

"Embodying Animals: Cervantes and Animal Cognition"  
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Abstract:

In *Don Quixote* and other texts, Cervantes approaches non-human animals in a plethora of ways: Some characters believe specific animals to be rife with symbolic meaning that bears on their own aspirations; other animals speak like humans provoking awe in spectators; still others are mentioned only insofar as they serve human ends, as food or labor. Yet a significant number are treated more circumspectly, with the considerable respect that is due to minds that are complex but never fully fathomed. Cervantes presents animal sense perception, emotion, thought, understanding and intentional agency, developing what I term “animal embodiment,” and opens up in fiction a world of possibilities for minding animals, creating non-human characters that—like many of the complex human characters with whom they often interact—merit the reader’s consideration, reflection and empathy. How are the minds of animals similar to and different from the minds of humans? What are the contexts, modes of interaction and habitational parameters in which animals differentiate themselves as cognitive beings for Cervantes? How are depictions of human-animal interactions important to uncovering animal sentience? Drawing on cognitive science and the philosophy of animal cognition, I demonstrate how Cervantes ushers in the modern paradigm of the human-animal relationship, as he navigates human experiences of real animals alongside the history of writing on animals from the middle ages onwards.