

Horses
Edwin Muir
1887-1959

Those lumbering horses in the steady plough,
On the bare field-I wonder why, just now,
They seem terrible, so wild and strange,
Like magic power on the stony grange

Perhaps some childish hour has come again,
When I watched fearful, through the blackening rain,
Their hooves like pistons in an ancient mill
Move up and down, yet seem as standing still.

Their conquering hooves which trod the stubble down
Were ritual that turned the field to brown,
And their great hulks were seraphim of gold,
Or mute ecstatic monsters on the mould.

And oh the rapture, when, one furrow done,
They marched broad-breasted to the sinking sun!
The light flowed off their bossy sides in flakes;
The furrows rolled behind like struggling snakes.

But when at dusk with streaming nostrils home
They came, they seemed gigantic in the gloam
And warm and glowing with mysterious fire
That lit their smouldering bodies in the mire.

Their eyes as brilliant and as wide as the night
Gleamed with a cruel apocalyptic light.
Their manes the leaping ire of the wind
Lifted with rage invisible and blind.

Ah, now it fades! It fades! And I must pine
Again for that dread country crystalline,
Where the black field and the still-standing tree
Were bright and fearful presences to me.

Pre-reading:

Have you ever fancied any animal as a child? When you look back, how do you evaluate the experience?

Have you ever observed the diversity in nature of creation pertaining to the same specie?

While-Reading:

First Impression:

Second Reading:

1. Title:

2. Structure

3. Rhyme Scheme

4. Use of Imagery:

5. Connotations of words in context:

Word	Denotation	Connotation
Lumbering		
Stony grange		
Pistons		
Conquering		
Stubble down		
Seraphim		
furrows		
Smouldering		
apocalyptic		
crystalline		
Streaming		

Post-reading

Stanza 1

Notice the effect of ‘lumbering’ in line 1 and how it contrasts with the image in lines 3-4.

What other words have been used as attributes of the image?

Stanza 2

Explore the effect of the simile ‘like pistons’ to reinforce the nostalgic tone.

Use PQC to write an evaluation

Stanza 3

Discuss the connotation of the contrast between ‘seraphim of gold’ and ‘ecstatic monsters’.

Does the tone transition into a fiercer one in stanza 3? How?

Stanza 4

Notice the tone of wonderment in stanza 4. How is it manifested?

Observe the use of punctuation marks in stanza 4.

Stanza 5

Notice the caesura in stanza 5. What contrast does it register?

What is the effect of ‘They came , they seemed...’?

Stanza 6

Evaluate the effect of the imagery in the 6th stanza. Write a PQC paragraph to illustrate the effect.

Stanza 7

‘Ah , now it fades! It fades!..’ what loss is the speaker lament and how does the poet creates a mystifying atmosphere of a memory here?

Exam Question:

Explore how the poet of *Horses* uses language and other devices to present spiritual connection with nature.

Thematic links with set poems

Theme	Poems
Nature	<i>Pied Beauty, Hunting Snake, Pike, The Woodspurge, Upon Westminster Bridge, Summer Farm</i>
Time	<i>A Different History, The Cockroach, The City Planners, The Planners</i>