

Conclusions

The three year old thoroughbred Tapiture ran in the 140th running of the Kentucky derby in early May, 2014 and finished fifteenth. He was trained by Steve Asmussen, an accomplished but controversial figure in the sport of horseracing for accusations by PETA that he used illegal and cruel methods to get his horses to run faster. The *New York Times* had previously run a series of essays on the treatment of horses in the industry in 2012;¹ so I was not surprised to find coverage of the Asmussen story when I read the paper on May 2, a couple of days before the race. I completed preliminary research and writing for *Creature Discomfort* on sabbatical in the small town of San Carlos, Uruguay in the first several months of 2014; it was over breakfast in our rented apartment there that I read this particular *Times* article. It struck me that many of the concerns about animal ethics from Spanish American literature are ongoing issues that regularly made the news that I read each morning before starting my day. Accusations about the alleged tactics employed by Asmussen called to mind Marroquín's *El Moro* and Sewell's *Black Beauty*, novels written over one hundred years ago to address forms of abuse, some of which are ongoing.² Sepúlveda's novel *Mundo del fin de mundo* was written in 1989 about efforts to stop a fictionalized *Nishin Maru* from killing whales; but in late March of 2014, the *Times* reported that the International Court of Justice in the Hague finally decided that "Tokyo's whaling research was a cover for commercial whaling."³ Monarch butterflies were counted in their overwintering grounds in Mexico and it turns out that there were alarmingly few of them.⁴ There were stories about unnecessary euthanizations at zoos in Denmark and Indonesia,⁵

1 See "Death and Disarray at America's Racetracks," *New York Times* online, accessed May 23, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/04/30/us/breakdown-horses-series.html>.

2 Asmussen has since been cleared of charges brought by PETA in Kentucky while the New York Gaming Commission has fined him \$10,000 in late 2015 for violating equine drug rules in that state.

3 Hiroko Tabuchi and Marlise Simons, "U.N. Court Orders Japan to Halt Whaling Off Antarctica," *New York Times*, March 31, 2014.

4 Michael Wines, "Migration of Monarch Butterflies Shrinks Again Under Inhospitable Conditions," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2014.

5 Dan Bilefsky, "Danish Zoo, Reviled in the Death of a Giraffe, Kills Four Lions," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2014; Keith Bradsher, "Pointing Fingers Over Heavy Death Toll at an Indonesian Zoo," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2014.

reviews of nonfiction books about the meat industry,⁶ and on the sports pages: the 2014 Winter Olympics. The funny pictures about double toilets and falling light fixtures in the hotels of the Russian town where the games were to be held made for a good laugh, but that was tempered by sobering coverage of the dogs who were rounded up around Sochi and euthanized to keep them from interfering with the outdoor events.⁷ Olivera Atúnez's *Zogoibi* might have been a novella about one of them if the games had been held in Montevideo. Just in that first part of 2014 when I was in Uruguay, these were what I read about in the paper before getting down to the business of writing each day. So it was not merely isolated coincidence that the abuse of racehorses in the United States was covered in the *New York Times* at about the same time that I was considering similar issues in the Colombian novel by Marroquín. Rather, much of what I read about animals in the newspaper in those first five months of 2014 had to do with ethical issues that I encountered (or was to encounter) throughout the canon and corpus of Spanish American literature. It should not surprise if these and other issues continue to make news even after *Creature Discomfort* goes to print.

I was also struck, as I considered recent Spanish American fiction, by the way in which certain concerns about animal ethics had been so thoroughly ingrained in some of the latest texts that arguments about rights or sentience were assumed in the narratives. This may have not been the case for those titles which were published even as late as the 1980s, but for those from the decades around the turn of the twenty-first century, the ethical treatment of animals seems to go without saying. For example, Colombian Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (*The Sound of Things Falling*) (2011) begins with snipers shooting a wandering hippopotamus after it escaped from Pablo Escobar's private zoo several years after the kingpin had himself been gunned down in Medellín. In the novel, two other hippopotami had also managed to get out and they were immediately hunted as well, "la persecución de unas criaturas inocentes por parte de un sistema desalmado" ["the persecution of a few innocent creatures by a heartless system"].⁸ Sixteen years before (in the timeframe of the novel), the news broke in 1993 that Escobar had been killed and one of the characters wonders aloud, "A ver qué van a hacer con los animales," dijo. "Los pobres animales se están muriendo de hambre y a nadie le importa. [...] Qué culpa tienen ellos de nada" ["I wonder what they are going to do with

6 Nick Redding, "How the Sausage Is Made," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2014.

7 David M. Herszenhorn, "Racing to Save the Stray Dogs of Sochi," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2014.

8 Juan Gabriel Vásquez, *El ruido de las cosas al caer* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2011), 13.