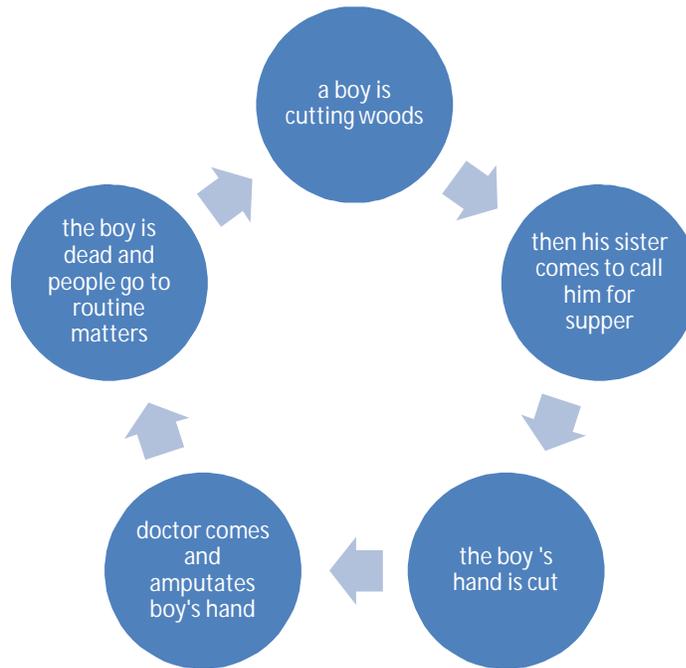
#### ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

The poem, "Out, Out" is written by an American Literary giant Robert Frost. He is the most appealing and touching canon in history of American Literature. He is a genuine poet with teeming imagination and sharpness of his craft. This is a narrative poem in its type that was first published in 1916. Events are combined in narrative structure as

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\*Corresponding Author: Muhammad Ajmal, Assistant Professor of English, G.C. University, Faisalabad, Layyah Campus, Pakistan.

this poem displays various events artistically woven in thread of the text. The below given diagram tells the events happened in this very short poem.



Robert Frost successfully introduces a narrator who is detached one and seeing all the events occurred with his keen interest. Readers are told about an accident that causes death of an innocent boy who is cutting woods just to earn livelihood by supporting his parents. The narrator is objective and reports the incident from outsider's perspective. Yet, as the narrative advances, readers encounter an abrupt ending of the boy's life and the more tragic event of family's return to their daily routine.

The very first nine lines of the poem are indicative of some sort of danger as the word "snarl" shows that someone or something intends to hurt you or even take your life. This animal imagery in the poem has been attributed to the saw that cuts woods. The saw has been personified as a killer and hungry for boy's hand.

The next nine lines of the poem, both the narrator and the boy sawing the wood are introduced. The narrator is feeling unrest and wishes that the boy's family had given him "the half hour". The boy has toiled until his sister comes to ask him to have supper. The narrator is in a fix whether the saw heard the word "supper" too and "leaped out" to eat boy's hand. The poet makes artistic use of personification as the saw has capacity of hearing and eating.

The following eleven lines portray the boy's unbearable plight as he is beseeching help from others and also trying to prevent his own "life from spilling". Here the narrator is an omniscient one who knows inner feelings of the boy who thinks his life useless and he will be of no worth for his family. It is too late now and the loss of a hand can never be recovered. Now comes the fatal scene as the boy requests his sister, "Don't let the doctor cut my hand off". His hand can not be saved and even he lost his life in this trauma of life.

In the last four line of this narrative poem, family's reaction has been shown. They are in pain and shocked but bound to submit against God's will. The following lines are significant;

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

This is the abrupt and fatal ending of the poem where family decide to start daily chores and live their own life.

#### FORMS AND DEVICES

This narrative poem by Frost is not lengthy and he makes use of blank verse to narrate the events in the narrative. Simple and every daily language have made the poem understandable for every reader. Breaks and interruption in the narrative structure breaks the flow of the text that is one sign of something is going to get wrong. It suits the events described and accident occurred. Strong action verbs like "snarled" and "rattled" has been used that add the meaning of the events.

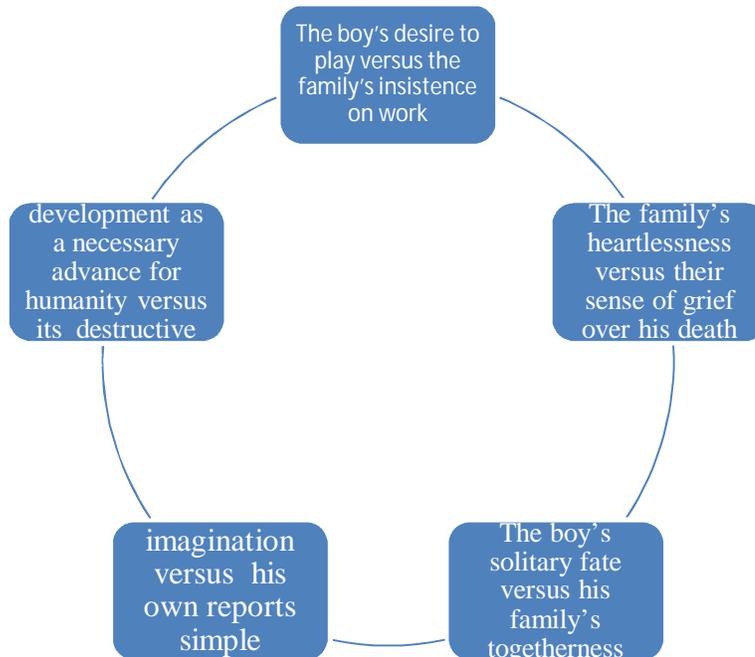
The narrator's simple and realistic details are woven in the thread of the text. The saw has been gifted with animate attributes who understands the word "supper" and "seemed to leap" at boy's hand. The boy's family has been portrayed more sympathetic and they would like the boy come to supper before this mishap. The title of the poem "Out out" is perhaps borrowed from Shakespeare's Macbeth when he utters "out, out brief candle!" on the abrupt death of Lady Macbeth by suicide. The boy's family is also in dole drums and can do anything except to accept the bitter reality of life which is full of mishaps ever.

### THEMES AND MEANINGS

In any type of writing theme captures the interest of the readers. In this narrative poem the possible themes are;

- 1) The isolation of the individual
- 2) The mystery of human existence
- 3) The ambiguity of nature
- 4) Need to create order out of chaos

Frost is also known as a poet of nature and in this poem too, this has been depicted as powerful but destructive. The narrative structure provides a lesson to readers that life should never be ceased in case of any mishap. This is also one historical fact that Frost was compelled to return back to America from England when World War 1 started. As the plot of this narrative poem proceeds, various conflicts appear which are;



This poem left many questions unanswered and can be termed as open-ended. Frost as a veteran like that of expertly cutting wood creates order out of chaos. Faced with the perplexity of life, its many accidents, mysteries, deaths, Frost uses language to give shape to important life issues. And finally one thing that he believed is important when he says;

I learnt three words about life that

*"It goes on".*

### DIDACTIC APPEAL IN THE POEM

Narratology is study of narrative techniques, having at least two events with time sequence. In this poem the narrator is external and detached who is telling what he sees around him realistically. Implied narratees are readers of this poem and the boy who lost his hand and life is the narrated. My claim that by studying literature and the structures in literature, new understandings of how we view life and ourselves may emerge is illustrated through the analysis. The leading theories on the field of narratology have illustrated how narratology can be didactic, and how information and knowledge can be presented as a narrative. This, in turn, has made possible a practical use of the findings in the analysis. The themes of personal and collective crisis, the social situations for Native Americans, and

the theme of storytelling and the didactical power of the storyteller's voice are brought forth by the narrative techniques and demonstrate how Frost explores his life experience as a Native American. This technique mirrors the Native American storytelling tradition. This paper offers a narratological approach which connects narratives with the reality outside fiction and through a coherent line called didactic.

### **To SUM UP**

Bearing all the discussion and analysis in mind, it can be said without iota of doubt that Frost is very skillful while describing various events occurring in life. He is very dexterous in his art of telling about life with its different shapes. This poem is narrative in its nature where reader finds as he/she is reading a narrative fiction. His style is unique in this poem and this is wonderful piece of literature for stylistic and narratological analysis.

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### **APPENDIX**

#### **'Out, Out'**

By Robert Frost

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,  
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.  
And from there those that lifted eyes could count  
Five mountain ranges one behind the other  
Under the sunset far into Vermont.  
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,  
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.  
And nothing happened: day was all but done.  
Call it a day, I wish they might have said  
To please the boy by giving him the half hour  
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.  
His sister stood beside him in her apron  
To tell them 'Supper.' At the word, the saw,  
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,  
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—

He must have given the hand. However it was,  
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!  
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,  
As he swung toward them holding up the hand  
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—  
Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—  
He saw all spoiled. 'Don't let him cut my hand off—  
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!'  
So. But the hand was gone already.  
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.  
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.  
And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.  
No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.  
No more to build on there. And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.