

Two Poems · Edward Kleinschmidt

THE DEATH OF THE FIELD MOUSE

I feel I should be in Rome writing this, 70 B.C.
Or so, hoisting my toga, some scribbler named Gaius Fabius
Maximus, and having come in from my country-house
In the Sabine Hills, a weekend playing satyr, having
Hauled in demijohns of wine, baskets of pears
And figs, I sit down to remember the mouse
Killed in the cantina. But it's years later, Augustan
Poets as dead as Augustan mice. Might that Catullus
Had lived longer than thirty, held his Lesbia longer, before
Mice made nests in his fine tunic. That Propertius's
Love for Cynthia didn't die when he died. The metal
Trap I bought at Silvano's snapped hard on the mouse's
Head, cutting deep behind its eyes, slicing deep into its brain.
A drop of blood larger than its ear was in its left ear.
The piece of *parmigiana* I had stuck on the spike was
Untouched. Might that he had eaten some! No
Mausoleum for this mouse, like the one Mausolos, satrap
Of Caria, built for his tomb in 353 B.C. I took its
Stiff body, its head now cleanly open, held together
Only by a hinge of skin, past the lime tree bower (one that
Coleridge wouldn't have felt such a prisoner in) to where
I saw the skeleton of a *riccio*, a hedgehog. The rest of
The day I chopped weeds I don't know the names of, or
Even if they have names. And I sheared the hawthorn
Hedge, which in Italian is called *topospino*,
Mouse-pricker, which blooms bright white each spring. Might
That the mouse had stayed there, getting pricked but somehow
Being more poetic, and certainly, most importantly, alive. Unlike
The boy in the box carried to the *Campo Santo* last
Week. No muscle left there—muscle, which means little
Mouse, from the way a muscle moves or doesn't, in this case—
Last flick of a leg long gone, last breath held in, held in.