Fall 2016 English 100W **Midterm Essay**

**Goals:** This in-class essay is see how well you can analyze a poem using the elements we have been working with so far: character, setting, plot, and POV. This meets GE Learning Objective 2 and the English Department’s Learning Objectives 1 and 2, if you’re keeping track.

**Procedure**: Read the poem carefully and determine what it’s about. Then read it again and think about how the elements of **character**, **setting**, **plot**, **point of view** are used to develop the poem’s meaning (**theme** or thesis). Choose ONE or TWO of these elements to discuss. Depth is more important than breadth here. Support your idea with **evidence from the poem—specific words and phrases,** as well as **summary of the plot,** if you choose plot.

**Grading Criteria:** Your work will be judged on the **depth of your thinking**, the **persuasiveness** of your support (development); **clarity**, **organization**, and command of **mechanics** (grammar and punctuation). All of these matter, but the first two are the most important.

**Details**: Please SKIP LINES and write as legibly as you can. The essay should have an introduction, body, and conclusion, with a clear **thesis statement** about what the poem means and clear **paragraph breaks**, but you don’t need to produce a 5-paragraph essay. Do your best with grammar, but don’t agonize. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Some background**: The poet, Edwin Muir (1887-1959), was raised on a farm on an island off the north coast of Scotland. When he was young, he suffered through various factory jobs, but eventually he became a successful poet, novelist, and (with his wife) a translator. He also taught English at Harvard for a time. This poem is from a collection called *One Foot in Eden* (1956).

**The Horses** by Edwin Muir

Barely a twelvemonth after   
The seven days war that put the world to sleep,   
Late in the evening the strange horses came.   
By then we had made our covenant with silence,   
But in the first few days it was so still   
We listened to our breathing and were afraid.   
On the second day   
The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer.   
On the third day a warship passed us, heading north,   
Dead bodies piled on the deck. On the sixth day   
A plane plunged over us into the sea. Thereafter   
Nothing. The radios dumb;   
And still they stand in corners of our kitchens,   
And stand, perhaps, turned on, in a million rooms   
All over the world. But now if they should speak,   
If on a sudden they should speak again,   
If on the stroke of noon a voice should speak,   
We would not listen, we would not let it bring   
That old bad world that swallowed its children quick   
At one great gulp. We would not have it again.   
Sometimes we think of the nations lying asleep,   
Curled blindly in impenetrable sorrow,   
And then the thought confounds us with its strangeness.   
The tractors lie about our fields; at evening   
They look like dank sea-monsters couched and waiting.   
We leave them where they are and let them rust:   
'They'll molder away and be like other loam.'   
We make our oxen drag our rusty plows,   
Long laid aside. We have gone back   
Far past our fathers' land.   
And then, that evening   
Late in the summer the strange horses came.   
We heard a distant tapping on the road,   
A deepening drumming; it stopped, went on again   
And at the corner changed to hollow thunder.   
We saw the heads   
Like a wild wave charging and were afraid.   
We had sold our horses in our fathers' time   
To buy new tractors. Now they were strange to us   
As fabulous steeds set on an ancient shield.   
Or illustrations in a book of knights.   
We did not dare go near them. Yet they waited,   
Stubborn and shy, as if they had been sent   
By an old command to find our whereabouts   
And that long-lost archaic companionship.   
In the first moment we had never a thought   
That they were creatures to be owned and used.   
Among them were some half a dozen colts   
Dropped in some wilderness of the broken world,   
Yet new as if they had come from their own Eden.   
Since then they have pulled our plows and borne our loads   
But that free servitude still can pierce our hearts.   
Our life is changed; their coming our beginning.