

For I Wish I'd Written That Wednesdays

Full Moon and Little Frieda

Ted Hughes

A cool small evening shrunk to a dog bark and the clank of a bucket –

And you listening.

A spider's web, tense for the dew's touch.

A pail lifted, still and brimming – mirror
to tempt a first star to a tremor.

Cows are going home in the lane there, looping the hedges with
their arm wreaths of breath –

A dark river of blood, many boulders,
balancing unspilled milk.

'Moon!' you cry suddenly, 'Moon! Moon!'

The moon has stepped back like an artist gazing amazed at a work
That points at him amazed.

It is a small poem. An unassuming free-verse poem of twelve lines and few rhymes, but it sticks. Poetry, as Auden says, is memorable speech, and the cry 'Moon!' is one that haunts me like an old song. I encountered it first in a British anthology called *Worlds: Seven Modern Poets*. Printed in 1973, *Worlds*' aim was to make contemporary British poetry more accessible to younger readers. It starts each section with an interview of the poet, follows with pictures of the poet's 'world,' and finishes with a selection of his poems. What grabbed me first, of course, were the pictures. Black and white images of post-industrial Britain, sheep farms in morning mist, ancient, dilapidated graveyards, and laughing people in pubs all shot with just the right out of focus focus and grittiness. The sort of pictures that make Instagram cringe with inadequacy.

To the left of "Full Moon and Little Frieda" is a picture of a church and graveyard. I noticed the church first, a degenerate tower stubbornly sticking it out with the sky, but my eyes were drawn down to the shadowed ground. There what I took for old cobbles I find are flat gravestones, sides bumping but for a few blades of grass.

Enter:

"A cool small evening shrunk to a dog bark and the clank of a bucket – /And you
listening.

In one swoop Hughes establishes mood, character and scene. I feel the quiet, the full rhythm of day and night, satisfaction in routine. The 'you' listening is Hughes'

daughter, but it could just as well be the reader. By using 'you' Hughes allows us to conflate ourselves with her, to see through Frieda's eyes long enough to pay attention to the undercurrents in these domestic surroundings. In his interview Hughes states: "What excites my imagination is the war between vitality and death, and my poems may be said to celebrate the exploits of the warriors of either side." The warriors here are cows and a little girl, but every reader is invited to enlist. To look up and see instead of the next task, the moon. Moon! And every time I see it now, I think of little Frieda and those hedges and cow breath, and the dark rivers of blood balancing what of our lives is unspilled.