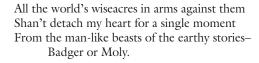


God, Animals and Imagination

Lewis had a love for animals, both real ones and "dressed animals" in stories, going back to his early childhood. In 1953, about halfway through his publishing of the Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis released a short poem titled "Impenitence". One writer has described the poem as "an apology for children's literature". Another writer has described it as "a clearly Narnian poem". The text follows.



Rat the oarsman, neat Mrs. Tiggy Winkle, Benjamin, pert Nutkin, or (ages older) Henryson's shrill Mouse, or the Mice the Frogs once Fought with in Homer.

Not that I'm so craz'd as to think the creatures Do behave that way, nor at all deluded By some half-false sweetness of early childhood Sharply remembered.

Look again. Look well at the beasts, the true ones. Can't you see?...cool primness of cats, or coney's Half indignant stare of amazement, mouse's Twinkling adroitness,

Tipsy bear's rotundity, toad's complacence... Why! they all cry out to be used as symbols, Masks for Man, cartoons, parodies by Nature Formed to reveal us

Each to each, not fiercely but in her gentlest Vein of household laughter. And if the love so

Raised–it will, no doubt–splashes over on the Actual archtypes,

Who's the worse for that? Marry, gup! Begone, you Fusty kill-joys, new Manichaeans! Here's a Health to Toad Hall, here's to the Beaver doing Sums with the Butcher!³

Let us be thankful for God's gift of animals and His gift of the imagination, and that children and adults alike can enjoy and learn from stories of "man-like beasts".



"And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.'

And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good."

GENESIS 1:24-25 (ESV)

³ C.S. Lewis, "Impenitence" in *Poems*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1992), pp. 2-3.



¹ Michael Gilmour, "C. S. Lewis Proposes a Toast: Health to All Animals, Real and Imagined", *Direction*, Fall 2015, https://directionjournal.org/44/2/c-s-lewis-proposes-toast-health-to-all.html.

² Brenton Dickieson, "A Cheeky Poem about Talking Beasts by C.S. Lewis", https://apilgriminnarnia.com/2015/07/13/cheek/.