

Humanistic Solicitude in Robert Frost's Out, Out

Jing Zhang

Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin 300202

Abstract: Robert Frost tries to save the era occupied by industrial civilization with his poetry. His poems with primitive style are simple and easy to understand, but they contain rich humanistic spirit. Out, Out, for example, is a concern for the survival of people living on the land. The author satirizes the materialized and spiritualized times through the way of poetry, which reflects the humanistic concern conveyed by him.

Keywords: Poetry; Humanistic solicitude; Rural culture

Attention to rural and local culture

"Frost is a pastoral poet. Much of his poetry is set in rural New England and its pastures. It is rustic. It is simple and meaningful." (Zhao, 10) In Out, Out, the poem, though not heavily directed at nature, depicts an idyllic labor scene just before the accident. The setting is Vermont. The story takes place at a mill where a buzz saw is used to cut wood. The beginning of the poem sets a discordant tone: everything seems so quiet, especially the "five rolling peaks" in the distant sunset, which give the reader a picture of an idyllic scene; However, with the invasion of onomatopoeia words "snarled and rattled", this visual image is immediately destroyed by the shrill, grating sound from the hearing.

"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." (Frost, 171) "Snarled" shows that the saw is dangerous and "rattled" shows that the saw is old. Except for the chainsaw, everything seems placid and tranquil. This shows Frost's praise to the traditional way of life, to the pure beauty unpolluted by the secular world. Also, the wood has a sweet smell. The sweet smell of the wood forms a sharp contrast with the dusty and dirty saw yard. "And from there those that lifted eyes could count five mountain ranges one behind the other under the sunset far into Vermont." (171) From the yard you see mountain ranges. This is a beautiful place. It is at the end of the day, the sun is setting.

In addition, the mountain, often as a symbol of nature, this image also showed Frost's worship of nature.

Attention to life

Out, Out is the expression of this theme---the attention to the survival of people living on this land and the attention to life. The poet's concern is not only the poor little boy, but also the people who work and live in this vast land. Their happiness is simple and pure. "And nothing happened: day was all but done. Call it a day, I wish they might have said To please the boy giving him the half hour That a boy counts so much when saved from work." (171) The poet writes such happiness that only half an hour could comfort and satisfy the little boy's soul, which is a satire on people's living state of materialized soul and declining humanistic spirit in the real society. The poet interrupts his description with his own subjective view. He wishes they let the boy stop with work a half hour before stopping time so that the boy can play a little bit. The boy has no time to play and playtime is precious to the labor, which heightens the tragedy of this poem.

In addition, the little boy in his poem has the virtue of hard-working spirit and industry. "And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled, as it ran light, or had to bear a load." (Frost, 171) This depicts the process of hard labor of the little boy, and praises the industrious virtue of the working people represented by the little boy.

The poem then moves into the poet's deepest emotional part in lines 10-17. ", and Frost gives a detailed account of what happened:

"Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them 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. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand! " (171)

The sense of urgency is undoubtedly at the exclamation point here. The day is quiet, and finally it is time for the rest that the boy values so much. Perhaps he is too excited, or perhaps he turns too fast, and in a moment his hand is sawed off. No one could foresee

this tragedy. However, the tragedy just happens.

“Then the boy saw all— Since he was old enough to know, big boy doing a man’s work, though a child at heart—” (171) The boy understand the reality of his life. The fact that he is still a young child shows how unfair it is.

A doctor comes, but he could do nothing. Everything is so unpredictable. With the gradual weakening of the pulse, the boy’s life is spoiled. At the end of the poem, the tragic effect of the boy’s death is further illustrated by those who turn away to go on their business. “And they, since they were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.” (Frost, 172) To our surprise, his co-workers and even his family are not caring and touched by the poor boy’s death at all. They just carry on with their business and go on with their lives as if there is nothing. It shows the tragedy of the boy’s death. He works his whole young life and now nobody cares that he is dead.

On the whole, the tone of the poem seems gentle. Yet the allusion contained in the title is exactly what Frost calls elegant metaphors for the deepest thoughts. He often uses metaphors to express a profound philosophy and interpret the relationship between man and nature. (He, Liu, Chen 23) The shortness and futility of life is best captured in Macbeth's classic monologue from Shakespeare's play Macbeth:

“Out, out, brief candle,
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.” (229)

The boy's life in the poem is so fragile. His life is so short that he just "come on, and then quietly retired", and even has no time to leave a "shadow".

Out, Out is about industrial revolution and how the pastoral society is eaten up. The saw is personified as industrial revolution and the hand of the boy as the pastoral society. On the other hand, Out, Out involves the theme of life and death and endows the work with profound life experience and rich implication. This poem is based on ordinary material but has a profound humanistic consciousness. Under the impact of the industrial revolution, Robert Frost tries to awaken people's original authenticity with his poetry creation. From the perspective of looking forward to the return of human spiritual homeland, he warns the world and creates the humanistic spirit.

References :

[1]Frost, Robert. Complete poems of Robert Frost. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1964.

[2]Shakespeare, William. Macbeth. London: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Author Introduction:

Jing Zhang(1997-), Female, born in June 1997, Jining City, Shandong Province, postgraduate student of Tianjin Foreign Studies University, British and American Literature