Horace, *Sermones* 2.6: The Country Mouse and the City Mouse, Part 2

Our campfire tale continues as the humble country mouse is seduced with promises of the “good life” from the haughty tooth of his urbane friend. The lap of luxury has its rough spots as we travel with these tiny rodents to town and see the other side of the proverbial fence. If the ultimate pleasure was to be free from anxiety, then to subscribe to this restrained kind of hedonism taught by the Epicurean philosophers is the real moral of Horace’s story. But perhaps the country mouse does not have the last word after all, nor does his city cousin; for seldom in Roman history do we find either mice or men who are able to straddle both worlds as successfully as did Horace.

**Text and Translation**

haec ubi dicta
when these words

agrestem pepulere, domo levis exsilit; inde
struck the country (mouse), lightly he scampers from the house; next

ambo propositum peragunt iter, urbis aventes
both finish the journey (as) planned, desiring at night

97. **ubi**: here, postpositive

98. **agrestem**: *agrestis, -e*: (belonging to the) country  
**pepulere** = *pepulerunt*  
**levis**: translate as an adverb: lightly; i.e. without a second thought  
**exsilit**: *exsilio, exsilire, exsilui*: leap out, leap up; present tense for perfect  
**inde**: (adverb) next

99. **ambo**: *ambo, ambae, ambo*: both  
**propositum**: *propono, -ponere, -posui, -positum*: put forth, plan  
**peragunt**: *perago, -ere, persegi, peractum*: finish  
**iter**: *iter, itineris*, n.: journey  
**aventes**: *aveo, -ere*: desire
moenia nocturni subrepere. iamque tenebat

to creep under the walls of the city. And now the night

nox medium caeli spatium, cum ponit uterque

was holding the middle of the sky’s expanse, when each (mouse) sets

in locuplete domo vestigia, rubro ubi coco

(his) footsteps in a rich house, where a coverlet

tincta super lectos canderet vestis eburnos
dyed with reddish-purple glowed on ivory couches.

multaque de magnā superessent fercula cenā,
There were left over from a great dinner many trays (of food),

100. moenia: moenia, -ium, n. (pl.): walls (of a city)
    nostrum: nostrum, -a, -um: at night; here, modifying the subject of peragunt
    subrepere: subrepo, subrepe, subrepsi: creep under

101. spatium: spatium, -i, n.: space; here, expanse

102. locuplete: locuples, locupletis: rich
    vestigia: vestigium, -i, n.: footstep
    rubro: ruber, rubra, rubrum: red
    coco: coccum, -i, n.: scarlet dye

103. tincta: tingo, -ere, tinxī, tinctum: dye
    super: (adverb) on (top of)
    canderet: candeo, -ere, candui: glow
    vestis: vestis, -is, f.: coverlet
    eburnos: eburnus, -a, -um: (made of) ivory

104. superessent: supersum, superesse, superfui, superfuturus: left over
    fercula: ferculum, -i, n.: tray (for serving food)
    cena: cena, -ae, f.: dinner
quae procul exstructis inerant hesterna canistris.
which (were) last night’s (and) were in wicker baskets piled up across the room.

ergo ubi purpureā porrectum in veste locavit
Then, when he seated the country (mouse who) stretched out upon the purple
grestem, veluti succinctus cursitat hospes
coverlet, just like (a servant with his tunic) hitched up, the host scurries back and forth

continuatque dapes nec non verniliter ipsis
and prolongs the banquet and officiously performs these

fungitur officiis, praelambens omne quod adfert.
(very) duties, licking beforehand everything which he brings.

105. procul: (adverb) at a distance; here, across the room
exstructis: extruo, -struer, -struxi, -structum: pile up
inerant: insum, -esse, -fui: be in
hesterna: hesternus, -a, -um: of yesterday; here, last night’s
canistris: canistra, -orum, n. (pl.): wicker baskets

106. ergo: (adverb) then
purpureā: purpureus, -a, -um: purple
porrectum: porrigo, -ere, porrexi, porrectum: stretch out
locavit: loco (1): place; here, to seat, with the city mouse as the understood subject

107. veluti: (adverb) just
succinctus: succingo, -cingere, -cinxii, -cinctum: tuck up the clothes in the girdle
cursitat: curro (1): frequentitive of curro showing repeated action; scurry back and forth
hospes: hospes, hospitis, m.: host

108. continuat: continuo (1): make continuous; here, prolong
dapes: daps, dapis, f.: banquet
nec non: and also; literally “nor not”
verniliter: (adverb) like a slave; with nec non, “officiously” (lit. “not like a slave”)

109. fungitur: fungor, fungi, functus sum: +ablative: perform
praelambens: praelambo, -ere: lick before
adfert: adfero, adferre, attuli, allatum: bring
ille cubans gaudet mutatā sorte bonisque
That (mouse) reclining rejoices in (his) changed lot and (surrounded) by good

rebus agit laetum convivam, cum subito ingens
things, plays the satisfied guest, when suddenly a monstrous

valvarum strepitus lectis excussit utrumque.
rattling of the double doors shook both off (their) couches.

currere per totum pavidi conclave magisque
Frightened, they run through the entire room and even more

110.  cubans: cubo, -are, cubui, cubitum: recline
gaudet: gaudeo, -ere, gavisus sum: rejoice
mutatā: muto (1): change
sorte: sors, sortis, f.: (one’s) lot
bonis...rebus: here, “surrounded by good things”; locative ablative

111.  laetum: laetus, -a, -um: satisfied
convivam: conviva, -ae, m.: guest; agit laetum convivam: “plays the happy guest”
subito: (adverb) suddenly
ingens: ingens, ingentis: huge, monstrous

112.  valvarum: valvae, -arum, f. (pl.): double doors
strepitus: strepitus, -ūs, m.: noise, rattle
lectis: lectus, -i, m.: (dining) couch
excussit: excutio, excutere, excussi, excussum: shake off
utrumque: uterque, utraque, utrumque: each (of two), both

113.  currere = currunt: historical infinitive used in animated narrative
pavidi: pavidus, -a, -um: frightened
conclave: conclave, -is, n.: room
exanimes trepidare, simul domus alta Molossis
breathless(ly) they tremble, when the lofty mansion resounded

personuit canibus. tum rusticus: “haud mihi vitā
with Molossian hounds. Then the country (mouse) said: “I have

est opus hāc” ait et “valeas: me silva cavusque
no need for this (kind of) life” and (adds) “Good-bye! The forest and (my mouse) hole

tutus ab insidiis tenui solabitur ervo.”
safe from sudden attack, will comfort me (in spite of its) scanty vetch.”

114. exanimes: examinis, -e: breathless; i.e. from terror
trepidare: trepido (1): be agitated; here, trepidare = trepidant (see currere, 113)
alta: altus, -a, -um: high; because it is the large home of a rich man
Molossis: Molossus, -a, -um: Molossian; Molossia is an area in Greece famous for raising hunting dogs

115. personuit: persono, personare, personui, personitum: resound
canibus: canis, -is, m./f.: dog
haud: (adverb) not at all
vitā: ablative with opus est (ablative shows the thing needed)

116. cavus: cavum, -i, n.: (mouse) hole

117. tutus: tutus, -a, -um: safe; with ab insidiis, “safe from sudden attack”
tenui: tenuis, -e: thin, scanty
solabitur: solor, -ari, solatus sum: comfort
ervo: ervum, -i, n.: vetch; a plant in the pea family cultivated for silage