



THE LABURNUM TOP

By **TED HUGHES**



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Notable Works : The Thought Fox , Snowdrop , Pike
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etc.....

The Laburnum Top



The Laburnum top is silent, quite still

In the afternoon yellow September sunlight,

A few leaves yellowing, all its seeds fallen.

Till the goldfinch comes, with a twitching chirrup

A suddenness, a startlement, at a branch end.

Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt,

She enters the thickness, and a machine starts up

Of chitterings, and a tremor of wings, and trillings —

The whole tree trembles and thrills.

It is the engine of her family.

She stokes it full, then flirts out to a branch-end

Showing her barred face identity mask

Then with eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings

She launches away, towards the infinite

And the laburnum subsides to empty.





Introduction

The poem 'The Laburnum Top' is written by Ted Hughes. It is about a repaying relationship between the Laburnum tree and the Goldfinch bird. The tree is yellow, silent and death-like and is made alive by the bird and her young ones. The yellow bird has her shelter on the tree where she feeds her young ones. But as soon as the bird leaves to fly in the sky, the tree becomes silent again.

top of the tree, its highest branches

The **Laburnum top is silent, quite still**

Personification

Symbol

Alliteration

In the afternoon **yellow September sunlight,**

turning into yellow

A few leaves **yellowing,** all its seeds fallen.

{Autumn Season}

Laburnum – a short tree with hanging branches, yellow flowers, and poisonous seeds

'yellow' for flowers, leaves and sunlight

(symbolizes silence, death {leaves}, and beauty {yellow flowers})

In the above lines, the poet says that he saw a Laburnum tree whose leaves were yellow. The tree's top is still and silent in the day time of September month. It is autumn season and all the seeds of the tree had fallen.

The poet has used the word 'yellow' for leaves and sunlight. Yellow symbolizes silence, death, and beauty. He describes the whole scene of the tree with this colour.

1. Which season has been described in these lines?
2. Describe the laburnum tree
3. Name the poem and the poet
4. What is the significance of 'yellow' in the poem?
5. Pick out the poetic device from the first line of the poem.
6. Write the poetic device – 'September sunlight'.

Till the **goldfinch** comes, with a **twitching chirrup**

onomatopoeia

A suddenness, a **startlement**, at a branch end.

Simile

What is the bird's movement compared to ?

Then **sleek as a lizard**, and alert, and **abrupt**,

What is the machine that starts up with the arrival of the bird?

metaphor

(Tree) Nest

She enters the thickness, and a **machine** starts up

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia

Of **chitterings**, and a tremor of wings, and **trillings** —

personification

Why does the laburnum tree tremble?

The **whole tree trembles and thrills.**

The sudden arrival of the goldfinch with a shrill whistle and flapping of its wings, to feed its nestlings, makes the whole tree tremble and trill. The quiet beauty of the laburnum tree, with its golden flowers awakens with the arrival of the bird.

Goldfinch : Wild canary - A small, yellow bird

twitching : sudden jerk movement

chirrup : a bird making repeated high pitched sounds

startlement : feeling or showing sudden shock

sleek : Smooth - In the context of the poem, it could imply a quick movement without much disruption.

abrupt : rapid, sudden or unexpected

chittering : to make a chattering sound

trillings : to produce a chirruping sound

trembles – to shake

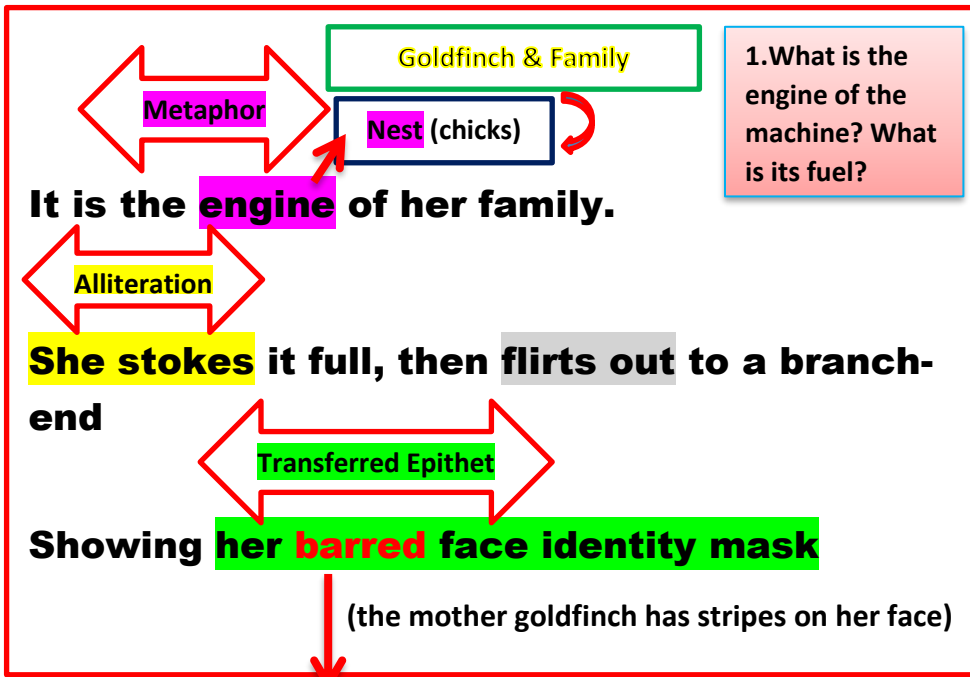
thrills – a sudden feeling of excitement

A Goldfinch bird comes to end the death-like scene of the tree and makes a sudden chirrup sound. The bird while being rapid, alert and precautions like a lizard, sits on the branches of the tree. As she moved towards the thickness of the branch, her younger ones started chirruping and doing vibrations with wings, making a sound like a machine. Because of the movement of the bird and her young ones, the tree starts to shake and thrill.

The poet has given two opposite scenarios of the tree. The tree first being death-like and still and then giving life and shelter to bird and her young ones.

The bird's movement is compared to a lizard. It is sleek, abrupt and alert like a lizard.

As the bird arrives, her little one become excited to see the mother and they start chirruping and fluttering their wings to get food from their mother. It seems as the machine starts up.



stokes – to add fuel to the engine

barred – stripy

flirts out – lead on to
 {In the context of the poem, move abruptly or jerkily with light steps}

1. The nest is the engine of the goldfinch family. With the little ones inside, chirruping and eating and playing with each other, the mother bird gets her life of it. As fuel to an engine, the goldfinch family’s fuel is not just the food that the mother brings, it is the mother’s love as well.

Why is the image of the engine evoked by the poet?

As the engine is the source to run the machine. The bird is compared to the engine as she is the feeder of her family. As a machine cannot work without an engine, her family can’t last without her.

This is an example of the poetic device – transferred epithet. The laburnum tree has flowers that fall like bars and when the bird sits behind the flowers the shadow on her face looks like she is wearing a mask that has bars on it. So, barred – is actually an adjective for the flowers and has been transferred from there and applied to the bird.

The Laburnum tree and the goldfinch bird is the engine of her family. She provides food to her young ones and moves to the other branch end. Her dark coloured striped face is visible as her body is yellow coloured and hides behind the yellow leaves of the tree.



Then with **eerie** delicate **whistle-chirrup** whisperings
She launches away, towards the **infinite**
And the laburnum **subsides** to empty.

eerie – weird and strange

whistle-chirrup – gentle
whisper like the chirping of
the bird

infinite - endless

subsides – diminishes

After reaching the end of the branch, the bird makes a sweet chirping sound just like whispering and flies away towards the infinite sky. It again makes the Laburnum tree silent.

What do you notice about the beginning and ending of the poem?

The poem starts or opens with 'silence and stillness' on the tree top. It closes with the emptiness and silence that returns after the bird has flown away.



Note down

the sound words

Twitching, chirrup, chitterings,
trillings, whispering

the movement words

Comes, enters, starts up, flirts out,
launches away, tremble, subside
the dominant colour in the poem.

Yellow

List the following

Words which describe 'sleek', 'alert'
and 'abrupt'.

Lizard, machine, and suddenness

Words with the sound 'ch' as in
'chart' and 'tr' as in 'trembles' in the
poem.

Goldfinch, branch, chitterings,
chirrup, trillings, twitching, tremors

3. Other sounds that occur frequently
in the poem.

'ing' sound in words like twitching,
chitterings, wings, trillings,

LABURNUM TOP

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