The expansion of European empires raised questions regarding the overlapping nature of the categories “human” and “animal,” and how different cultures might reflect on those categories differently. In colonial New Spain, Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón took umbrage at tales of Nahua women and men transforming into animals like foxes and caimans. Boundaries blurred in what Ruiz de Alarcón perceived as wild witchcraft and deviltry. But imperial tales also could speak of a cross-species diplomacy blessed by God, as in the stories told about San Martín de Porres (1579-1639) and his ability to foster peace so that “natural enemies” like a dog, cat and mouse might eat from the same bowl. In the Americas, there were clerics who disented from Ruiz de Alarcón’s simple formulae, and even those who, like St. Francis of Assisi, found a way to embrace identification with other animals without committing transgression—to find a place for nonhuman animals in a divinely ordained order that did not identify them solely with demonic inversion or subjugation as beasts of burden and servants to humanity. In the viceroyalty of Peru, the Dominican brother and barber-surgeon Martín de Porres associated with animals in a way considered extraordinary, but not illicit, by those around him. Like a number of other humans deemed saintly, he refrained from eating meat, but he also took the trouble to care for sickly and injured animals, even as he cured humans who were ill. Beatified in 1837, he finally became a saint in 1962. His unwillingness to pursue power, his exiting the game played by both dominant Spanish male authority figures and those called by them “witches,” like the nanahualtin, appears to have been central. He and the

animals he associated with were tame, and in reaching out to other animals as an expression of Christian love and humility, Martín de Porres was able to embody a compassionate interest in nonhuman animals that was there in Spain’s empire.2

Empathy with other animals had to compete with the reduction of animals to their use value alone, but it was never entirely absent from the cultural conversation. A peasant, like the fictional Sancho Panza, might think of the animal he labored with as a companion. And early modern Spanish Christianity recognized a place for animals in the world, so that even hardened conquistadores, who might use their dogs to brutalize Amerindians without mercy, could mourn those dogs sympathetically as fallen comrades when they died. In the midst of imperial expansion and brutality, Spaniards interacted with tame animal familiaris and companions. To understand an individual like Martín de Porres, who was lauded for this behavior, one must first understand the place of the acceptable animal companion in everyday Spanish imperial culture, morality and religion.

Those Who Are Not Consumed: Nonhuman Companions and Comrades

As we have seen, nonhuman animals provided the Spanish empire with labor, entertainment and metaphorical ideals to be emulated. While serving in these capacities, they could also provide companionship. They could be perceived as members of the family, and humans might be perceived as members of the pack. Frequent and familiar association bonded humans to other animals, creating working pets like the dogs of the conquistadores and animal companions who might even live a life of leisure, much like so many pets we see today. Again, as in our own contemporary world, there were levels of affection adopted by humans toward other animals—those levels being constructed around cross-species similarities and differences. Humans are a unique species of animal, naturally set apart by reproductive affinity and heightened levels of abstraction and reflection

2 Harriet Ritvo has argued that domesticated animals provided nineteenth-century English imperial discourse with metaphors for the appropriate behavior of subordinates, but, like subordinated classes and peoples, “Malice and insubordination were widely suspected among humankind’s animal subjects.” Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 30.