Reflecting on Sacrifice

People go to great lengths to support their families and show their love and dedication. They do things they do not even have to (do) to make sure the people they care for can live a more comfortable life. This is what we call “sacrifice” the act of putting others before ourselves and giving something up so others are better off. Sacrifice is a strong theme in Robert Hayden’s “Those Winter Sundays.”

The father in the poem gets up early every Sunday and lights a fire so his family has a warm home to wake up to. He does this with, “[C]racked hands that ached/from labor in the weekday weather,” (Hayden 35). These lines are the speaker’s way of showing that his father was already worn from his job and this was him putting in more work than he had to. The father also did little things for his family. One example given in the poem would be polishing the speaker’s shoes. Even so, his effort went unappreciated; his very son spoke indifferently to him and did not thank him for what his father had provided.

The fact that the father’s work was unnoticed may have been due to the angers in the speaker’s home, implying that people in the house were constantly fighting or just not getting along. The poem does not make the issue entirely clear, but there was something that caused the speaker to ignore the effort put in by his father. Upon reflecting, however, the speaker realized
what sort of sacrifice the father had done. “What did I know/of love’s austere and lonely offices?” (Hayden 36). The speaker proposes this question to himself at the end of the poem. He makes it clear to himself and the auditor that he has recognized his father’s expression of love.

The family may have been imperfect and it may have felt disconnected, but the father pushed on. He put an effort into keeping things stable with the labor he did during the week and going that extra mile on his days off: from lighting a fire in the morning, to polishing his son’s shoes. He never asked for anything in return, but he was a stern man, and this was his way of showing his family that he cared about them and they are still in his heart.
Works Cited