

# Pangur Bán By Anonymous

From the ninth-century Irish poem

Pangur Bán and I at work,  
Adepts, equals, cat and clerk:  
His whole instinct is to hunt,  
Mine to free the meaning pent.

More than loud acclaim, I love  
Books, silence, thought, my alcove.  
Happy for me, Pangur Bán  
Child-plays round some mouse's den.

Truth to tell, just being here,  
Housed alone, housed together,  
Adds up to its own reward:  
Concentration, stealthy art.

Next thing an unwary mouse  
Bares his flank: Pangur pounces.  
Next thing lines that held and held  
Meaning back begin to yield.

All the while, his round bright eye  
Fixes on the wall, while I  
Focus my less piercing gaze  
On the challenge of the page.

With his unsheathed, perfect nails  
Pangur springs, exults and kills.  
When the longed-for, difficult  
Answers come, I too exult.

So it goes. To each his own.  
No vying. No vexation.  
Taking pleasure, taking pains,  
Kindred spirits, veterans.

Day and night, soft purr, soft pad,  
Pangur Bán has learned his trade.  
Day and night, my own hard work  
Solves the cruxes, makes a mark.