

## 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.