



## A Ted Hughes Website

### Poems

#### Terry Gifford: »Only an Owl ...«

##### »Only An Owl...«

in memory of Fred Rue Jacobs  
Dunnerdale, September 18 1999

There's a hole in the State of California.  
It can be seen from across the world.  
From China, Australia, Brazil,  
From Cairo, Poland and France  
The friends of Fred can feel the hole  
In the bars of Bakersfield, the restaurants,  
The new college library that was not big enough  
For the books that flowed into Bakersfield  
Like water through Valley View, into # 133.

I'm writing in the last house up a valley  
In the Lake District and Fred is here  
At midnight saying, »Hey, life ain't so bad!«  
And »I've had the cancer all these years, but  
Hey, I'm a success!« as I ignore my own  
Mortality in pursuit of the natural wonders  
In those books, the bull backlit by moonlight  
In the mist of the meadow I just walked through.  
I only saw it when I looked back. Looking back,

I did not expect to meet Fred in Cairo,  
But when I went for breakfast on the top floor  
Of the hotel there he was drinking beer,  
Waiting for *people* to appear, ignoring  
Brilliant parquets below. At dinner over here  
His enthusiastic laughter was a little too loud  
For English ears. For breakfast over there  
Fred's fridge was always stocked with nuts  
And beer. Just nuts and beer. »Perfect!«

When I go to the door, peer into the dark  
Across the still meadow towards the woods,  
I hear the owls of the valley socialising  
And remember Ted's dedications in those books  
In the Valley View shrine: »Only an owl  
Knows the worth of an owl.« Fred was a man  
Worthy of his collection, as I think Ted knew  
When he wrote, »This one's for Fred,  
Living his death with such knowing fun.«

Terry Gifford

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**A note by Terry Gifford:**

Fred Rue Jacobs, Librarian at Bakersfield Community College, California, was a long standing friend of Ted's and the leading US collector, devoting a room in his apartment to Ted's work in shelves of books and three filing cabinets of material. This collection is now with Fred's close friend Mimi Mckay in Austin, Texas. He was the life and soul of meetings of Hughes scholars and very much wanted to be at the Lyon conference. An expert on cancer treatment (»Hey, I'm a success!« he said for 12 years or more), he was devastated that he had not been able to offer his expertise to Ted, being unaware of the nature of Ted's final illness. »Only an Owl...« I wrote for his memorial gathering in Bakersfield.