

At Grass

The eye can hardly pick them out
From the cold shade they shelter in,
Till wind distresses tail and mane;
Then one crops grass, and moves about
- The other seeming to look on -
And stands anonymous again

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
Two dozen distances sufficed
To fable them : faint afternoons
Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
Whereby their names were artficed
To inlay faded, classic Junes -

Silks at the start : against the sky
Numbers and parasols : outside,
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
And littered grass : then the long cry
Hanging unhushed till it subside
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?
They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.
Summer by summer all stole away,
The starting-gates, the crowd and cries -
All but the unmolesting meadows.
Almanacked, their names live; they

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a fieldglass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophecies :

Only the groom, and the groom's boy,
With bridles in the evening come.

Philip Larkin