Animals are a significant and recurrent, if paradoxically effaced, presence in the study of all Golden Age Spanish literature, including the comedia. This should not surprise, since only in the waning of the 20th century did European literary scholars in any number turn to animals as a topic worthy of academic scrutiny. Nonetheless, in the early modern period animals were certifiably and historically central to mankind as sources of food, clothing, transportation, labor, and companionship. As Keith Thomas details in *Man and the Natural World*, animals were literally everywhere in early modern English towns and were often thought of as individuals.¹ In the country and urban settings alike people kept dogs, cats, horses, chickens, goats, pigs, and cows, among other species. Perhaps this very proximity has led to animals’ historical invisibility, and the Spanish context turns out to be no different.

In recent decades, however, scholarly interest in animals as subjects whose history is worthy of analysis has emerged from the convergence of growing concerns over the environment and animal welfare on one hand, and 20th-century interdisciplinary scholarship on previously marginalized social groups on the other. As a result animals have been identified as the latest addition to the roster of deferred Others whose time has come in our efforts to reconstruct and comprehend early modern culture, particularly as it is manifested in Spanish literature.

Literature, of course, teems with works of fiction involving all species of animals: domestic, wild, and fantastic or mythical. This presence demonstrates how writers and artists have imagined, conceived, and represented them across cultures and history, with the often unstated but underlying goal of establishing lines of demarcation between the human and the animal.² Consequently, over the past few years early modernist literary scholars are entering the multidisciplinary field of Animal Studies to

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² In this essay I generally simplify usage to “humans” and “animals,” rather than the currently favored “nonhuman animals,” for the sake of simplicity and to allow the term, and the animal, individual identity rather than existence solely in opposition to humans.
address our complex, paradoxical, morally shifting, and ambivalent relationships with animals across our interrelated histories and times, focusing on the cultural capital of their portrayal in literature.

In modern and contemporary scholarship animals have conventionally been viewed figuratively as simple tropes that function as positive or negative stand-ins, or models, for human behavioral traits. That focus notwithstanding, real animals with a material presence and history are found in significant numbers in early modern literature and were objects of ongoing fascination for writers at the time. In the Golden Age *comedia*, animals are present in several modalities and degrees. Live animals did appear on the stage with some frequency; animals are narrated in the manner of Aesopian beast fables, whose roots are found in the bestiary tradition, or in related off-stage episodes; fantastic and real animals (often from the emblem tradition) function symbolically; and, finally, they appear in the form of animal-human hybrids, or blendings, that scrutinize the human-animal divide, among other issues.

This essay explores these exemplars as they occur in a series of representative plays by Lope de Vega, Luis Vélez de Guevara, and María de Zayas. My purpose is not to document definitively or provide a taxonomy of the presence of animals in the *comedia*: this would require a book rather than the pages afforded here. Instead, I have selected plays that exemplify the patterns outlined above in order to construct an expanded dialogue on animals’ presence in and contributions to drama in early modern Spain.

To initiate the discussion with real animals, it should be noted that how and to what extent live animals appeared on the Golden Age stage is a question fraught with uncertainties. A great deal more research remains to be done on the materiality of playhouses, staging practices, and theatrical companies in order to “find” the animal. For example, were animals included as property in the *hato* of theatrical companies such as those enumerated by César Oliva and Francisco Torres Monreal? Were they hired or borrowed for performances? There is no question that they were present, since abundant stage directions call for their use, as will be seen shortly. Live animals were also often replaced by cardboard figures and

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