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The Spitting Image of a Man: Machado de Assis's *Crônicas* about Donkeys

JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS
Translator: Robert Patrick Newcomb

Translator's Preface

The Brazilian writer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908) is best-known for his formally innovative, ironic, and subtly critical novels of Rio de Janeiro's belle-époque-era high society, and for his similarly pathbreaking short fiction. However, his most consistent outlet for literary expression was the newspaper *crônica*, a hybrid, flexible form in which the writer applies personal reflection to day-to-day ephemera, and blends observation and literary imagination. As Soares offers: "Se corrermos os olhos despretensiosamente pela vasta produção machadiana, não seria despropositado afirmar que o autor de *Quincas Borba* foi acima de tudo um cronista" (365). While Machado contributed *crônicas* to local newspapers, particularly the *Gazeta de notícias*, in several series throughout his career, this quantitatively large segment of his production, like his literary criticism, has been relatively neglected by scholars. This is doubtless due first, to the wealth of material for literary analysis one finds in the dazzling novels of Machado's "mature" period, such as *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881) and *Dom Casmurro* (1899), and second, to the stubborn notion that the *crônica* is a lesser form, one that Brazilian literary luminaries such as Machado, Lima Barreto, Clarice Lispector, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and others cultivated for financial rather than high-minded, "literary" reasons. Nonetheless, certain of Machado's *crônicas* have gained a degree of critical notice, particularly those that filter the author's vibrant imagination and acute social awareness through a coherent narrative. One such *crônica*, published on October 16, 1892, in the *Gazeta de notícias*, and commonly referred to as "Conversa de burros" or "Um

caso de burro," is the centerpiece of the selection of *crônicas* concerning donkeys that are presented here in English translation.

In "Conversa de burros," Machado—or Machado's narrator—is riding in a Rio streetcar when he overhears a conversation between the pair of donkeys who are pulling the *bonde*[1]. These nameless animals, referred to as "the one on the left" and "the one on the right," debate the impact of the recently introduced electric streetcar. The donkey on the left, perhaps reflecting a liberal faith in progress, offers that with the arrival of the *bonde elétrico* they will be "free." The donkey on the right, extending the political allegory, exhibits a more typically conservative skepticism in light of impending change. Referencing humanity's long history of abusing donkeys, and the fact that the two are "company property," he counters that rather than being allowed to rest, they will be made to "pull wagons" until, "whether from old age or bad luck, we'll no longer be able to work, and we'll once again have our freedom." This "freedom" will be illusory, however. He explains that once they are unable to work, they will be left on the street, "free to rot." He imagines one such donkey's dead body being picked up by "a wagon, pulled by another donkey," thereby continuing the cycle of donkey abuse and suffering. The one on the left, who had earlier protested, "where's the justice in this world?" charges the other with being "depressing," after which the one on the right begins to explain how donkeys, unlike humans, are philosophical animals. Ironically, his speech is cut off when the driver pulls in the reins, forcing the bit further into his mouth. Once the streetcar reaches the end of the line, the narrator hops out, approaches the donkeys, and reveals that he speaks their language, which is that of the Houyhnhnms, the intelligent horses described in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). The donkeys, shocked that he understands them, become agitated, prompting the driver to flick them with the reins. The piece closes as follows: "It seemed to me that I was the one who deserved the smack, since I had startled them. But as the donkey on the left asked, and as I repeat now: where's the justice in this world?"

This *crônica* exemplifies several aspects of Machado de Assis's work. It is ironic and typically "Machadian" in tone—seemingly casual, though occasionally interrupted by a dark observation or a description of a sudden act of violence. The

[1] On August 12, 1892, the first electric streetcar line in Brazil, and in all of Latin America, was inaugurated. Animal-powered streetcars had been used in Rio for decades. Streetcars were—and are—referred to in Brazil as *bondes*.

narrator's attitude is also characteristically Machadian, falling somewhere between bemusement and skepticism, as he contemplates the era's dizzying scientific and technical advances, which included the introduction of the electric streetcar. And finally, the piece reflects Machado's sustained though underappreciated literary engagement with the plight of the presently and formerly enslaved.[2] Indeed, scholars have proposed that the donkey's fundamental function in Machado's work is as a social allegory—one that, I would add, is highly relevant to the period in which he wrote, which coincided with the abolitionist campaign, the legal abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, and its immediate fallout. Machado affirms this interpretation in an October 5, 1886, *crônica* in verse published in the *Gazeta de notícias*, in which he describes a donkey, "less an ass than his master" (*menos burro que o senhor*) and a "deep thinker" (*cismava / Cousas de ponderação*), who is nonetheless "emaciated, / Held captive like a *Nagô*" (*magro / Cativo como um nagô*).[3]

Returning to his October 16, 1892, piece, Machado ironizes on and subverts the long-standing tendency in Brazil and elsewhere to dehumanize the nonwhite, enslaved, poor, and uneducated by caricaturing them as animals. Fabiano's famous statement, "Você é um bicho, Fabiano," from Graciliano Ramos's novel *Vidas secas* (1938), provides an eloquent demonstration of how marginalized persons, whether enslaved Afro-Brazilians or landless *retirantes*, may internalize this animalization. Machado's *crônica* also pokes fun at the idiomatic use in Portuguese and various other languages of "ass" or "donkey" and related terms to describe a stupid person (*burro*) or unintelligent behavior (*burrice, asneira*). Machado's ironic, subversive intent in deploying donkeys as a vehicle for discussing slavery and oppression is confirmed by his descriptions of their mistreatment at the hands of their streetcar-driving "masters": like enslaved humans, the donkeys are made to work and are physically abused. Across Machado's donkey-themed *crônicas* these animals are presumed to be stupid but are in fact thoughtful, intelligent, even philosophical.[4] In a June 10, 1894, *crônica*,

[2] See the translator's preface in Machado de Assis's "Six *Crônicas* on Slavery and Abolition."
[3] *Nagô*: term used in Brazil for Yoruba-speaking persons enslaved and trafficked from the Slave Coast.
[4] In repeatedly depicting "philosophical" donkeys, Machado inverts the classical notion, dating from Plato and Xenophon and ironized in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, that "the human body was especially constructed for celestial contemplation, while the quadruped body was more suited for baser activities such as eating and sex" (O'Sullivan 196).

a talking donkey misidentified as Lucius, the protagonist of the Roman writer Apuleius's novel *The Golden Ass*, reveals that his fellow streetcar-pulling donkeys share Machado's bookish habits: "In the midst of so much suffering, we read. We mostly read English and American newspapers, when a passenger leaves one behind on the streetcar." But as "company property," these enslaved animals will work until old age or technological progress renders them obsolete, at which point their master will abandon them with "[n]o retirement? No reward for our service? No gesture of gratitude?" as the donkey on the left from Machado's October 16, 1892, *crônica* protests.[5] The abuse endured by enslaved persons as "beasts of burden"—a figure made literal by Machado's donkeys—is explained here and throughout Machado's oeuvre by his desultory view of humankind as profoundly self-interested, vain, and generally incapable of empathy, as expressed in the Latin proverb *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man).[6]

Despite the charge that Machado, particularly as an Afro-Brazilian born into relatively modest circumstances and as a descendant of enslaved persons,[7] was insufficiently engaged with the abolitionist cause, he addressed the problem of slavery—albeit in the years following legal abolition—in the short stories "O caso da vara" (1891) and "Pai contra mãe" (1905), and in a series of *crônicas* written in the days surrounding the signing of the Lei Áurea on May 13, 1888. The best-known of these pieces, published on May 19, 1888, in the *Gazeta de notícias*, imagines a master who frees his slave Pancrácio in advance of legal abolition and publicizes this in the local press, in order to win a reputation for generosity, which he hopes to parlay into a political career. Meanwhile, he tricks Pancrácio into staying on as a nominally "free" worker, in exchange for a meager salary and the same physical and verbal abuse he had suffered while enslaved. Machado's implication is clear: abolition will prove insufficient to prevent the exploitation of formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilians. More broadly, legal and technological "progress," as represented in his October 16, 1892, *crônica* by the introduction of

[5] See Lopes; Oliva; Ribeiro.
[6] See Newcomb.
[7] Machado's father was a mulato housepainter and his mother an Azorean immigrant. They lived on the Morro do Livramento in Rio as *agregados* on the property of a wealthy woman. Machado received a limited formal education and was largely self-taught. He began working as a printer's apprentice as a young man.

the electric streetcar, cannot be counted upon to improve the lot of those considered inferior and whose continued exploitation benefits the elite.[8]

Further, Machado's October 16, 1892, *crônica* demonstrates his oft-commented erudition, and his use of literary and philosophical citations to present problems facing Brazilian society in universalizing terms, or conversely, to draw on local phenomena to exemplify broader philosophical issues. Machado cites two texts in connecting his *crônica* to the problem of slavery and to the "universal" reality of human cruelty: *Gulliver's Travels*, which his narrator ironically takes not as satire but as fact, given that he speaks the Houyhnhnms' language; and the story of Balaam's donkey, from the biblical book of Numbers. Elsewhere in his donkey-themed *crônicas* Machado references Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, as we have seen, as well as Sancho Panza's donkey from Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, a novel to which Machado referred frequently in his work.

Regarding Balaam's donkey: Machado invokes this Old Testament tale in his October 16, 1892, *crônica*, when the donkey on the left declares, "By Balaam's donkey!" in response to the one on the right, who has explained that they will have no retirement. In Numbers 22, God sends an angel to the prophet Balaam, who is riding his donkey. While Balaam does not see the angel, his donkey does. Startled in a manner similar to the streetcar-pulling donkeys in Machado's *crônica*, she veers from her path, prompting Balaam to strike her—just as the driver of the *bonde* does. After Balaam strikes the donkey twice more, God grants her the power of speech, which she uses to protest her treatment: "What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" (22:28). This is echoed in the *crônica*, when the donkey on the left asks: "Where's the justice in this world?" Balaam finally sees the angel and repents to God—though significantly, he never apologizes to his donkey. Machado's invocation of Balaam's donkey is humanizing, given that she displays wisdom, endures patient suffering, and evinces a sense of dignity that prompts her to contest her mistreatment. This aligns with the tendency to read Balaam's donkey typologically, as Bough explains: "Not only does she represent wisdom, rather than stupidity, she also exemplifies the suffering and abused beast of burden. The donkey, patiently bearing harsh abuse, as well as the physical burdens placed upon them, is often represented as a Christ-like figure" (58). And more locally, Lopes explains that in "aproxim[ando] o burro

[8] See Lopes (4n3, 8) for Machado's donkey-theme *crônicas*, his *crônica* on Pancrácio, and "Pai contra mãe."

e o escravo, Machado de Assis reveste aquele de aspectos positivos: o domínio da linguagem, a capacidade de análise, a reflexão social e política, o dom da oratória, a sabedoria. Ao construir a alegoria dos escravos na figura dos burros, o escritor proporciona que o sistema escravocrata seja desvelado pela voz do cativo" (8).

Machado drew on the figure of the donkey—an animal with a long history of representation in folklore, proverbs, and literature, particularly in the ancient Greek and biblical traditions—several other times in his writing, depicting them as victims of human abuse, as Stoic philosophers, and as exemplars of humble dignity and quiet resistance. While donkeys appear several times in his *crônicas*, one also figures in his penultimate novel, *Esaú e Jacó* (1904), in a chapter entitled "Caso do burro." Here the character Counselor Aires sees a wagon stalled on a Rio de Janeiro street:

> [T]he driver was beating the donkey that had been pulling the cart. Though this was a vulgar spectacle, it stopped our Aires in his tracks; he sympathized with the donkey as much as with the driver. The energy exerted by the driver was certainly great, because the ass was standing there, considering if it should move. Notwithstanding his superior position, the driver was beating the donkey like the very Devil. Some people had stopped to watch. This lasted for five or six minutes. Finally, the donkey decided that he preferred pulling to being beaten, and he pulled the cart out of that spot and got a move on.
>
> Aires saw a deep look of irony and patience in that animal's round eyes. It seemed the expression of an indomitable spirit. Later he read this monologue in those eyes: "Go on master, squeeze into your cart so that you can buy the hay you feed me. You have to work to keep me shod. But despite all this you can't stop me from calling you something foul. But don't worry, I don't call you anything at all; you'll always be my dear master. While you work yourself to death to earn your living, I'll content myself thinking

> that your rule over me counts for little, as long as you don't take away my freedom to be stubborn."[9]

The donkey's imagined monologue reveals his disdain for his abusive master (*patrão*, in the original Portuguese) in a manner that recalls the "savage and deformed slave" Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* ("You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse") (1.2.363–64; 1010). Further, it implies that in this case, the donkey's stubbornness is more purposeful than congenital:[10] by stalling the cart, he is engaging in a temporary work stoppage that approximates a form of resistance practiced by the enslaved. This aligns with an observation Machado made in an earlier *crônica*, published on August 15, 1876, in *Ilustração brasileira*. Here Machado inverts the classical equine hierarchy and compares the humble donkey favorably to the aristocratic horse.[11] Unlike horses, which Machado's narrator describes as "nothing but wicked dandies, well-mannered scoundrels," donkeys "are abused, but do not seek revenge upon their abusers. It's said they are stubborn. This may be true; it's natural that an animal of so many and such varied merits should have at least one negative trait. But is obstinacy a mortal sin? Besides being stubborn, from time to time they kick. But where horses kick out of malice, donkeys kick to make a point, as an argument of last resort."

While some of Machado's donkey-themed *crônicas* have comic elements, and all employ irony, one is elegiac in tone, without abandoning the denunciation of cruelty and injustice that characterizes this corpus. In this piece, published on April 8, 1894, in the *Gazeta de notícias*, Machado's narrator describes an encounter with an emaciated donkey "lying on the ground, by the streetcar tracks," in the Praça 15 de Novembro in the center of Rio. The donkey has been abandoned, and its proximity to the tracks suggests why: technological progress and the animal's old

[9] My translation. For commentary on this episode, see Pádua. The original of "You have to work to keep me shod" reads *Vive de pé no chão para comprar as minhas ferraduras*.

[10] The idea that donkeys are stubborn, which Machado refers to several times in these *crônicas*, dates from antiquity. See Griffith (223).

[11] "The deeply entrenched cultural binary between the 'high-class' horse and the 'low-class' donkey … is obvious enough, and in many respects it persists today. The horse is tall and elegant, long-haired, luxurious, refined, militarily spectacular and respected, distinctively named, finely adorned, expensive to keep, and fastidious in its diet, voice, and activities—and thus 'noble' (and 'Indo-European'). The donkey is rough, cheap, coarse, noncombatant, hardworking (but sometimes recalcitrant), low-maintenance, anonymous, and thus 'ignoble, asinine,' even 'slavish' (and 'Asiatic')" (Griffith 228).

age have rendered it useless to its former master. Bearing out the prediction of the "donkey on the right," this animal has been left on the street rather than given a dignified retirement. The narrator notes ironically: "Its owner, or whoever had abandoned it in the plaza, had felt some degree of pity for it, and had left it this meal. This was no small gesture. If the man who did this is a reader of *crônicas*, and happens to read this one, he should know that I'd like to shake his hand." In line with Machado's depiction of donkeys as philosophical animals, the narrator believes that the abandoned donkey, which is on death's door, is undertaking an "examination of conscience," which begins as follows: "However much I scrutinize my conscience, I cannot find a sin that requires me to show contrition. I've never stolen, never lied, never slandered nor offended anyone. In my whole life I've only kicked three times, at most, and this was before I learned the ways of the city and understood the destiny of true donkeys (*verdadeiro burro*), which is to take it and shut up." The donkey's resignation, which he presents as part of a Stoic philosophy that "consists of walking with purpose and controlling one's feelings," lends him a dignity that is conspicuously absent from the "half-dozen curious observers [who] had stopped in front of the animal. One of these, a ten-year-old boy, poked the donkey in its hindquarters with a stick." The next day the narrator returns and finds the donkey's dead body, noting: "Two boys stared at the body—a repugnant spectacle. But childhood, like science, allows for curiosity without disgust. By that afternoon the body was gone; there was nothing left. So go our earthly labors." In addition to showcasing the classical theme of *vanitas* and reaffirming Machado's oft-expressed view that humans lack empathy but are quite capable of casual acts of cruelty, this *crônica* extends Machado's allegorical representation of enslaved Afro-Brazilians as donkeys, and draws attention to the treatment of elderly enslaved persons abandoned by their masters when no longer capable of working—a scenario that as we have seen, was imagined by one of Machado's streetcar-pulling donkeys in his October 16, 1892, *crônica*. Notably, Machado ironized on this theme years earlier, in a June 15, 1877, *crônica* published in *Ilustração brasileira*, albeit without recourse to animal allegory. Here a master frees his slave Clarimunda when she turns sixty-five: "She had earned him seven or eight times her purchase price. The slave woman's birthday arrived and he decided to free her … without charge!"[12] He writes a newspaper item

[12] See Machado ("Six *Crônicas*" 111).

announcing his action, in a bid to win a reputation for magnanimity—an act of false philanthropy and bad faith that anticipates that of Pancrácio's master in Machado's May 19, 1888, *crônica.*

To my mind, the quotation that best summarizes Machado's varied writing on donkeys is the following, an explanation given by a mysterious, possibly angelic stranger to Machado's incredulous narrator in a February 13, 1889, *crônica* published in the *Gazeta de notícias*: "[T]he donkey is not so much an animal as the spitting image of a man, but with four legs. The proof is that while the dog is friendly, the horse is proud, etc., the only animal that is philosophical is the donkey." Notwithstanding the concern for animal well-being that one perceives in his descriptions of abused, emaciated, and sometimes abandoned donkeys, for Machado, the donkey's function seems essentially allegorical or fabular,[13] serving in particular to dramatize the condition of presently and formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilians—"an entire class deserving of some compassion," as the donkey misnamed Lucius declares in a June 10, 1894, *crônica* published in the *Gazeta de notícias.* By extension, Machado's donkeys and their "masters" embody essential human characteristics: cruelty and patience, acceptance and rebelliousness, skepticism and hope for the future. By allegorizing Afro-Brazilians who are enslaved, who suffer cruel abuse, who are threatened by technology-driven obsolescence and eventual abandonment, and who are presumed to be as stupid as donkeys, Machado, with his characteristic irony, humanizes and defends them: they are shown to curse their masters under their breath, they educate themselves and resist to the extent they are able, they advocate for their individual and collective well-being, and they speak, debate, and articulate philosophies to explain their condition and guide them forward. In the words of one of Machado's narrators, this time taken from his April 8, 1894, *crônica*, to offer this subversively humanizing depiction "was no small gesture."

*August 15, 1876 (***História de quinze dias, Ilustração brasileira***), part II*

I'm convinced that my friend didn't go to the races. He didn't go, or isn't going? As of this hour, as I write, he's *not going*; by the time the reader reads these lines, he will have *not gone.* I don't know how to reconcile this *crônica*'s two moments

[13] See Pádua for Machado and the fable.

in time. Whether he isn't going or didn't go, I can say that my friend's absence from the Prado Fluminense racetrack was noteworthy.[14]

I must confess that I'm not planning to set foot there either, first of all because my feet are dog-tired, but also because I don't enjoy when horses or bulls run. I enjoy watching time and the things of this world race by, but that's all. At times I myself compete for first prize, and I would have little trouble running from the whip. But as far as watching a horse race …

I'll tell you exactly what I think.

Each man sympathizes with a particular animal. Some like dogs; I adore them.[15] Oh, dogs are wonderful, if they know me, if they're not guarding a friend's property while I'm visiting, if they're not asleep, or leprous, or have sharp teeth!

Others love cats. It's a question of taste, but I've always found that men and women of a certain age especially like those sluggish, voluptuous quadrupeds.

Some are devoted to birds. Others still like worthless human creatures, and more than a few like the tiny creatures that live in one's pantry.[16]

I dislike horses.

Dislike horses? Actually, I detest them. I find horses the least tolerable quadrupeds on Earth. Horses are stupid, treacherous, corrupt animals. They seem to beat us over the head with their superiority, because the poets have sung of them in epic and lyrical form; because of their nobility; because they are friends to men; because they go to war;[17] because pretty young ladies ride them; because they pull buggies; because of the infinite number of indulgences we grant them. Horses look upon us

[14] The Prado Fluminense was a racetrack located in what is now the neighborhood of Engenho Novo in Rio de Janeiro.
[15] Machado's love of dogs is well-attested. In addition to writing a dog into "Miss Dollar" and *Quincas Borba* (1891), he and his wife Carolina were dog owners.
[16] Here Machado uses the terms *bicho careta* and *bicho de cozinha*.
[17] "Unlike horses, donkeys played no role in battle [in ancient Greece]" (Gregory 200).

with disdain. They neigh at us, startle us. They dragged Hippolytus to his death.[18] They're nothing but wicked dandies, well-mannered scoundrels.

Consider the donkey: what calm! What a charitable disposition! Donkeys pull the carts that bring us water, give rides to our daughters-in-law, and often to our sons-in-law as well. They bring us fruit, coal, and vegetables—they pull the streetcars. These are useful, necessary animals. And for all this they are abused, but do not seek revenge upon their abusers. It's said they are stubborn. This may be true; it's natural that an animal of so many and such varied merits should have at least one negative trait. But is obstinacy a mortal sin? Besides being stubborn, from time to time they kick. But where horses kick out of malice, donkeys kick to make a point, as an argument of last resort.[19]

March 15, 1877 (*História de quinze dias, Ilustração brasileira*), part III

The Santa Teresa streetcar line—a system of belts and pulleys, or a Jacob's Ladder[20]—the very image of earthly existence—has been inaugurated. While one streetcar goes up the hill, another goes down it. There's not enough time for a rider to enjoy even a pinch of snuff. At the most two men can tip their hats to each other, but that is all.

God forbid that one day, in all of this going up and down, down and up, some of the riders end up ascending to Heaven, while others descend to Purgatory, or short of that, to the morgue.

It goes without saying that for the stagecoaches, this was a very sad occasion. Yesterday, some donkeys, who enjoy the trip up and down the hill, were lamenting this latest sign of progress. One of them, a philosopher, humanitarian, and an ambitious creature, murmured:

[18] Machado's phrasing, *faz Hipólito em estilhas*, is more ambiguous, but he refers to the Greek mythological figure Hippolytus. In Euripides's tragedy, Hippolytus dies after being dragged from a chariot by his frightened horses.
[19] Machado uses the Latin phrase *ultima ratio*.
[20] Machado compares the Santa Teresa line to the biblical Jacob's ladder in two respects: the belt-and-pulley system, like Jacob's ladder, is a seemingly miraculous contraption, and both convey humans skyward.

—They say: *les dieux s'en vont.* How ironic! No, it's not the gods who are on the way out, but us. *Les ânes s'en vont,* my friends, *les ânes s'en vont.*[21]

This interesting quadruped looked at the streetcar with a nostalgic and humiliated glance. Perhaps he was recalling that just as the donkey's slow movements had been displaced by steam power, steam power will be displaced by the blimp, the blimp by electricity, and electricity by a new power that will, once and for all, bring the great train of the world to the end of the line.

Let's hope this does not occur … at least not in the immediate future.

But in the end, the streetcar line was inaugurated. Now Santa Teresa will become fashionable. Riding in *diligências*—an ironic name for buggies of this type—was certainly worse, and far more annoying than riding in a streetcar, *diligência* being a term whose meaning falls somewhere between "turtle" and "ox."

One of the great advantages of the Santa Teresa streetcars over their city cousins is the impossibility of "fishing," which is the curse of the other streetcar lines. Between the Largo do Machado and Glória, for example, "fishing" is a real plague. The streetcars go down the hill slowly, looking back and forth, hoping to snag a far-off passenger. Sometimes a passenger will get on at Praia do Flamengo, and the streetcar, polite and generous, stops in his tracks, takes a break, takes a pinch of snuff, strikes up a bit of conversation, grabs the passenger, and continues on his appointed path until the next corner, where he repeats this routine.[22]

Nothing of the sort occurs in Santa Teresa: there the streetcar is all business. One cannot act like a student playing hooky when there is work to be done.

Having said all this, I hope that there's no charitable soul out there who will claim that I have a house to let in Santa Teresa—I swear! The world is topsy-turvy.

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[21] These phrases are written in French in the original. *Les dieux s'en vont* is taken from François-René de Chateaubriand's novel *Les Martyrs* (1809). The donkey's adaptation, *les ânes s'en vont* suggests that with technological progress, donkeys are "on the way out."

[22] Here Machado personifies the streetcar, describing it, rather than the driver, as "fishing."

November 5, 1886 (*Gazeta de Holanda, Gazeta de notícias*), excerpt

And then I recalled a donkey,
He was a worthy animal,
Neither rude nor dour,[23]
Less an ass than his master.[24]

And I thought: naturally
Throughout all of history
There have been donkeys
And they deserve our protection.

And I went to him. He was standing,
With his eyes to the ground.
He had the air of one
Who was a deep thinker.[25]

But what thing, what subject,
So weighty, so difficult,
Was visible on his face?
He had never been asked.

Perhaps, seeing himself emaciated,
Held captive like a *Nagô*,
He thought of the wild ass,
Who was his ninth great-grandfather.[26]

[23] Machado uses the term *casmurro* in the original. This would later appear in the title of his novel *Dom Casmurro*.
[24] In the original, *Menos burro que o senhor.* Given that *o senhor* in this context can refer either to his master or to "you" (here, the reader), the phrase may also be translated as "less an ass than you."
[25] In the original, *de quem cismava / Cousas de ponderação*.
[26] In the original, *seu décimo avô.* This reference recalls Francisco de Goya's aquatint, *Asta su abuelo*, from his series of satirical *Caprichos* (1797–98). The image depicts a donkey dressed as a gentleman, holding a book with images of his donkey ancestors. Donkeys in the *Caprichos* are generally understood to satirize the Spanish aristocracy.

I approached, and I explained
The reason for my visit;
He, after taking a pause,
As a thinking man would,

Replied: —In words plain
But true I will tell you,
Everything I know of this,
While I shoo away the flies.

I tell you that society
Has created charities,
And laws, and regulations,
To relieve our suffering.

It has created a rest home,
Pleasant, sturdy, large and well-suited;
One no longer dies on the street,
But spends a peaceful retirement there.

More than one Spanish jaguar,
And many a luckless cat,
Enjoys this blessed charity,
While staying in his own room.

All the roughed-up roosters[27]
Find grain and affection there;
And there Balaam's donkey
Lives out the rest of her days.

[…]

[27] Machado's references to the *onça espanhola*, *gatos-pingados,* and *galos na testa* rely on the dual meanings, all lost in translation, of *onça* (jaguar, ounce) and *galo* (rooster, goose egg), and on the idiom *gato-pingado*. Machado's wordplay is doubtless meant to amuse, but also undercuts the veracity of the donkey's tale of an animal rest home.

And I asked: —My friend,
Why do so many live out
Their days in that home,
While you continue your labors?

He, a circumspect donkey,
a well-built ass,
used his fine intellect
to give this reply:

—If I were there
With the others of my kind,
You would not have this
For the *Gazeta de Holanda*.

February 13, 1889 (*Bons dias, Gazeta de notícias*)

Good day!

To the Devil with politicians! Everyone tells me that the way to get a decent Chamber of Deputies is to get rid of district elections, in which a foolish or wicked man may be elected by a half-dozen votes. The latest telegrams from France say that the government and their Chamber of Deputies are set to approve district elections, precisely to avoid this sort of problem. Does this make sense to you? Me neither.

Luckily, I happened upon one of those creatures whom Heaven once routinely dispatched to enlighten mankind. He told me that Pascal[28] was a dreamer. I don't like *calembours*,[29] but I couldn't resist: "I beg your pardon, but Paschoal makes pastries."[30] The man paid me no mind. He continued insisting that Pascal was a

[28] Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): French scientist, inventor, philosopher, and author of the *Pensées,* among other works.
[29] A humorous pun or joke dependent on wordplay (French). Machado uses the French term in the original text.
[30] The Confeitaria Paschoal was located on the Rua do Ouvidor.

dreamer, because what Pascal thought odd was in fact quite natural: *what is true here is untrue there*.[31] Do you know why they're adopting a system there that has worked quite badly here? To avoid Caesarism. Do you know what Caesarism is? he asked.

—No sir, I don't.

—Caesarism comes from Caesar.

—Farani?[32] I confess that I asked this without the least desire to engage in wordplay.

—No.

—Zama? I know a César Zama.[33]

—Be quiet man, or get out of my sight! I don't suffer weak minds or rude people. While it's quite impolite to interrupt someone who's telling the truth, it's all the worse when the interrupter is saying something asinine.[34] César Zama! César Farani!

—I know: César Cantú …[35]

—To the Devil with you! Let him put up with this! When you're ready to learn, listen quietly! Understood? My word! Cantú, Farani, Zama … Have you seen the comet yet?

—There's a comet?

[31] In the original, *verdade aqui, erro além*.
[32] César Farani: prosperous Italian-born, Rio-based jeweler and developer.
[33] César Zama (1837–1906): Brazilian medical doctor, politician, and writer from the state of Bahia.
[34] In the original, *asneira*, a word whose etymology speaks to the deeply rooted notion that donkeys are stupid.
[35] Cesare Cantù (1804–1895): Italian historian and poet.

—Yes sir, there is; you should see it. It's visible at three in the morning, and the best place to see it is from the Morro do Neco, to the left.[36] It has a long, bright tail. Go, my friend; those who don't understand things should not concern themselves with them. Go see the comet.

I felt a bit disappointed, because my main reason for seeking this man out was to ask if there was such a thing as the Society for the Protection of Animals.[37]

At the last minute, on my way to see the comet, I turned back and asked my question. He replied that yes, there was a Society for the Protection of Animals, but what does this have to do with you? I explained that in my opinion it was one of the worthiest organizations of its kind. I was pleased when it was announced, and I said to myself that if England and other countries had these sorts of organizations, then why couldn't we? They are evidence of fine, just, high-minded feelings, of mankind showing charity to brutes.…

It seems that I was speaking well, because he didn't like what I was saying and interrupted, shouting that he was in a hurry. But I still managed to spit out a series of elegant phrases, and I made some literary allusions, to show that I knew my way around books.[38] Eventually I explained the reason for my question: I wanted to know what the Society thought of one or all of the at-least three plans the municipal government was considering to rid the city of it dogs.[39]

He didn't know, nor did he want to risk his mortal soul by speaking about things he couldn't confirm. Did I know what was going on in Quebec? I responded that I didn't. Well, this was the same thing: as far as my curiosity was concerned, the Society and Quebec were identical. The Society might have studied all three or none of the plans, or even four of them, but who can say?

[36] The Morro do Neco, today Morro do Pinto, is located in the neighborhood of Santo Cristo in Rio de Janeiro.
[37] It is unclear what organization Machado is referring to here, or if he has a specific one in mind.
[38] Machado uses the phrase *sabia cavalgar livros*, consistent with this *crônica*'s purported focus on animals.
[39] These plans presumably concerned stray dogs, though the phrase *planos para a extinção dos cães* is ambiguous.

We spoke for a bit longer. I explained to him that donkeys, and principally those who pulled carts and streetcars, will tell anyone who will listen that no one cares for them, with the exception of the switch (in the case of carts) and the reins (in the case of streetcars). He replied that the donkey is not so much an animal as the spitting image of a man, but with four legs.[40] The proof is that while the dog is friendly, the horse is proud, etc., the donkey is the only animal that is philosophical. I tried and failed to stifle my laughter—if only I had sneezed instead! The man lunged at me with his fists raised. He almost killed me! When I came to, I humbly asked:

—If the Society for the Protection of Animals doesn't protect dogs or donkeys, then what does it protect?

—There aren't any other animals out there besides dogs and donkeys? Aren't giraffes animals? Giraffes, elephants, hippopotamuses, camels, crocodiles, eagles? Even the Trojan horse, though it was made of wood and men hid in its stomach, can be considered an animal. The Society doesn't have to do everything at once. Hippopotamuses come first, then dogs.

—But the thing is …

—Look man, go see the comet: Morro do Neco, to the left.

—At three?

—Three in the morning. Good night.

October 16, 1892 (*A semana, Gazeta de notícias*)

I didn't attend the inauguration of the electric streetcars, and so I resolved not to write about them. Nor did I take a ride in one for the purpose of experiencing and describing this new mode of transportation. Hence my silence on these matters in last week's *crônica.* The day before last, however, while riding in one of the

[40] In the original, *a imagem quadrúpede do homem*.

common streetcars passing by Praia da Lapa, I encountered an electric streetcar, traveling in the opposite direction. This was the first I had seen with my own eyes.

Truthfully, what impressed me first of all, more than the streetcar's electricity, was the expression on its driver's face. The man's eyes gazed at those of us in my streetcar with a truly superior look. While he was not ugly, it was not his physical appearance that gave him this air. One sensed in him the belief that he had invented not only the electric streetcar but electricity itself. It's not my place to censure him for these half-glories, or borrowed glories, as men with nothing better to do might term them. While borrowed glories may be worth less than glories that are actually earned, they nonetheless always deserve some sympathy. Why would I deprive a man of this agreeable feeling of superiority? What do I have to give him in return?

I also admired the streetcar's calm march forward, as if it were cutting through the waters like a boat moved by an invisible, friendly wind, as a poet might write. Since we were moving in opposite directions, we soon lost sight of one another, with him turning toward Largo da Lapa and Rua do Passeio, and I onto Rua do Catete. But I continued thinking about him. Here and there passengers would get off of my streetcar, and others would get on, and yet I continued to think of the electric streetcar. Things continued this way until, near the end of the line and with night already having fallen, there were only three of us left: the conductor, the driver, and myself. The other two seemed on the verge of sleep.

Just then I heard strange voices. It sounded like the donkeys were speaking to one another. I leaned toward them (I was sitting in the front row). They were! I have a reasonable knowledge of the language of the Houyhnhnms, as the famous Gulliver described, so it wasn't difficult for me to follow along. I know, of course, that horses are not donkeys, but I could hear that the donkeys were speaking the language of horses. Granted, donkeys are less talkative than horses. They may be the Trappist monks of the animal kingdom, but they do speak. I leaned in and listened:

—You're right, but at the same time you're wrong, replied the one on the right to the one on the left.

The one on the left said:

—It seems clear to me that once all of the streetcars are electric, we'll be free.

—Of course it seems that way, but there's a great deal of difference between *seeming* and *being.* You don't know the history of our species, my friend. You're ignoring what life has been like for donkeys since the beginning of time. The savior of all of humanity was born among us, in a stable, and with His humble act He honored our own. Yet Christians never spare us their abuse, not even on Christmas Day. And those who spare us one day take their revenge the next.

—What does this have to do with freedom?

—I see, observed the donkey on the right, with a melancholy tone. I see that there's a lot of humanity in that head of yours.

—How's that? snapped the donkey on the left, stopping in his tracks.

The driver, between yawns, pulled the reins together and gave the donkeys a smack.

—Did you feel that? asked the animal on the right. When streetcars came to this city, they came with the rule that animals were not to be whipped. To a man the drivers were scandalized: when does a donkey ever move without a good smack? The donkeys sang songs of praise and thought the tracks on which the streetcars would move were a blessed idea. But they didn't know what men are like.

—You see, men improvised whips by pulling the reins together. And sometimes they use sticks or switches made from quince branches.[41]

—Precisely. And here I think men have a point. A skinny donkey's a weak donkey, but he'll move if you whip him. Do you know what the Board of Directors told Shannon to do when he was in charge? "Fatten up the donkeys, give them lots of

[41] The *vara de marmelo*, or quince switch, was used to punish enslaved persons and unruly children.

grass, lots of hay to eat. That way they'll start liking their work. Then, when the time's right, we'll cut their rations, *all right*?"[42]

—I can't complain. I don't eat much, and the more I eat, the less work I can do. But will we get grass along with our freedom once all the streetcars are electric?

—The only thing that'll change with the electric streetcar is our master.

—How so?

—We're company property. When everything runs on electricity, we won't be needed, and they'll sell us. Naturally, we'll be made to pull wagons.

—By Balaam's donkey! exclaimed the donkey on the left. No retirement? No reward for our service? No gesture of gratitude? Where's the justice in this world?

—We'll pull wagons—continued the other donkey, calmly—and our lives will be a little better. We'll still be whipped, granted, but the owner of a single donkey has a better sense of what he's paid for it. One day, whether from old age or bad luck, we'll no longer be able to work, and we'll once again have our freedom …

—Finally!

—We'll be out on the street, at least for a little while, eating the plants the humans put there for beautification. But what good are a couple of bites from a plant that might not even taste good?[43] We'll get weaker and weaker. Little by little, old age and bad luck will kill us until, to use a human metaphor, we'll be dead as a doorknob.[44] Then we'll be free to rot. After three days,[45] the neighbors will start to notice that the donkey smells bad. They'll talk and complain to each other. On the fourth day, another, more assertive neighbor will go running to the newspapers,

[42] The phrase *all right!* is written in English in the original, though with an exclamation point.
[43] See also the proverb *burro com fome, cardos come*.
[44] The original, Portuguese-language expression is *esticar a canela.*
[45] Note Machado's possible reference to the biblical Resurrection. Here, though, the dead donkey, unredeemed, does not ascend to Heaven on the third day, but remains on the street until another donkey picks it up.

tell them what's happened and ask them to print a complaint. On the fifth day, the complaint will be published. On the sixth day, an official will come by to confirm the complaint. On the seventh, a wagon, pulled by another donkey, will cart the body away.

There was a pause.

—You're depressing, said the donkey on the left. You couldn't find a silver lining if it killed you.

—That may be true, my friend, but hope is for weak creatures, like humans and crickets. Donkeys are known for their matchless strength. Ours is an essentially philosophical race. The science of astronomy is for humans, who walk on two legs, and probably for eagles, who fly high in the sky. We'll never be astronomers, but philosophy is ours. All human attempts at philosophy are mere chimeras. Each century …

The driver pulled in the reins and the bit in the donkey's mouth silenced him. We were at the end of the line. I got off the streetcar and glanced over at the two conversationalists. I couldn't believe it was them. I took advantage of the fact that the driver and conductor were busy unharnessing the pair so that they could move them to the other end of the streetcar, and murmured under my breath:

—*Houyhnhnms!*

This registered like an electric shock. They bolted to attention, raised their hooves, and with great enthusiasm asked me:

—What kind of man are you, who knows our language?

Just then the driver gave them a smack and chastised me for startling the animals. It seemed to me that I was the one who deserved the smack, since I had startled them. But as the donkey on the left asked, and as I repeat now: where's the justice in this world?

July 16, 1893 (*A semana, Gazeta de notícias*), excerpt

Life isn't entirely defined by affliction. Life has its pleasures as well, and while they may not come as often as we'd like, they are nonetheless great and beneficial to us. Last night, for example, I dreamt that I was a pair of donkeys pulling a streetcar. I think it was on the Laranjeiras line. How my consciousness could divide itself in two, I cannot say; this would make for an interesting topic of study. But in truth I was a pair of donkeys. I could feel that we were fat, so fat and so strong that we asked the driver to please give us a smack, so that it wouldn't seem like we were working of our own volition. We wanted to be abused, but the driver refused. He refused to strike us with an iron rod, or with the reins. He didn't make us pant heavily, or groan, or die. The only thing he did to get us to move was to click his tongue against the roof of his mouth. He was all puffed up, as if he were to thank for our strength, and we really flew. But he paid dearly for his gentleness, because he reached his destination ahead of time, and was fined.

April 8, 1894 (*A semana, Gazeta de notícias*)

On Thursday afternoon, just past 3 o'clock, I saw something that was so interesting that I decided then and there to open this *crônica* with it. Now, however, as I take up my pen, I'm afraid that the reader may find what I describe to be a vulgar, even obscene spectacle, and less appealing than I did. But impertinence compels me forward; after all, tastes vary from person to person.

I saw a donkey lying on the ground, by the streetcar tracks, between the fence that rings the garden in Praça 15 de Novembro and the place where the passageway used to be. This wasn't the sort of place where a donkey would normally stop to rest, so I concluded that rather than resting, he must have fallen. Seconds later, we (I was there with a friend) saw the donkey lift up its head and the front half of its body. Its bones could be seen through the skin, and its half-dead eyes would close from time to time. The poor animal nodded its head so lethargically, as if half-asleep, that it appeared to be on death's door.

Someone had left grass and a water dish for the animal, so it hadn't been entirely abandoned to its fate. Its owner, or whoever had abandoned it in the plaza, had felt some degree of pity for it, and had left it this meal. This was no small gesture. If the man who did this is a reader of *crônicas*, and happens to read this one, he should know that I'd like to shake his hand. The donkey didn't eat the grass or drink the water; rather, he was preparing to graze on other grasses and drink other waters, in more spacious, eternal meadows.

A half-dozen curious observers had stopped in front of the animal. One of these, a ten-year-old boy, poked the donkey in its hindquarters with a stick. If he hadn't intended to poke him in the hindquarters then I don't know children, because he wasn't poking him in the neck, but in the hindquarters.[46] Truth be told, he didn't do this, at least not when I was there, but then I was only there for a few minutes. But those few minutes were worth an hour or two. If there is justice on Earth, those few minutes will be found to be worth a century, given the magnitude of the discovery I made then and there, which I record here for posterity.

It appeared to me that the donkey was in the midst of an examination of conscience. Indifferent to onlookers, and to the grass and water, he had in his eyes the look of a contemplative. His was an interior, profound labor. The popular, cautionary refrain "a donkey thought too much and died"[47] demonstrates that those who first witnessed this phenomenon misunderstood it. Thinking does not lead to death. Rather, death makes thinking necessary. As far as the substance of this donkey's thoughts, he was doubtlessly examining his conscience. Now then, I presume that I managed to determine the substance of that donkey's examination of conscience in the short time I spent observing him. I am another Champoillon,[48] though I am greater than he, for rather than deciphering written words, I deciphered the inner thoughts of a creature who could not express himself verbally.

[46] In the *Iliad*, "[a]s the most expendable of the equines, the donkey is consigned to the dubious care of boys, who beat him vigorously and relentlessly. In Greek literature, only slaves receive the same kind of reflexive beatings" (Gregory 202).
[47] The original reads *por pensar morreu um burro*. This proverb serves as a caution against thinking too much and refraining from acting.
[48] Jean-François Champoillon (1790–1832): pioneering French Egyptologist famed for deciphering hieroglyphs.

If he could have talked, the donkey would have said to himself:

"However much I scrutinize my conscience, I cannot find a sin that requires me to show contrition. I've never stolen, never lied, never slandered nor offended anyone. In my whole life I've only kicked three times, at most, and this was before I learned the ways of the city and understood the destiny of true donkeys,[49] which is to take it and shut up. I've communicated by braying. It was only recently that I realized that they can't understand me, but I've continued braying out of respect for tradition, and without meaning to offend anyone. I've never caused any accidents. When I made the switch from pulling buggies to streetcars, there were times when people were left dead in the street or were trampled, but unlike the drivers, who ran away, I stayed where I was and waited for the authorities, and this proves that I was not the guilty party.

As for more serious matters, I can't think of a time when I even thought of disturbing the peace. Causing trouble is contrary to my nature, and further, simple reflection has shown me that since there has never been a revolution that affirms the rights of donkeys, these rights don't exist. There's never been a coup d'état undertaken in defense of these rights, nor has there been a royal edict declaring that they must be respected. Monarchy, democracy, oligarchy: no form of government has considered the interests of my species. Whatever the regime in power, the rod is never spared.[50] The rod, tempered by a bit of stubbornness—and stubbornness is, in the end, my only bad quality—is the only institution I know. When I wasn't being stubborn, I had the bit in my mouth, which makes me a fine example of submission and conformity. I never asked for sunny or rainy weather. All I needed was a rider, a carriage, or the streetcar's whistle to get a move on. We've considered the bad things I refrained from; let's now consider the good that I did.

I've helped in more than one romantic adventure, by quickly bringing a buggy and a lover to his beloved's home—or by merely stopping in a spot where a young man

[49] The original Portuguese reads *verdadeiro burro*, which superficially refers to the code of conduct for "true" or "real" donkeys, but also carries the implied, pejorative meaning of "a real ass," as if to imply that a human or animal willing to submit to such a farcical code is a fool.
[50] The original Portuguese reads *ronca o pau.*

riding the streetcar could catch a glimpse of a girl in the window. I've taken more than one debtor far away from an overzealous creditor. I've taught many people about philosophy, a philosophy that consists of walking with purpose and controlling one's feelings. When an amusing man wanted to make his friends laugh, I always came to his aid, letting him slap and punch me in the face. And so …"

I didn't hear the rest, and I continued on my walk, feeling both stirred and sorrowful. Though I was pleased with my discovery, I couldn't help but feel sad that a donkey that was such a fine thinker was going to die. I considered that all donkeys must possess this one's good qualities, and this reassured me that those that would remain would also be exemplary creatures. Why not examine the morality of the donkey in greater detail? It has been written that bees and ants are superior to men, at least when considered collectively—that is, their political institutions are said to be superior, more *rational* than ours. Why not pay the same mind to the donkey, who is greater still?[51]

On Friday I again walked through the Praça 15 de Novembro, and I found the animal dead.

Two boys stared at the body—a repugnant spectacle. But childhood, like science, allows for curiosity without disgust. By that afternoon the body was gone; there was nothing left. So go our earthly labors. Without exaggerating the merits of the deceased, we must admit that, if he failed to invent gunpowder, neither did he invent dynamite. And that is worth something at the end of a century. *Requiescat in pace.*[52]

June 10, 1894 (*A semana, Gazeta de notícias*)

Yesterday morning, I stepped into my garden, as is my custom, and found a donkey there. You haven't misread. This isn't a misprint, as occurred in the last issue of *A*

[51] The original Portuguese reads *maior* (greater, larger). While donkeys are of course larger than insects, the deeper implication is that the donkey's moral code and sense of self make it superior to insects—and arguably to humans.
[52] Rendered in Latin in the original.

semana, in which *Banco União* appeared where *Banco Único* should have been. This was a flesh-and-bone donkey—well, more bone than flesh. Now then, I have roses in my garden, roses I lovingly care for, and that love me in return, that greet me each morning with their sweetest scents and shamelessly whisper sweet nothings to me, because I don't allow those blossoms to be cut from the bush. They will die where they were born.

Seeing the donkey before me, I thought of Lucius, or Lucius of Thessaly, who by eating roses was transformed from a donkey back to a man.[53] I was startled, and—I confess my ungrateful attitude—less from the loss of the roses than from the fright of what I was seeing. I acted the hypocrite, naturally, and greeted the donkey quite respectfully, calling him Lucius. He moved his ears, and replied:

—My name isn't Lucius.[54]

The blood drained from my face, but so as not to further annoy him with my surprise, which was great, I said:

—Oh no? Then, my dear sir, what is your name?

—I don't have a name. Names are reserved for horses, and then almost exclusively for race horses. You haven't read in the London telegrams that the horses Fulano and Sicrano[55] won the Oaks? You haven't read the same thing about Epsom?[56] A city donkey, a donkey that pulls a streetcar or a cart, doesn't have a name, though a country donkey might. Horses are held in such high regard that if a horse wins a race in England, its name is shouted to the four corners of the Earth. I'm not being poetic: at times rhymes come from my mouth, and one might find a publisher for them.[57] Don't give me literary ambitions! Yes sir, I speak in rhyme because I speak infrequently, and when I do, I stumble over my words. Do you know whose horse

[53] In *The Golden Ass*, Lucius, transformed into a donkey, is told that if he eats roses, he'll recover his human form.
[54] The narrator's misnaming of the donkey as Lucius recalls the practice of the "slave name."
[55] "Fulano" and "Sicrano" are Portuguese-language placeholder names, similar to "Joe Schmoe" in English.
[56] The Oaks, established in 1779, is run at Epsom Downs, Surrey, and is a race for three-year-old fillies. The Epsom Derby, a race for three-year-old colts and fillies, is also run at Epsom Downs.
[57] Here Machado refers to the rhyme between *Inglaterra* and *Terra*, from the previous sentence.

came in first at Epsom? It was Ladas, who belongs to Lord Roseberry, the head of the government. Ladas just recently won him two thousand guineas.[58]

—Who's told you about all of these English things?

—Who, my friend? Why, the donkey who stands before you, he said, kneeling and then rising again at my request. He went on: I know that you, sir, have friends in the press, and I came here to ask if you could intercede on my behalf, and on behalf of an entire class deserving of some compassion …

—Deserving of justice, *justice*, I corrected, with both hypocrisy and servility.

—I see that you understand me. Hear me out; I'll be brief. As a rule, donkeys are only taught the language of the country where they live, but Greenough, the now-departed first director of the Botanical Garden Company,[59] thought that the donkeys that pulled streetcars here should learn English. His motivation is understandable. He had only recently arrived in Rio de Janeiro, and he brought with him his ardent love for his native tongue. Naturally he thought that it was the only language that Earth's creatures should speak. I learned it with ease …

—How? Were you here during the time of the company's first director?

—Yes sir, I was here for him, as were a few others. There are only a few of us left from the old days, but we continue our work. Let those who will wonder at this. We animals of 1869 can be identified by the brave decrepitude with which our bones pull those cars, though they are dog tired.[60] There's a bit of the discipline that we were taught when we were young at work here. It's true that we're abused. We're whipped, kicked, flogged, and poked, but this only happens when what little strength we have left isn't sufficient for the task at hand. Now then, modern

[58] Archibald Primrose, 5th earl of Roseberry (1847–1929), was a Liberal politician and Prime Minister from March 1894 to June 1895. His horse Ladas won the 2000 Guineas and Epsom Derby in 1894, among other races.
[59] Charles B. Greenough, an American railroad engineer and director, was authorized by the Brazilian government to provide streetcar service to Jardim Botânico in 1868.
[60] The original Portuguese reads *deitando a alma pela boca*.

donkeys are stubborn; they don't take punishment as well as us. But they're young, after all.

He sighed and went on:

—In the midst of so much suffering, we read. We mostly read English and American newspapers, when a passenger leaves one behind on the streetcar. The day before yesterday one of them forgot an issue of *Truth.* Are you familiar with *Truth*?[61]

—I am.

—It's a radical newspaper from London, the donkey continued, as if to underscore the significance of this bit of news, as any ordinary man would do. It's a radical, weekly newspaper. It's said that it's written by someone who's apparently a member of Parliament. It was the latest issue, hot off the press. I'd just been to the trough, or to something of the sort, and I leafed through Labouchère's newspaper … the publisher is named Labouchère. The paper publishes news of sentences handed down by the London courts, in two columns, one for the rich and one for the poor, to show that poor people and those without resources are given harsher sentences, and for less serious crimes. What did I find in the latest issue? Just this sort of thing. John Fearon Bell was fined five pounds because he had mistreated four foals by not giving them enough to eat and drink. One of them died and the three others were left in a miserable state. In the opposite column, a certain Thompson[62] was found sleeping in a barn and was sentenced to a month in jail. More comparisons: Elliott, charged with mistreating sixteen calves, fined five pounds plus costs; Mary Ellen Connor, charged with vagrancy, one month in prison. William Poppe, fined five pounds plus costs for underfeeding eight cows; William Dudd, a fisherman's apprentice, twenty-two days in prison for disobedience.[63] It was all like this. A boy stole a pheasant's egg from its nest: fourteen days in jail; a gentleman mistreated four cows, five pounds plus costs.

[61] *Truth* was a London newspaper founded in 1877 by Liberal politician Henry Labouchère.
[62] In the original Portuguese, *Fuão Thompson*.
[63] It is likely that Machado incorrectly copied "Pope" and "Dodd," or in inventing them, misspelled them.

—Truly, these differences are great, I said, but without much conviction.

—Ah, my noble friend! We're all for differences in punishment, regardless of the severity of the crime. Let those who steal an egg or sleep in the street be sentenced to a month or a year, but let those who mistreat us in any way, or who don't give us enough to eat, or at the other extreme, those who beat us excessively, be fined fifty or one-hundred *mil-réis.* We accept that we'll be abused. It's our destiny, and I'm too old to learn another way of doing things.[64] But let punishments be meted out with moderation, without the violence shown by streetcar and cart drivers. The punishments that this Englishman finds too lenient I find just right for those who punish us. A poor man has no vices.[65] I don't ask that our oppressors be jailed. It should be enough that they pay a modest fine, plus costs. A donkey cares only for his own hide; a man cares for his hide *and* his wallet. If a man's wallet is injured, then perhaps our hides will suffer a bit less.

—I'll do what I can, but …

—But what? You, sir, are human and you'll defend your own kind. So, speak with your friends in the press. Head up a great, popular movement. Isn't the City Council about to take out a loan? Tell them that if they fine those who mistreat donkeys, they'll bring in five or six times the amount of the loan, without paying any interest, and with money left over for the Teatro Municipal[66] and perhaps for neighborhood theatres as well. For once, sir, give a care for us. It was your fellow humans who discovered that we are your uncles, if not in a literal sense, then through a sort of affinity.[67] Well, dear nephew, it's high time that we reunite our

[64] The donkey's statement, *já estou velho para aprender outro costume*, recalls the proverb "burro velho, não aprende línguas," or a more sinister alternative, "burro velho, mais vale matá-lo que ensiná-lo." It also suggests the English-language proverb "you can't teach an old dog new tricks."
[65] This statement recalls quotations from St. Augustine, from *City of God*, book 4, chapter 3 ("the good man is free even if he is a slave, whereas the bad man is a slave even if he reigns: a slave, not to one man, but, what is worse, to as many masters as he has vices") (147), and Adam Smith, from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, chapter 3 ("We see frequently the vices and follies of the powerful much less despised than the poverty and weakness of the innocent") (72–73).
[66] Construction of the Teatro Municipal began in 1905. The building, located in central Rio, was inaugurated in 1909.
[67] Given Machado's reference to Charles Darwin later in this paragraph, it is likely that the donkey is referring to evolution, and humans' and donkeys' descent from a common, mammalian ancestor.

family. Don't abandon us, as you did when donkeys worked alongside slaves.[68] Give us our May 13.[69] Be a Lincoln for the modern age, and in accordance with Darwin's gospel, proclaim our freedom![70]

You cannot imagine the eloquence of the donkey's final words. Full of enthusiasm, I promised that I would move Heaven and Earth, that I would do all that I could. I asked him if he read Portuguese, and he responded that he did. I told him to watch for that day's edition of the *Gazeta.* With a trembling voice he thanked me, moved his ears, and slowly walked out of the garden, with his hooves striking the ground here and there.

March 17, 1895 (*A semana, Gazeta de notícias*)

Something important happened on the first day of the week: the donkey triumphed. He triumphed in the Zoological Garden,[71] where earlier the goose and the tiger had triumphed. But where he triumphed is unimportant. Having triumphed, we owe our congratulations to the good and blessed companion of St. George, on the road to Jerusalem, to Sancho Panza's lifelong friend, to the friend of the man of the backlands,[72] to the donkey that, in certain areas at least, is the railroad's rival.

We are accustomed to saying or hearing that a horse named Fulano or Sicrano has triumphed, either at the Derby or in another arena of animal combat, but in the end it was the horse alone that triumphed, because it was the horse that put ten or twenty *mil-réis* in Pedro's pocket, and emptied Paulo's, Sancho's, and Martinho's pockets. Some even say that it's the *mil-réis* that run the race, and that the horses

[68] The original phrase, *no tempo em que os burros eram parceiros dos escravos*, also conveys the idea that before abolition, donkeys were treated as badly as enslaved humans—and conversely, that the enslaved were treated as badly as donkeys.
[69] The Lei Áurea, which legally abolished slavery in Brazil, was signed by Princess Isabel on May 13, 1888.
[70] The donkey's emotive language recalls the closing exhortation of Castro Alves's abolitionist poem "O navio negreiro" (1868): "Andrada! arranca esse pendão dos ares! / Colombo! fecha a porta dos teus mares!"
[71] This private zoo was established in the early 1890s by João Batista Viana Drummond (1825–1897) in Vila Isabel. The city granted it a license to run a raffle, which attracted bookmakers. This was popularized as the illegal but omnipresent *jogo do bicho*.
[72] Machado's original Portuguese reads *sertanejo*.

exist only on paper. This is because so many families don't own a horse, and as such they end up believing that they aren't real.

The donkey triumphed. I say "triumphed" to use the press's preferred term, but in everyday speech we'd say that he paid out.[73] Today the donkey paid out, tomorrow the monkey will pay out, then the jaguar will pay out, etc. Last Friday I found myself in a shop, and I saw a young man walk in who was extraordinarily jovial—either by nature or for some other reason. He yelled, "the ostrich has paid out!" This would be difficult to understand for someone unfamiliar with how animals act around here. But "paid out" is a more succinct, a livelier, and, I don't doubt, a more accurate expression than the more formal alternative. I'm sure of it. And so, zoology runs parallel to the lottery, and both point toward science, which is the end of humanity.[74]

Archaeology too is a science, as long as it sticks to the study of dead things, and refrains from bringing the dead back to life. In order to understand the differences between the sciences, I recommend that you compare the lively joy to be found in our Zoological Garden with the project of bringing the Olympic Games back from the dead in Athens after two thousand years. Truly one must have a great love for this rag-and-bone science to disinter the games. But this is precisely what a commission, with the requisite funding and goodwill, is charged with doing. This spectacle has been scheduled for April 1896.[75] There won't be donkeys or horses there, just men and more men: foot races, wrestling, gymnastic exercises, aquatic races, athletic events: everything that one could imagine to exhaust the competitors with no benefit to the spectators, as there will be no gambling. The prizes are for the winners alone, and are symbolic in nature. All in line with Aristotle's

[73] In the original, Machado uses *vencer*, apparently the press's verb of choice, with *dar* being the colloquial alternative. If read allegorically, the donkey "paying out" suggests an enslaved person whose labor profits his or her master, much as a donkey or horse, here reduced to images in the *jogo do bicho*, may provide financial benefit to its owner.

[74] Machado's expression, *o fim da humanidade*, may refer to science as humanity's end point or goal, in a teleological sense. Alternately, science may be understood as eventually bringing about the "end of humanity." This ironic inversion aligns with Machado's well-known skepticism toward evolutionist thinking.

[75] The inaugural modern Olympic Games were held in 1896 in Athens. They were then held in Paris (1900), and St. Louis (1904), as alluded to by Machado.

metaphysics.[76] It seems that there is a proposal on the table to hold these games again, in Paris, at the end of the century, and in the United States in 1904. If this comes to pass, then goodbye America! It won't have been worth it for America to have been discovered four centuries ago if it is forced to retreat twenty centuries into the past.

Hopefully they won't think of us. Let's content ourselves with donkeys and all they give us. I know well that they don't just pay us in money; they also pay us in deaths and broken legs. This is what the statistics provided by Dr. Viveiros de Castro tell us.[77] He adds that streetcars account for the greatest number of deaths of this type. It seems that in order to avoid these disasters, the streetcar companies should be liable for damages; if they are made to pay for lost lives and limbs, they will look for capable, cautious drivers, instead of hiring bad ones, allowing them to avoid punishment, or throwing their weight around to stifle lawsuits.

The first thing that this suggests to me is that there are several responsible parties: the donkey, the driver, the streetcar, and the company. It's likely that electricity itself is also at fault. And why not the Eternal Father, who made all of us? The second is that this solution, which would be quite good and fair as a means to prevent servants from smashing plates, by obliging them to pay for any broken plate, is unjust and would possibly prove ineffective if applied to the streetcar companies. It is unjust because the companies' money is reserved for shareholders in the form of regular dividends, and for operating expenses. Donkeys don't eat much, but they do eat. Streetcars jostle around and are occasionally thrown off their tracks. At some point they'll have to be repaired—not all at the same time, mind you, but one at a time. It would be inhumane, not to mention contrary to the companies' interests, to let streetcars that will break down in five minutes continue to operate. Now if the companies are held liable for these disasters, what will be left in the bank to pay for necessary expenses?

[76] While perhaps not Machado's thrust here, it bears noting that Aristotle "had stated that it was natural for free men to dominate slaves and animals because both were much less rational than free men and actually benefitted from domination. It was therefore acceptable not only to denigrate and ridicule the lowly donkey but also to abuse them physically" (Bough 59).
[77] Francisco José Viveiros de Castro (1862–1906): Brazilian jurist.

A third observation: if, as the distinguished jurist notes, the companies settle to make lawsuits against their drivers disappear, won't they do the same when they themselves are held responsible for lost lives and broken limbs? Won't there be settlements? The settlements may be larger, given that they will be defending their own capital, rather than defending their workers.[78]

And a fifth and final observation: this author declares that the law of 1871, which was written to address mistakes made due to incompetence or imprudence, has been a dead letter.[79] I ask: who can say that a law that would make corporations liable in civil suits would not be one more dead letter? Why should the law of 1871 be an isolated case? Given that a dead letter is a disaster rather than a unique privilege, why should we assume that a new law wouldn't be struck by the same dark star that killed off the law of 1871? On the other hand, given that judges are responsible for upholding the law of 1871, which is a dead letter, does it follow that one of them should pay damages for the dead law? How can companies be expected to pay damages for a dead man? In what respect are men superior to the law?

These are delicate matters. On the 27th of this month, for example, the law concerning the maximum capacity for streetcars will come into force. Let's assume that it won't have an immediate impact: laws aren't eclipses, which reliably occur on their appointed date. And even so, it's true that this week there was a lunar eclipse that no one saw, not because it didn't happen, but because the moon wasn't visible. Laws are imperfect human works—like authors. Let's assume that the law doesn't really take effect on the 27th. Let's *bet* that it doesn't; I'm sure this donkey will pay out. How can we expect that the law, if it isn't respected on the 27th, will be respected on the 28th, or in April, or in any other month? After all, there are also laws of forgetfulness.

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[78] This would seem to be Machado's fourth observation, though it is not designated as such.
[79] Machado seems to refer to Law No. 2.033 (September 20, 1871), which reformed several features of the imperial-era Brazilian judicial system.

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ROBERT PATRICK NEWCOMB is Professor of Luso-Brazilian Studies and Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California, Davis. His publications include the books *Nossa and Nuestra América: Inter-American Dialogues* (Purdue, 2011) and *Iberianism and Crisis: Spain and Portugal at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 2018). His translations include Alfredo Bosi's *Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization* (Illinois, 2015) and several essays and *crônicas* by Machado de Assis.