

To a Cat

John G. Neihardt

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I WATCH you basking, sleepy in the light,
Majestic dreamer, humorously stern.
Your little scratch–scarred nose betrays you quite;
Yet how I long to know your thoughts, to learn
What magic dreams beget themselves and burn
Throughout your subtle nerves! For once I saw
A cat's form graven on an antique urn,
And round their god Egyptians knelt in awe!
Was once your hiss a blight? Was once your purr a law?

Perhaps through sentient chains of linked ages
Your soul has fled, yet, like a haunting dream,
Can recollect the prayers of swarthy sages,
Can hear the wash of Nilus' mystic stream.
It seems I see you basking in the gleam
Of desert dawns; majestic, you gaze
Into the eye of Ra and dream a dream:
Vast multitudes wait, breathless, in amaze,
For your oraculous purr to set their hearts ablaze.

Perhaps you think, "How stupid grows the world!"
And pine for godhood till you grow to be
A broken spirit, like a war–flag furled,
Or drought–drained river sighing for the sea.
What potent utterance do you waste on me,
When I am kind and stroke your glossy fur?
What do you gaze on that I cannot see?
Perhaps if men could know the things that were,
Their petted faiths should quake and tremble at your purr.