

Juvenal describes the city of Rome as a dangerous place for the poor. He describes the apartment buildings as being flimsy, commenting “We live in a city propped up for a great part on matchsticks.” (Juvenal 3.193-194) with the managers of these apartment blocks often covering up how bad the damage or cracks and holes in the structure were and trying to persuade the tenants it won’t collapse. The roofing tiles are the only defence against rain (Juvenal 3.202-208) and if the apartment building catches fire the people on the top floors are as good as dead. He also comments how the people have few belongings and when the buildings and their belongings are lost nobody will help them find food and shelter when they are “naked and begging for scraps of food” (Juvenal 3. 210-211). These were typical environments for the poor of the city.

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Juvenal also comments on the dangers of the street conditions as well as the home. Sleep is hard to come by due to the noise of carts in the streets. You need money for sleep in Rome. Crowds are thick so that “This one strikes us with an elbow that one with a hand.” (3.245-246). People can be crushed, unprepared for the afterlife and condemned to stay on the banks of the Styx for 100 years. “The poor chap has no hope of a boat across the muddy whirlpool nor any small coin to stretch out in his mouth.” (3.266-267).

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Horace views living in the city as a leisurely experience. He finds city life pleasant and often watches the world go by rather than involving himself in it, doing as he pleases “I go alone wherever the desire takes me” (Horace Sat 1.6. 111-112). He visits the Circus Maximus and Forum (Sat 1.6 113-114) and looks over the stalls and cost of produce. He takes a walk, writes or has a massage with quality oil after getting up late. “ad quartam iaceo” (Sat 1.6 112). Horace also presents a view of life in the country as opposed to the city in the fable of the Town and Country Mouse. The country mouse lives a frugal life, putting by his stores which he offers to the town mouse when he comes to stay. “He did not begrudge the chickpea he had put aside, nor the long oats, and carrying a dry grape in his mouth gave him half-eaten scraps of bacon fat.” (Sat 2.6 83-84) while he himself ate spelt and darnel. They reclined on “this year’s hay.” This generosity does not suit the city mouse’s sophisticated taste and he suggests that they sample city life.

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The town mouse eats the leftovers from dinner-parties amid luxurious furnishings. He shares this with his friend but their sumptuous banquet is brought to an abrupt halt as two Molossian hounds rush in (Sat 2.6 114) and the terrified mice rush all over the room. This convinces the country mouse to return to his humble hole where he will be safe from ambush “me ... tutus ab insidiis” (Sat 2.5 117). Country life may be humble but it seems less dangerous than life in the city.

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In conclusion the Roman viewpoint of town and country life seemed to vary according to the person’s class.

For the poor city life is busy, hectic and unpleasant, offering a high chance of death due to dangerous housing and crowded streets, as Juvenal points out. While the town mouse lives surrounded by opulence, danger is present.

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Horace’s reflections of life in the city are those of a man who is not obliged to work and can spend his days at leisure, not worrying about money but also not living too extravagantly. He finds the city pleasant and interesting but seems to admit in the fable of the Town and

- 11 Country Mouse that amidst the luxury lurks danger. In the country, life is rough but it is possible to find generosity and live more safely than the poor in the city.