

On Receiving a Picture of Swans

by H. P. Lovecraft

"Impromptu verse, or 'poetry' to order, is easy only when approached in the coolly *prosaic* spirit. Given something to say, a *metrical mechanic* like myself can easily hammer the matter into technically correct verse, substituting formal poetic diction for real inspiration or thought. For instance, I lately received a post-card bearing the picture of swans on a placid stream. Desiring to reply in appropriate verse, I harked back to the classic myth of Phaethon and Cygnus, handling it as follows:

With pensive grace, the melancholy Swan
Mourns o'er the tomb of luckless Phaethon;
On grassy banks the weeping poplars wave,
And guard with tender care the wat'ry grave.
Would that I might, should I too proudly claim
An Heav'nly parent, or a God-like fame;
When flown too high, and dash'd to depths below,
Receive such tribute as a Cygnus' woe!
The faithful bird, that dumbly floats along,
Sighs all the deeper for his want of song.

"This required about 10 minutes of composition."

- in a letter to Robert Kleiner, 1915