

## Written Commentary

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“The Owl” by Edward Thomas is a rather melancholic poem that seeks to be plaintive by describing a tired walker’s pain and misery. The poem is highly contemplative in its narrative, and each line is bludgeoned as it attempts to turn outward to suffering humanity in its own embittered tone. The experience is pathos in that it arouses feelings of sympathy and pity for the speaker. The narrator’s physical sensations are described with touching exactitude when he is “hungry, and yet not starved” and “cold, yet had heat.” Although the speaker is “hungry, cold and tired,” he helps himself to a pungent sense of satisfaction with “food, fire and rest.” The poet maintains a very personal attitude to both the subject as well as the audience, and this is conspicuous in his predominant use of the first person as well as the active voice.

The owl is symbolic of a remote inability to express one’s closest worries and fears. “All of the night was barred out” but the shrill cry of the owl creates not an aura of relief but a reminiscence of the speaker’s own past, which being a soldier, is weighed down with remorse and a closed sense of encumbrance.

The poem is highly structured and consists of simple yet elegant quatrains; this alludes to the speaker’s own ordeal as a soldier. It is out of the question to complain when in pain, or rejoice when in harmony. Breaking enforced rules is as difficult as breaking a neatly structured four-line stanza. Capitalization is appropriate while punctuation is abundant, both of which can be seen as a merger between form and content. The poet employs a few elements of impotent imagery that although aren’t very concrete, help communicate the poet’s passions well. The mentioning of the North Wind (3) reminds us of a non-Utopian cold north where deserted military personnel could have been forcibly stationed.

In the end, the poem has achieved remarkable control in expressing the grievances faced by a forlorn soldier who, like an owl’s cry on a dark wintry night, lacks neither emotion nor life. The poet pens this subtle yet poignant feeling of despair with the aid of such profound alliterative paradoxes as “salted and sobered” which makes it all a poetic delight for every reader to behold.

