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C. S. Lewis, 2 Kings 19:35, and Mice

C. S. Lewis's works are replete with animals of various kinds, offering both vivid and memorable characters and also objects of moral concern and theological value. He thereby anticipates what may be seen as a gradual turn toward the inclusion of animals in theological and ethical contemplation since his death in 1963. Although biographers have noted the important creative and religious influences of George MacDonald on Lewis's work, this article highlights Lewis's concern for animals as one of MacDonald's more significant yet overlooked influences. Mice are arguably Lewis' especial favourite, their small size and fragility offering pastoral, theological, and ethical lessons. In Lewis's retelling of the Sennacherib story of 2 Kings 19:35, mice are shown to accomplish the work of angels.

THROUGHOUT HIS WORKS, C. S. Lewis habitually presents the Bible as an animal-haunted text, emphasizing the nonhuman to a degree few others match. To the extent that his science fiction trilogy (1938–1945) or the *Narniad* (1950–1956) or certain poems (e.g., “The Sailing of the Ark,” also called “The Late Passenger,” 1948) reimagine biblical stories, he tends to populate those tales with animals and/or shift them from the periphery to the

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centre and/or use those stories as occasions to speak about their treatment. Animal ethics mattered to him, and he considered indifference toward their plight a failure of moral vision.¹ On many occasions, his inclusive theological vision found expression in art.

Lewis first published the poem “Sonnet” in 1936. The key lines for our purposes are these:

The Bible says Sennacherib’s campaign was spoiled
By angels: in Herodotus it says, by mice—
Innumerably nibbling all one night they toiled
To eat his bowstrings piecemeal as warm wind eats ice.

But muscular archangels, I suggest, employed
Seven little jaws at labour on each slender string,
And by their aid, weak masters though they be, destroyed
The smiling-lipped Assyrian, cruel-bearded king.²

He refers here to 2 Kings 19:35, which tells us simply, “the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies” (NRSV). The verse intrigues Lewis because Herodotus offers a rather more colourful account of Sennacherib’s defeat:

Thereafter there came against Egypt a great army, and its leader was Sennacherib, king of the Arabians and the Assyrians.... But when enemies came, there spread out against them, at nightfall, field mice, which gnawed their quivers through, and through, too, the bows themselves and the handles of their shields, so that on the next day they fled, defenseless, and many of them fell.³

¹ On this topic, see e.g., John Laurent, “C. S. Lewis and Animal Rights,” *Mythlore* 19, no. 1 (1993): 46–51; Andrew Linzey, “C. S. Lewis’s Theology of Animals,” *Anglican Theological Review* 80, no. 1 (1998): 60–81; and Michael J. Gilmour, *Animals in the Writings of C. S. Lewis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

² C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Poems of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Harper-Collins, 1994), 134. Lewis first published “Sonnet” in *The Oxford Magazine* 54 (May 14, 1936) under the pseudonym Nat Whilk.

³ Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, trans. David Greene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 193.

Lewis does not privilege one story over the other in “Sonnet” but rather playfully combines them. The result is a highly satisfying reading.

His reimagined 2 Kings 19:35 replaces exalted angels with lowly mice, or more accurately, pictures co-operation between them. Though it is not the only, or even the principal concern of “Sonnet,” one consequence of his creative re-presentation of the story is an elevation of the status of creatures easily disregarded as mere vermin. The biblically-inspired poem makes a forceful ethical statement. If these creatures participate in the great work of angels, our usual assessment (mere vermin) overlooks something of crucial importance. There is a whiff of the dominical saying about sparrows in all this: humans value them little (two sell for a penny) and yet God knows each one that falls (Matt 10:29–31; Luke 12:6). But *why* does Lewis read the Bible this way, introducing animals at unexpected moments, making them objects of moral concern, and finding theological value even in the least of creatures?

In the writings of Scottish poet and children’s author George MacDonald we find a constructively jumbled mix of imagination, theology, and concern for animals. Each category on its own is no great wonder⁴ but slippage back and forth between them, with one simultaneously informing and drawing on the others, is a rarity. Creative approaches to the Bible that find “space” for animals and animal ethics are infrequent enough in our own day let alone in religiously conservative Victorian England and, to be sure, Macdonald’s musings were not always welcome. When a young minister in Sussex, the elders of his church charged him with heresy for simply speculating about the salvation of animals.⁵

We find again this trinity of interrelated themes—theology, animals, and an active imagination—in the writings of C. S. Lewis a generation later in what is a clear line of influence. Lewis also explored theological topics in creative writings, and wrote about animals and their connection to the religious life. The results of his speculations about animals are a welcome corrective to the Christian tradition’s tendency to ignore them altogether, and even though Lewis left no systematic theological statement on the matter,

⁴ For contexts on the last, see e.g., Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987). Chapter three (“A Measure of Compassion”) discusses some religious impulses behind animal welfare efforts.

⁵ See the editorial Introduction to George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin and Other Fairy Tales*, ed. Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Peterborough: Broadview, 2014), 11 n. 1.

what emerges in his poetry, novels, correspondence, and other works is an active imagination finding or creating spaces for the nonhuman within otherwise myopic and anthropocentric religious discourses. In some ways, he anticipated a gradual turn toward the inclusion of animals in theological and ethical contemplation in the decades since his death in 1963.

George MacDonald Baptizes C. S. Lewis's Imagination

Seek not that your sons and your daughters should not see visions, should not dream dreams; seek that they should see true visions, that they should dream noble dreams. Such out-going of the imagination is one with aspiration, and will do more to elevate above what is low and vile than all possible inculcations of morality. Nor can religion herself ever rise up into her own calm home, her crystal shrine, when one of her wings, one of the twain with which she flies, is thus broken or paralyzed.

—George MacDonald (1867)⁶

As examples of literary influence go, it is difficult to overstate ways George MacDonald contributed to C. S. Lewis's work. Lewis himself insists the connection is a crucial one when exploring the roots of his imaginative and religious formation, and he is effusive in his praise. In his 1945 novel *The Great Divorce*, the narrator C. S. Lewis meets George MacDonald in the afterlife. He relates how discovering *Phantastes* (1858) as a teenager “had been to me what the first sight of Beatrice had been to Dante: Here begins the New life.”⁷ Lewis repeats the story in his 1955 memoir *Surprised by Joy*.

As this section's epigraph suggests, imagination for MacDonald is a necessary precursor for the discovery of religious meaning. In reading MacDonald for the first time, the bookish, atheist teenager (somewhere around 1916) felt as though he were “carried across the frontier” and that “all was changed.” Reading *Phantastes* proved transformative: “I saw the common things drawn into the bright shadow: *Unde hoc mihi?* in the depth of my disgraces, in the then invincible ignorance of my intellect, all this was given me without asking, even without consent. That night my imagination was, in a certain

⁶ George MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture.” This essay first appeared in *British Quarterly Review* 46, no. 91 (1867): 45–70. It appears also in MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin*, ed. King and Pierce, which I cite here (347).

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 502. Italics original.

sense, baptized; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer. I had not the faintest notion what I had let myself in for by buying *Phantastes*.”⁸ This discovery of MacDonald prepared Lewis for religious insights as he makes clear in *Surprised by Joy* and elsewhere, but also—and this is less often discussed—for religious insights about animals and the Christian’s moral obligations to them. Examples of MacDonald’s animal-friendly approach to religion and storytelling are not difficult to find.

“Diamond’s a good horse—isn’t he, sir?” “From your description I should say certainly; but I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance myself.” “Don’t you think he will go to heaven, sir?” “That I don’t know anything about,” said Mr. Raymond. “I confess I should be glad to think so,” he added, smiling thoughtfully.⁹

Even asking this question, as the incident at the Sussex church suggests, is something of a theological adventure, at least within certain circles.

When discussing George MacDonald’s influence on Lewis, most biographies correctly trace creative and religious links between the two.¹⁰ Less often is there mention of ways MacDonald urged theological consideration of animals. Crucial to Lewis’s writing on that topic is the imagination, and it is in his creative work—the Ransom novels (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Peregrandra*, *That Hideous Strength*), the Chronicles of Narnia, select poetry—that we find many of his insights about the nonhuman.¹¹ For both authors, poetry and fantasy freed the imagination, allowing them to consider animals

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955; Boston: Mariner, 2012), 179, 181. Lewis also comments on the extent of MacDonald’s influences in the Preface to his 1946 anthology of the Scottish writer’s work: “In making this collection I was discharging a debt of justice. I never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him” (C. S. Lewis, ed., *George MacDonald: An Anthology* [New York: HarperCollins, 2001], xxxvii). For an introduction to his work, see Daniel Gabelman, *George MacDonald: Divine Carelessness and Fairytale Levity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013).

⁹ George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 263.

¹⁰ See e.g., Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 85; Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis—Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet: A Life* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale, 2013), 42–43; A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 45–47.

¹¹ Important discussions about animals in his nonfiction include a chapter on animal suffering in *The Problem of Pain* (1940), and his essay “Vivisection,” first published in 1947 by the

in new ways and without the constraints of church tradition or the conventions of other literary forms. Perhaps they also found in imaginative writings safe places to explore their unorthodox and controversial ideas—think of the backlash from MacDonald’s elders; think of the censure of Lewis’s university colleagues who objected to his antivivisectionist stance.¹²

To be sure, Lewis’s affection for animals reached back to early childhood, long before discovering MacDonald. This is evident in the now-published juvenilia. We also see it in his pre-conversion adult writing where again there is concern for the wellbeing of animals and an abhorrence of cruelty.¹³ What MacDonald contributes to Lewis is a “*baptized* imagination,” a model of a specifically Christian, theologically sensitive, and biblically informed way of thinking about animals and animal ethics. A few brief examples help establish the connection between MacDonald and Lewis on this topic. When anthologizing the Scottish author, animals are a conspicuous part of the portrait Lewis produces. For instance, his biographical sketch introducing that 1946 collection includes details about MacDonald’s father, described by Lewis as “a remarkable man” remembered for his kindness to animals: “he objected to grouse shooting on the score of cruelty and had in general a tenderness for animals not very usual among farmers more than a hundred years ago.”¹⁴ This seems an odd detail to include in such a brief biographical sketch but obviously one important enough to Lewis to highlight. We find a similar tenderness toward the nonhuman in the younger MacDonald, a tenderness born out of a specifically religious conviction, as the following excerpt included in the anthology makes clear:

[God] knows His horses and dogs as we cannot know them,
because we are not yet pure sons of God. When through our

New England Anti-Vivisection Society (and available in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 224–28).

¹²“Lewis’s views on this matter [opposition to vivisection] lost him many friends at Oxford and elsewhere, as vivisection was then widely regarded as morally justified by its outcomes. Animal pain was the price paid for human progress” (McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 237).

¹³For an example of the adult Lewis’s pre-conversion concern for animals, see remarks in a diary entry of 1922 concerning fellow Oxford students taking a dog into the laboratories: “they were laughing together as they talked of the old man who had sold it making them promise to give it a good home and be kind to it.” He does not disguise his anger, calling the incident “disgusting” (*All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper [San Diego: Harvest, 1991], 143). For the juvenilia, see *Boxen: The Imaginary World of the Young C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: William Collins, 1985).

¹⁴Lewis, Preface to *George MacDonald*, xxiii, xxiv.

sonship, as Paul teaches [in Rom 8:18–25], the redemption of these lower brothers and sisters shall have come, then we shall understand each other better. But now the Lord of Life has to look on at the willful torture of multitudes of His creatures. It must be that offenses come, but woe unto that man by whom they come! The Lord may seem not to heed, but He sees and knows.¹⁵

Like his master, Lewis also turns to Pauline eschatology when contemplating animals. We see this in his poem “Man Is a Lump Where All Beasts Kneaded Be,”¹⁶ in which he considers the Genesis concept of human dominion over the earth. Addressing the diverse animal world, the narrator initially betrays a harsh, heavy-handed exercise of his God-given rule but it gives way to a gentler, humbler attitude, the result of a chastened conscience. He is sorry for failing to rule other creatures as he ought, and the poet promises to come back when “grown shepherd” and “not before I’ve come where I am bound.” The last phrase recalls Rom 8:18–25, which anticipates an end to creation’s groaning *after* the redemption of the children of God, *after* they get where they are going, *after they come where they are bound* (cf. MacDonald’s “we are not yet pure sons of God”).

There are other hints of Lewis’s indebtedness to MacDonald on the matter of animals, both theoretical and creative. In at least one instance it is explicit. A passing reference to “the King in Curdie” in Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength* (1945) invites reading that novel with MacDonald’s Curdie fairy tales close at hand.¹⁷ In the immediate context of that off-handed reference, readers find Elwin Ransom sharing his home with mice (among other creatures), in what amounts to an enactment of the peaceful co-existence of species known in the Garden of Eden or Isaiah’s peaceful kingdom or Mark’s account of Jesus in the wilderness: “Humans want crumbs removed; mice are anxious to remove them. It ought never to have been a cause of war.”¹⁸

Lewis has much to say about animals elsewhere in this particular novel, aligning heroes with compassionate treatment of them, and villains with indifference and cruelty. The latter are vivisectionists. Ironically, escaped

¹⁵ Taken from Lewis, ed., *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, 123–24.

¹⁶ Lewis, *The Collected Poems*, 82. Lewis takes the title from John Donne.

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 197.

¹⁸ Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 198.

animals from the laboratories destroy those affiliated with the demonically inspired National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments, and this denouement presumably owes something to MacDonald as well. His novel *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) also includes a judgment-by-animals storyline: “The place was swarming with creatures—animal forms wilder and more grotesque than ever ramped in nightmare dream.... The rest of the creatures now came stalking, rolling, leaping, gliding, hobbling into the room, and each as he came took the next place along the wall, until, solemn and grotesque, all stood ranged, awaiting orders.”¹⁹

Lewis also includes the following entry in *George MacDonald: An Anthology*: “In what belongs to the deeper meanings of nature and her mediation between us and God, the appearances of nature are the truths of nature, far deeper than any scientific discoveries in and concerning them.... It is through their show, not through their analysis, that we enter into their deepest truths.”²⁰ Commenting on Lewis’s inclusion of this excerpt, Kallistos Ware reminds us Lewis “valued the material world around us in and for itself, he valued it still more because of its transparency, because of the way in which the material world brings us to an apprehension of God.” The world is, for Lewis, “a sacrament of the divine presence.”²¹ No wonder Lewis abhorred cruelty toward animals. Even the least of them, including mice in laboratories, reveal something of the Divine.

C. S. Lewis and Mice

Reepicheep in your coloured picture has just the right, perky, cheeky expression. I love real mice. There are lots in my rooms in College but I have never set a trap.

—C. S. Lewis (1953)²²

With the MacDonald model in view—that rare cluster of a fertile imagination, serious theology, and a concern for the decent treatment of animals—

¹⁹ George MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* (London: Penguin, 1994), 194, 205.

²⁰ Lewis, ed., *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, 76–77.

²¹ Kallistos Ware, “Sacramentalism in C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams,” in *C. S. Lewis and His Circle: Essays and Memoirs from the Oxford C. S. Lewis Society*, ed. Roger White, Judith Wolfe, and Brendan N. Wolfe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 53, 54.

²² C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Children*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 32. The letter also appears in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, volume 3, *Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 334–35.

Lewis considers the nonhuman in a variety of places and ways. He wrote the lines above to a young Narnia fan. Notice how, without pause, Lewis drifts from theological imaginings involving an animal (Reepicheep), to the real world and its real mice (“my rooms”), to moral consideration of them (“never set a trap”). Mice loom large in his writing, as seen already in comments about *That Hideous Strength*. We also find him censuring their ill-treatment, something evident in a letter of November 25, 1950:

I too am an admirer of [George] Bernard Shaw’s work, and could love him for his attack on the vivisectionists. That in the preface to [*The Doctor’s*] *Dilemma* [1906] is just devastating. Many before and since have attacked them for their cruelty, but Shaw was, I think, the first man to attack them for their *stupidity*; which I’m sure gets them on the raw whilst an attack on their cruelty would most likely leave their withers unwrung. No one who has ever read Shaw is able afterwards to think of vivisectionists without remembering the imbecile who spent his time cutting the tails off generations of mice to see if presently one would be born without a tail....²³

He writes about all kinds of animals, of course, but mice arguably are a favourite. He shared a trench with one during WWI and still thought about that experience forty years later;²⁴ he lamented the cruelty they experienced in laboratory experiments; he refused to set traps for them in his Magdalen College rooms. And, of course, we find him celebrating them in fiction. Not only does Ransom welcome them as roommates but we also read of the mighty Aslan honouring them (in *Prince Caspian*) for an act of kindness shown him (in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). The gallant Reepicheep is awarded special consideration. He gets his tail back after losing it in battle (see below) and is also swept out of Narnia into Aslan’s land, Enoch-like, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

But why mice? Why not a more exotic, arguably more interesting animal or mythical creature? There is often a certain logic at play in Lewis’s animal stories. Doris T. Myers writes of Lewis’s use of the hieroglyphic properties (her term) of animals and mythological beings. In Narnia’s *The Last Battle*,

²³ Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, 65.

²⁴ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 195.

to illustrate, there is an alignment of attributes and personalities typically associated with characters' species: the donkey is stupid; horses are spirited and noble; dogs excitable and loyal; cats aloof; mice, rabbits, and squirrels gentle but helpless.²⁵ Also pertinent is Lewis's fondness for "David and Goliath" stories: Narnia's children defeat powerful witches; a humble, gentle-natured Tolkien-like Cambridge philologist battles and kills the ferocious, demonic Un-man in Perelandra. Lewis's re-written 2 Kings 19:35 is of a kind with such stories. More importantly, the poem serves his pastoral, theological, and ethical purposes.

It may be that the exotic is precisely what Lewis wants to avoid when developing certain themes. Mice are ubiquitous so all readers know something of them, including the fact that they are small and particularly fragile. This shared body of knowledge and experience (we also are small and fragile) is important. Lewis's recurring references to mice remind us that attaching value to strength, size, and status is absurd.²⁶

Sennacherib, Angels, and Mice

Though Lewis's scholarship was exemplary, we must remember he was not a biblical scholar. His specialization was English literature, and particularly the literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. When commenting on the Bible he is typically careful not to overstate his credentials. "This is not a work of scholarship," he writes in the opening of his book on the Psalms. "I am no Hebraist, no higher critic, no ancient historian, no archaeologist. I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself."²⁷ What mattered to him was not the Bible itself but rather "the realities about

²⁵ Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1994), 177–78. See also her article "Hrossa, Pigs, and Teddy Bears: The Animal Kingdom According to C. S. Lewis," *Mythlore* 22, no. 2 (1998): 4–9. See also Margaret Blount, "Animals in the Novels of C. S. Lewis," in *C. S. Lewis, Bloom's Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (1974; New York: Chelsea House, 2006), 11–29.

²⁶ "If our Reason told us that size was proportional to importance, then small differences in size would be accompanied by small differences in importance just as surely as great differences in size were accompanied by great differences in importance. Your six-foot man would have to be slightly more valuable than the man of five feet, and your leg slightly more important than your brain—which everyone knows to be nonsense. The conclusion is inevitable: the importance we attach to great differences of size is an affair not of reason but of emotion" (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* [New York: HarperCollins, 2002], 346–47).

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 1, 2.

which scripture speaks.”²⁸ For this reason, Lewis finds both fundamentalism and modern biblical criticism falling short because they lack good literary sense. Both talk *about* Scripture, “thus keeping it at a safe distance, instead of experiencing from head to toe the reality for which it serves as means and medium.”²⁹ This concern to get to *the reality behind biblical stories* is relevant for understanding his approach to 2 Kings 19:35.

There are at least two overlapping ideas to which Lewis calls our attention in his creative reading of the Sennacherib story in “Sonnet.” The first draws on a remark from Pascal that serves as the poem’s epigraph: “*Dieu a établi la prière pour communiquer à ses creatures la dignité de la causalité.*”³⁰ In a 1949 letter, he admits not knowing why God asks people to pray but adds “I am attracted by Pascal’s saying that ‘God has instituted prayer to lend to his creatures the dignity of Causality.’” He then copies “Sonnet” into the letter, thus offering the poem as commentary on Pascal’s idea. As he puts it in verse, “omnipotence [chooses] to need / Small helps than great.” Puny humans participate in God’s work through prayer. This is a gift from God, bestowing dignity on people in the same way “muscular” archangels bestow dignity on mice, using their “little jaws” to defeat a great army.

The second insight relates to the first. Even the smallest of God’s creatures are valuable and the tendency to overlook them and discriminate against them is spiritually consequential. In 1942, Lewis again visits the Sennacherib story of 2 Kings 19:35 but this time in the context of a sermon preached at St. Jude on the Hill Church in London,³¹ and there too we see his interest in the dignity of the smallest, easily overlooked parts of creation. What is more, he suggests we see God in the seemingly inconsequential. To support this point, he references Julian of Norwich (1342—ca. 1416), the Medieval anchoress and mystic who received a series of visions on May 13, 1373. She describes the vision Lewis mentions as follows:

... [Christ] showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, lying in the palm of my hand, and to my mind’s eye it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought, “What can this be?”

²⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “On Scripture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, ed. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75.

²⁹ Vanhoozer, “On Scripture,” 78.

³⁰ The citation from Pascal is italicized in the 1964 collection *Poems*, 134.

³¹ C. S. Lewis, “Miracles,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 28.

And the answer came to me, “It is all that is made.” I wondered how it could last, for it was so small I thought it might suddenly disappear. And the answer in my mind was, “It lasts and will last for ever because God loves it; and in the same way everything exists through the love of God.”³²

The immediate context of Lewis’s reference to Julian of Norwich concerns the interconnectedness of all facets of God’s creation, everything from nature to myth to the incarnation to the sacramental bread and wine. He writes of the “ever-varying texture of reality, the liveness, the elusiveness, the intertwined harmonies of the multi-dimensional fertility of God.” The Divine reality “is like a fugue,” he continues, “All His acts are different, but they all rhyme or echo to one another.”³³

This idea of “intertwined harmonies” and “rhymes” suggests the individual parts of creation, even the smallest among them, potentially function as signs of the greater whole: “If a miracle means that which must simply be accepted, the unanswerable actuality which gives no account of itself but simply *is*, then the universe is one great miracle.”³⁴ Focusing on one part of this greater whole is potentially revelatory—even a hazelnut, even a mouse—and it is able to point beyond itself to the miraculous character of all creation.

Like Julian’s hazelnut, animals are unlikely signposts pointing beyond themselves to the “great miracle.” But again, why mice in particular? I suspect that for Lewis they are emblematic of all animal life but more specifically, emblematic of animal life that is easily and quickly dismissed as irrelevant or dispensable. For most, if mice have any value at all, it is a merely instrumental value (e.g., scientific experimentation). Beyond that, they are of no concern and can be dispatched in labs and traps without a second thought. But Lewis questions all such attitudes, finding in mice a value colleagues in the Oxford laboratories overlooked.

He writes often of humanity’s hubris.³⁵ As small and vulnerable creatures in a world of predators, mice come to represent an absence of excessive overreach. Even Reepicheep, full of martial courage though he is, acknowl-

³² Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing, with introduction and notes by A. C. Spearing (London: Penguin, 1998), 7.

³³ C. S. Lewis, “Miracles,” 37.

³⁴ Lewis, “Miracles,” 36. Italics original.

³⁵ See e.g., C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (1952; New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 48–49.

edges the limitations and vulnerabilities mice face. There is no temptation for them to overreach owing to their diminutive stature. As the brave mouse explains to Aslan, soon after discovering he lost his tail in battle,

“I can eat and sleep and die for my King without one. But a tail is the honor and glory of a Mouse.... permit me to remind you that a very small size has been bestowed on us Mice, and if we did not guard our dignity, some (who weigh worth by inches) would allow themselves very unsuitable pleasantries at our expense. That is why I have been at some pains to make it known that no one who does not wish to feel this sword as near his heart as I can reach shall talk in my presence about Traps or Toasted Cheese or Candles: no, Sir—not the tallest fool in Narnia!”

Mice know their limits. Their self-assessment is realistic and within the proper order of things—unlike humans, they know they are small, weak, and inconsequential—but they deserve honour and respect nonetheless. “You have great hearts,” Aslan says in response to Reepicheep and the other assembled mice.³⁶ The attempt to restore dignity to animal life, to present even the least of creatures in all their nobility as part of a good creation, is part of Lewis’s theological achievement, and it provides an imaginative basis for ethical argument.

Myth and imagination are crucial for his efforts to communicate that idea. He wrote occasionally about animals in more formal prose but arguably the MacDonald-like romances and verse prove more convincing and certainly have broader appeal. On one occasion, he describes myth as the mountain source of different streams that become truths here in the valley, or, switching metaphors, the isthmus connecting “the peninsular world of thought with that vast continent we really belong to.”³⁷ Myth, imagination, storytelling, and poetry speak meaningfully into “real world” concerns, including animal ethics. Mice did not defeat Sennacherib and his archers but in telling the story that way, Lewis creates conceptual spaces for animals within theological and ethical contemplation.

³⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 208–9.

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 66.