The Whitsun Weddings

Philip Larkin (1922-85)  Philip Thicknes (b.1938)

Soprano

Moderato \( \frac{\text{mf}}{} \) That Whit-sun, I was late get-ting a-way:

Piano

Moderato \( \frac{\text{mp}}{} \)

That Whit-sun, I was late get-ting a-way:

Not till a-bout One-twen-ty on the sun-lit Sat-ur-day Did my three-quar-ters emp-ty train pull out, All

Meno mosso \( \frac{\text{accel. poco a poco}}{} \) win-dows down, all cush-ions hot, all sense Of be-ing in a hur-ry gone.

Meno mosso \( \frac{\text{accel. poco a poco}}{} \)

accel. poco a poco

We ran be-hind the backs of hou-ses, crossed a street Of

A tempo \( \frac{\text{mp}}{} \)

We ran be-hind the backs of hou-ses, crossed a street Of

A tempo \( \frac{\text{mp}}{} \)
blind ing wind-screens, smell the fish-dock; thence the river's le-vel drif-ting breadth be-
gan, where sky and Lin-co'n-shire and wa-ter meet.

noon, through the tall heat that slept For miles in-land, A slow and stop-ping
curve south-wards we kept. Wide farms went by, short-shad-owed cat-tle, and Ca-
nals with float-ings of indus-terial froth; A hot-house flashed un-nique-ly,

hed-ges dipped And rose: and now and then a smell of grass Dis-placed the reek of

but-toned car-riage cloth Until the next town, new and non-des-crit,

Ap-proached with ac-res of dis-mant-led cars. At first, I did-n't no-tice what a
noise the wed-dings made
Each sta-tion that we stopped at: sun de-stroys The in-te-

rest of what's hap-pening in the shade, And down the long cool pla-

whoops and skirts I took for por-ters lark-ing with the mails, And went on

read-ing. Once we star-ted though, We passed them,
grinning and powdered girls In parodies of fashion, heels and
veils, All posed irresolutely, watching us go, As if
out on the end of an event Waving goodbye To something that survived it.

Struck, I leant More promptly out next time, more curiously, And saw it all again in
different terms: The fathers with broad belts under their suits And sallow foreheads;

mothers loud and fat; An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms, The nylon

gloves and jewel-ery substitutes, The lemons, mauves, and olive ochres that Marked off the

girls un-real-ly from the rest. Yes, from ca-fés And banquet-halls up yards, and bun-ting dressed Coach
party annexes, the wedding days were coming to an end.

All down the line Fresh couples climbed a-

board: the rest stood round; The last confetti and advice were thrown, And, as we moved, each face

seemed to define Just what it saw departing: Children frowned At
some-thing dull; fa-thers had ne-ver known Suc-cess so huge and
whol-ly far-ci-cal; The wo-men shared The sec-ret like a hap-py fu-ne-ral, while
girls, grip-ping their hand-bags tigh-ter, stared At a re-lig-i-ous wound-ing.
Free at last, And load-ed with the sum of all they saw, We
hurried towards London, shuffling gouts of steam. Now fields were

building-plots, and poplars cast long shadows over major roads,

and for some fifty minutes, that in time would seem just long enough to settle

hats and say I nearly died. A dozen marriages got under way.
They watched the landscape, sitting side by side. An Odeon went past, a
cooling tower, And someone running up to bowl and none Thought of the others

they would never meet Or how their lives would all contain this hour. I thought of London spread out in the sun,
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat: There we were aimed.

And as we raced across Bright knots of rail Past standing Pull-mans, walls of blackened

moss Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail Traveling coincidence;

and what it held Stood ready to be loosed with
all the power That being changed can give.

We slowed a gain, And as the tight-en ed brakes took hold, there swelled A sense of

falling, like an arrow shower, Sent out of sight some-where be-com-ing rain.