The Mouse Colony

Katerina Tsiopos

*Indiana University, Columbus*

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**Recommended Citation**


Available at: [https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol12/iss1/4](https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol12/iss1/4)

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Abstract

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Keywords

Animals, colony, eco poetry, forester mouse, trees

This journal article is available in Animal Studies Journal: https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol12/iss1/4
The Mouse Colony

Katerina Tsiopos

The Mouse Colony: Deep Cell

Ounce for ounce
Mice are meaner than
Rats. They are inheritors of
Seemingly boneless bodies
They squeeze and escape
Through crevices coexisting
In risky symbiosis with fleas,
Virus, and hunger.
We scientists try to plot their
Brief cantankerous lives –
Weavers and shakers –
Jump, spin, run, gnaw, breed
In five perfect five-dimensions.
Like us,
They carry immutable genes
In embryotic memory:
Timeless dancing dams and sires.
Labome, JAX, Charles River
Cultivate their namesakes,
Mutations, their elite flaws:
Dementia and forgetfulness,
The renewed Lethe.
Parkinson’s slight missteps,
Telltale quivering hands –
Diabetes or cancer,
Genes gone wild.
We carry those, too.
We study our outside selves
In the deep laboratory,
The colony of science.

The Mouse Colony: Four Corners

Heavy snows and rains revived
Drought-stricken piñon groves.
How we love a surplus of food.
We eat till we burst, breed until we infest.
Four Corners, USA, May 1993,
The deer mice fattened
Eating ten times more piñon nuts
You danced in the rain,
Hanta virus flourished in the desert.

The Mouse Colony: Double Helix

Direct address: you and I
Reluctantly live side-by-side.
You steal food from our silos,
Drop your scat
In the harvested grain.
I collect your kind in the air-conditioned,
Air-purified, water-purified
Cloistered labs – in this medical colony
That I might learn why my mother weaves,
Why my brother shakes in his sleep,
I keep you close – too close.

**The Mouse Colony: Novosibirsk Paeons**

We have come to this, gratefully: a mouse,
Chill scientists waxed artistic.
Fashioning an eternally busy mouse sculpture
Acknowledging your many many
Deaths in the service of science.
Bespectacled statue, frozen knitting
DNA chains in a Siberian backdrop
In front of the Institute of Genetics.
You deserve the paeons as
You squat on rear haunches
A shawl drawn close
Against the white nights
Hunched shoulders
Fingers working the knitting needles,
In perpetuity
Knitting needles
Weaving a double helix.
Ice encrusts the bronze mouse body
In the icy heart of Novosibirsk.
The Mouse Colony: *Mus Musculus*

Here you are, *mus musculus*, house mouse,
You escape from science to
Colonize my domestic world,
Invade my nights of twitchy dreams.
I have contained you, Mouse,
For years in the colony of science,
Changed your bed shavings,
Sterilized your polycarbonate cages,
Fed you with the world’s most
Precious kibble and precise water.
Technicians raised your mouse pups.
You smell of mammal regret.
In captivity, your fur
Cools from the ketamine injection.
I slice your tissue, capture the tell-tale diseased cells
That model human dis-ease
In the grey light of the electron microscope.