

# Reflections

MARCH 2023

## God, Animals and Imagination

C.S.

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”.<sup>1</sup> Another writer has described it as “a clearly Narnian poem”.<sup>2</sup> The text follows.



All the world’s wisecracs in arms against them  
Shan’t detach my heart for a single moment  
From the man-like beasts of the earthy stories—  
Badger or Moly.

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 complacency...  
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!<sup>3</sup>

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)

<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> Brenton Dickieson, “A Cheeky Poem about Talking Beasts by C.S. Lewis”, <https://apilgriminnarnia.com/2015/07/13/check/>.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Impenitence” in *Poems*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1992), pp. 2-3.

