**‘I like to see it lap the Miles’**

I like to see it lap the Miles -

And lick the Valleys up -

And stop to feed itself at Tanks -

And then - prodigious step

Around a Pile of Mountains -

And supercilious peer

In Shanties - by the sides of Roads -

And then a Quarry pare

To fit its sides

And crawl between

Complaining all the while

In horrid - hooting stanza -

Then chase itself down Hill -

And neigh like Boanerges -

Then - prompter than a Star

Stop - docile and omnipotent

At its own stable door –

—Emily Dickinson

**Adlestrop**

Yes. I remember Adlestrop —

The name, because one afternoon

Of heat the express-train drew up there

Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.

No one left and no one came

On the bare platform. What I saw

Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,

And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,

No whit less still and lonely fair

Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang

Close by, and round him, mistier,

Farther and farther, all the birds

Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

—Edward Thomas

**The Whitsun Weddings**

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:

    Not till about

One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday

Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,

All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense

Of being in a hurry gone. We ran

Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street

Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence

The river’s level drifting breadth began,

Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept

    For miles inland,

A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.

Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and

Canals with floatings of industrial froth;

A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped

And rose: and now and then a smell of grass

Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth

Until the next town, new and nondescript,

Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

At first, I didn’t notice what a noise

    The weddings made

Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys

The interest of what’s happening in the shade,

And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls

I took for porters larking with the mails,

And went on reading. Once we started, though,

We passed them, grinning and pomaded, 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 seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;

An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,

The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,

The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.

    Yes, from cafés

And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed

Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days

Were coming to an end. All down the line

Fresh couples climbed aboard: 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 something dull; fathers had never known

Success so huge and wholly farcical;

    The women shared

The secret like a happy funeral;

While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared

At a religious wounding. Free at last,

And loaded 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 Pullmans, walls of blackened moss

Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail

Travelling coincidence; and what it held

Stood ready to be loosed with all the power

That being changed can give. We slowed again,

And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled

A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower

Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

—Philip Larkin

**Getting There**

How far is it?

How far is it now?

The gigantic gorilla interior

Of the wheels move, they appall me ——

The terrible brains

Of Krupp, black muzzles

Revolving, the sound

Punching out Absence! Like cannon.

It is Russia I have to get across, it is some was or other.

I am dragging my body

Quietly through the straw of the boxcars.

Now is the time for bribery.

What do wheels eat, these wheels

Fixed to their arcs like gods,

The silver leash of the will ——

Inexorable. And their pride!

All the gods know destinations.

I am a letter in this slot!

I fly to a name, two eyes.

Will there be fire, will there be bread?

Here there is such mud.

It is a trainstop, the nurses

Undergoing the faucet water, its veils, veils in a nunnery,

Touching their wounded,

The men the blood still pumps forward,

Legs, arms piled outside

The tent of unending cries ——

A hospital of dolls.

And the men, what is left of the men

Pumped ahead by these pistons, this blood

Into the next mile,

The next hour ——

Dynasty of broken arrows!

How far is it?

There is mud on my feet,

Thick, red and slipping. It is Adam’s side,

This earth I rise from, and I in agony.

I cannot undo myself, and the train is steaming.

Steaming and breathing, its teeth

Ready to roll, like a devil’s.

There is a minute at the end of it

A minute, a dewdrop.

How far is it?

It is so small

The place I am getting to, why are there these obstacles ——

The body of this woman,

Charred skirts and deathmask

Mourned by religious figures, by garlanded children.

And now detonations ——

Thunder and guns.

The fire’s between us.

Is there no place

Turning and turning in the middle air,

Untouchable and untouchable.

The train is dragging itself, it is screaming ——

An animal

Insane for the destination,

The bloodspot,

The face at the end of the flare.

I shall bury the wounded like pupas,

I shall count and bury the dead.

Let their souls writhe in like dew,

Incense in my track.

The carriages rock, they are cradles.

And I, stepping from this skin

Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces

Step up to you from the black car of Lethe,

Pure as a baby.

—Sylvia Plath

# A Second Train Song for Gary

When the trains come into strange cities

The citizens come out to meet the strangers.

I love you, Jack, he said

I love you, Jack, he said

At another station.

When passengers come in from strange cities

The citizens come out to help the strangers.

I love you too, I said

I love you too, I said

From another station.

The citizens are kind to passing strangers

And nourish them and kiss their lips in kindness.

I walk the unbelieving streets

I walk the unbelieving streets

In a strange city.

At night in cold new beds the welcomed strangers

Achieve in memory the city's promise.

I wake in love with you

I wake in love with you

At last year's station.

Then say goodbye to citizens and city

Admit this much—that they were kind to strangers.

I leave my love with you

I leave my love with you

In this strange city.

—Jack Spicer