CHAPTER THREE

VALUED ANIMALS AND ANIMAL VALUES

When Spaniards arrived in the Americas, they were well accustomed to treating sentient beings as resources and tools of transformation. Over the course of more than three centuries, the nonhuman animals of the early modern Spanish empire were used to provide food, clothing, labor and entertainment. They slaved for Spaniards even as subordinated humans often did, and therein lay the complexity. In daily interaction with other animals, many humans could see similarity and continuity, while others tried to minimize semblance in order to exploit another being with greater ease. Both cattle and human slaves might be tallied numerically in a foreshadowing of today’s “bottom-line” economics, while real partnerships and friendships might also develop between humans and their “beasts of burden.”

Cervantes obviously enough portrayed Sancho Panza’s deep affection for the donkey who labored with him. In contrast, Juan Mateos, though well versed in the behavior of his prey, constantly returned to nonhuman animals as resources to be used by nobles in their quest for amusement and preparation for war. With a range of opinion regarding the nonhuman animals who labored for them, human inhabitants of the Spanish empire could and did develop notions of appropriate animal husbandry and outright cruelty. In a world full of hunts and bullfights, individuals could still be dismayed by the cruelty that Philip II’s heir, don Carlos, exhibited toward servants and nonhuman animals alike. Spanish imperial tradition lionized a sense of stewardship, and popular chivalric romances were only truly rivaled by pastoral tales of idealized shepherds and shepherdesses.

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2 According to Irving A. Leonard, the groundbreaking pastoral romance, *Siete Libros de la Diana* (1559) by Portuguese-born Jorge de Montemayor was only second in popularity to the chivalric romance *Amadís de Gaula* in both Spain and the Americas: “It was reprinted seventeen times during the sixteenth century and at least
In Spanish culture, there was a vision of the “good shepherd” at the same time that large landed estates measured their wealth in sentient beings reduced to means of production.

**How the Spaniards Learned to Value Animals in Iberia**

Spaniards were defined by the nonhuman animals with whom they associated, and by just how they associated with those other animals. Their humanity was intrinsically linked to animality. Just as ants “herd” aphids for their honeydew, the Spanish animal herded other animals—especially sheep. Human interpretations and perceptions are intertwined seamlessly with our biological needs in the material world. To understand the attitudes of the Spanish empire to nonhuman animals, elements of the Spanish economy must be understood. The need to eat in order to survive cannot be altered by cultural construction. It is real, and it was in the Spanish imperial economy that human ideas studied in the last chapter interacted with an undeniable physical reality. In turn, Spanish choices concerning the best way to run an economy impacted both the people and nonhuman animals they subjugated as imperialists. In both economic terms and metaphysical flights of fancy, Spaniards valued sheep and herding—first in Europe and then in the Americas as well.

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8 more editions appeared in the next hundred years…. But despite the undoubted refinement of language and the charm of its lyric passages, both prose and verse, the enthusiasm of sixteenth-century readers, particularly the heirs of the hardy Conquistador, for the pastoral theme remains a puzzling enigma. The shipping registers and other contemporary lists, however, attest unmistakably to its popularity, for they are sprinkled not only with Montemayor’s masterpiece but with sequels by other writers such as Alonso Pérez (1564), and the more inspired *Diana enamorada* of Gaspar Gil Polo (1564).” Irving A. Leonard, *Books of the Brave: Being an Account of Books and of Men in the Spanish Conquest and Settlement of the Sixteenth-Century New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992; originally published 1949), 115-16.