

## Horace, *Sermones* 2.6: The Country Mouse and the City Mouse, Part 1

Horace was born in Venusia (south central Italy) on December 8, 65 BCE. His father (or grandfather) had been a slave in the important Horatii *gens* of Rome, and, according to standard Roman practice, upon his manumission Horace's family adopted the Roman name. While he was pursuing his education at Rome and later Athens, civil war erupted between Caesar and Pompey. Unfortunately, Horace joined the wrong side, Pompey's, and ended up losing his family farm but was spared by Caesar.

Maecenas, the secretary of the arts for Octavian (later Augustus), took the penniless Horace under his powerful wing and began supporting the fledgling poet as part of the imperial program fostering the native arts in Rome, including poetry written in Latin. Horace would never know hunger and poverty again. Augustus tried to convince him to become more active in the government, but Horace preferred the simple pleasures and joys of life: friendship, travel, the lighter side of love, the scenery of nature.

The excerpt below comes from Horace's second book of *Sermones* ("Conversations"), satirical poems on a multitude of topics. The sixth is a hymn to his contentment with his farm and the simple life of the country. In the first part of the poem, Horace sits around the campfire with friends, and someone praises wealth. One of Horace's companions, Cervius ("Bucky"), recounts a tale of a country mouse who invited a friend from the city to dinner only to be told that his way of life is narrow and shabby.

### Text and Translation

Olim

Once upon a time,

rusticus urbanum murem mus paupere fertur

a country mouse is said to have received a city mouse

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accepisse cavo, veterem vetus hospes amicum,

in his poor hole, an old friend (and) old guest,

79. **olim**: (adverb) once upon a time

80. **rusticus**: *rusticus*, -a, -um: of or belonging to the country

**urbanum**: *urbanus*, -a, -um: of or belonging to the city

**mus**: *mus*, *muris*, m/f.: mouse

**paupere**: *pauper*, -eris: poor (with *cavo* in the next line: "in [his] poor hole")

**fertur**: "(a country mouse) is said"; lit. "is conveyed (in conversation)"

81. **cavo**: *cavum*, -i, n.: (mouse) hole

**veterum**: *vetus*, -eris: old

**hospes**: *hospes*, *hospitis*, m.: host

asper et attentus quaesitis, ut tamen artum  
unrefined and attentive to his supplies, (and) although frugal,

solveret hospitii animum. quid multa? neque ille  
he could relax his basic nature for guests. Why (say) more? He did not

sepositi ciceris nec longae invidit avenae,  
begrudge the select chick-pea nor the long-grained oat,

aridum et ore ferens acinum semesaque lardi 85  
and he offered a dried grape seed and half-eaten morsels of bacon carrying (them)

frusta dedit, cupiens variā fastidia cenā  
in his mouth, hoping to overcome with various food

82. **asper**: *asper, -era, -erum*: rough; here, unrefined  
**attentus**: *attendo, -ere, attendi, attentum*: careful, attentive  
**quaesitis**: lit. “things having been sought out”; here, supplies  
**ut tamen**: although  
**artum**: *artus, -a, -um*: frugal
83. **solveret**: *solvo, -ere, solvi, solutum*: relax; i.e. his normally frugal way of life  
**hospitiis**: “when guests visited,” lit. “for friendships”  
**quid multa**: “Why (say) many things?,” i.e. “Why go on?”  
**neque ille**: a colloquial phrase, “No, he (i.e. the country mouse) was not the mouse to hold back on...”
84. **sepositi**: *sepositus, -a, -um*: select  
**ciceris**: *cicer, -eris, n.*: chick-pea (genitive with *invidit*)  
**invidit**: *invideo, -ere, -vidi, -visum*: begrudge; + somebody (acc.) something (gen.)  
**avenae**: *avena, -ae, f.*: oat  
**longae...avenae**: long-grained oat
85. **et**: (treat as if postpositive; translate before *aridum*)  
**aridum**: *aridus, -a, -um*: dry  
**ore**: *os, oris, n.*: mouth  
**acinum**: *acinus, -i, n.*: grape seed  
**semesaque**: *sem/esa: sem(i)* = “half”; *esus* (from *edo, -ere, edi, esum*: eat); half-eaten  
**lardi**: *lardum, -i, n.*: the fat of bacon
86. **frusta**: *frustum, -i, n.*: morsel  
**varia**: *varius, -a, -um*: various  
**fastidia**: *fastidium, -i, n.*: disgust; plural for singular; object of *vincere* (87)  
**cena**: *cena, -ae, f.*: meal, food

vincere tangentis male singula dente superbo,  
the disdain of the one hardly touching (them) one by one with a haughty tooth,

cum pater ipse domūs paleā porrectus in hornā  
after the master of the house himself, having stretched out on (a bed of) this year's chaff,

esset ador loliumque, dapis meliora relinquens.  
was eating spelt and darnel, leaving behind the better parts of the banquet.

tandem urbanus ad hunc “quid te iuvat” inquit, “amice,” 90  
At length the city (mouse) said to that one, “What fun is it for you, (my) friend,

praerupti nemoris patientem vivere dorso?  
to live (in such) suffering on the edge of a rough pastureland?

vis tu homines urbemque feris praeponere silvis?  
Don't you want to put men and the city before the savage woods?

87. **male:** (adverb) hardly

**singula:** *singulus*, -a, -um: one by one; here, neuter plural substantive

**dente:** *dens*, *dentis*, m.: tooth

**superbo:** *superbus*, -a, -um: haughty

88. **paleā:** *palea*, -ae, f.: chaff

**porrectus:** *porrigo*, *porrigere*, *porrexi*, *porrectum*: lie stretched out

**hornā:** *hornus*, -a, -um: recent, this year's

89. **esset:** *edo*, *esse*, *edi*, *esum*: eat

**ador:** *ador*, -oris, n.: spelt (an old kind of wheat)

**loliumque:** *lolium*, -i, n.: darnel (ryegrass)

**dapes:** *daps*, *dapis*, f.: banquet

90. **tandem:** (adverb) at length

91. **praerupti:** *praerumpo*, -ere, *praerupi*, *praeruptum*: break off in front; here, rough

**nemoris:** *nemus*, -oris, n.: pastureland beside a wooded area

**dorso:** *dorsum*, -i, n.: back; here, on the edge (locative ablative)

92. **vis tu:** idiom: “Don't you...?”

**feris:** *ferus*, -a, -um: savage

**silvis:** *silva*, -ae, f.: woods

carpe viam, mihi crede, comes, terrestria quando  
Seize the way, trust me, pal, since things on earth

mortalīs animas vivunt sortita neque ulla est  
have been allotted mortal souls and there is no

aut magno aut parvo leti fuga: quo, bone, circa  
escape from death for either the great or the small: therefore, good (fellow),

95

dum licet, in rebus iucundis vive beatus,  
while one may, live happy in pleasant circumstances,

vive memor, quam sis aevi brevis.”  
live mindful of how short-lived you are.”

93. **carpe:** *carpo, -ere, carpsi, carptum*: pluck out; enjoy; here, seize  
**comes:** *comes, comitis, m/f.:* companion; here, pal  
**terrestria:** *terrestris, -e:* (things/creatures) of the earth  
**quando:** (adverb) when; sometimes causal: since, because; here, postpositive

94. **mortalīs:** *mortalis, -e:* mortal; here, *mortalīs = mortales* (acc. pl.)  
**vivunt:** = *sunt*  
**sortita:** *sortior, -iri, sortitus:* allot

95. **leti:** *letum, -i, n.:* death; here, genitive with *fuga* (“escape from”)  
**fuga:** *fuga, -ae, f.:* escape  
**quo...circa:** *quocirca:* therefore

97. **memor:** *memor, -oris:* mindful; + genitive  
**aevi:** *aevum, -i, n.:* life-time  
**aevi brevis:** genitive of description