

# Chapter 11

## Coming

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### Understanding the Poem

1. What does the bird in the poem announce? How is this related to the title, 'Coming'?

#### Answer

The poem 'Coming' by Philip Larkin is a celebration of the advent of the spring. To express the happiness the poet sets the plot of house fronts clothed in chilly and yellow light. Amidst all this, a thrush sings a welcoming song. It seems the whole nature is dancing with joy at the arrival of the new season. The thrush, sitting in a garden shrub, laurel, in the deep bare garden, is humming repeatedly in its fresh-peeled voice "that it will be spring soon". This joy full singing of the thrush imparts an "astonishing" effect on the brickwork of the houses. The poet feels happy as well to see the beauty that nature encompasses. In fact it is through the voice of the thrush that the poet has tried to express that how overwhelmed he is on the "coming" of the spring.

2. Why is the speaker's childhood described as 'a forgotten boredom'?

#### Answer

The autobiographical element makes a reader curious to know about Larkin's childhood. His parents were very loving and affectionate. However, he recalls his childhood as a dejected one. He talks of himself in depreciating terms. It appears that the poet had a very poor concept of himself. It is also known that Philip suffered slight stammer in childhood that endured for the rest of his life, though reduced. If the reader pays attention, argues John Woley, it is not difficult to note the contradiction in the term "forgotten boredom". If, like Larkin says, he has forgotten his childhood, the question is, how can he comment so confidently that it was a bored one? However, it may be concluded that Larkin's childhood did not have any memories that he was fond of. He even remarked once that his biography could begin when he was 21, which implies that nothing spectacular happened before that. Thus,

Philip Larkin recalls his childhood as “a forgotten boredom”.

3. What causes the element of surprise when the child comes on the scene of 'adult reconciling'?

**Answer**

As Larkin is absorbed in the resonant humming of the thrush, he transcends present to his boring childhood, which he feels is best forgotten. The poet is transformed into a child. He feels happy like a child who feels happy just by watching elders reconciling with each other. The child comprehends nothing yet smiles just because the adults are happy. This might appear surprising however, if one may look more closely, the scene reflects the innocence of a child. Probably the poet has tried to make a point that our happiness lies in other's happiness. The whole thought makes Larkin happy and he wonders about the mystiques of universe and human life.

4. What two things are compared in the poem?

**Answer**

It is difficult to judge whether the poet is trying to compare or is drawing a relation. Philip Larkin, in his poem *Coming*, celebrates the advent of the new season, spring, with the “fresh-peeled voice” of the thrush. He creates the imagery of the spring peeled out of the winter. The old season giving birth to the new season. The nature had been sleeping in the cold and gloomy winter and now the freshness of the new season sparked a new life in it. The birds, houses, gardens, the whole nature has joined the party to welcome the spring. Seeing this transformation the poet is so happy that he himself transcends into childhood.

Here Larkin highlights the difference between innocence and experience. He presents an innocent watching the adults, laughing and reconciling, probably after a fight or reconciling with the life. How he begins to feel happy though he understands nothing. This is the innocence of the child that his happiness lies in others happiness, which is juxtaposed with the experienced adults, who engage themselves in trivial issues creating troubles for themselves and others.

The poet has tried to bring out the difference between two seasons and stages of human life. This mystique is beyond Larkin's comprehension and he is only left wondering about it all.

5. How do you respond to these lines?

Light, chill and yellow,  
Bathes the serene  
Foreheads of houses

### **Answer**

The poem *Coming* by Philip Larkin is dedicated to the beauty the spring brings along with it. It is a celebration of humanity. In the beginning, the poet creates a picturesque in the mind of a reader. Larkin creates a beautiful evening scenery. The longer evenings of the spring are jeweled by the forehead of calm houses' roof tops, washed down by the chilly and yellow light of the setting sun. The reader is imparted with beautiful imagery of the whole environment sitting serenely and enjoying the sun going down as the spring beckons. They all dance to the humming of the thrush in the deep garden. It feels like the whole nature has come alive in the lovely evening and join the party to welcome the coming of the spring.

6. Comment on the use of the phrase 'fresh-peeled voice'.

### **Answer**

Larkin uses the "fresh-peeled voice" of the thrush as an adjective to beautify the evening setting of the new season, the spring. The phrase describes the freshness and sharpness of the thrush's humming. This freshness is symbolic of the freshness that has dissolved in the air with the advent of the new season that the poet celebrates. The thrush sings, sitting in a "laurel-surrounded in the deep bare garden". It hums repeatedly that "it will be spring soon". Its singing marks an "astonishing" effect on the brickwork of the houses. The song of the thrush also acts a catalyst in the transcending of Philip to his childhood flashing the "forgotten-boredom" right in front of his eyes. He is transformed into a child. The poet probably tries to draw a parallelism between the freshness of the bird's song and the innocence of the child. The "fresh-peeled voice" is symbolic of the spring succeeding the winter. The transformation of the season. It appears as the winter gave birth to the spring and now that it is coming, the whole universe and humanity dance to the tune of thrush to join in the celebration.