

BOOK REVIEW

Battaglia, Vital. *Ah! Atestado de óbito do Jornal da Tarde e outras histórias do jornalismo*. São Paulo: Detalhe Editora, 2012. 281 pp. Kindle file.

THE *Jornal da Tarde (JT)* was founded in 1966 by Mino Carta and Murilo Felisberto. The São Paulo-based daily newspaper, which was created with the intention of providing a venue for New Journalism in Brazil, had a successful run that lasted a few years short of a half-century. The last edition of the *JT* was published on October 31, 2012. *Ah! Atestado de óbito do Jornal da Tarde e outras histórias do jornalismo*, released shortly after, is a collection of *crônicas* that spans sports reporter Vital Battaglia's five decades in professional journalism. Battaglia's illustrious career began in 1962 when he began working at the *Última Hora* newspaper. A ten-time winner of the Esso Journalism Award, Battaglia has worked for TV Record, Rádio Jovem Pan, Notícias Populares, *A Gazeta Esportiva*, and *Olé*, but his name is largely tied to his role as one of the first writers associated with the *JT* and the nearly twenty five years that he was employed as a reporter for the *JT*.

It is important to note that “ah” in Portuguese is similar to its usage in English, an utterance that straddles the realm of onomatopoeia and interjection, often expressing bittersweet affect, which in the case of Battaglia's title is used to express certain remorse. *Ah!* begins with charismatic tales of Battaglia's anxious and somewhat awkward initiations into the gritty landscape of 1960s journalism while on assignment in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other urban centers throughout Brazil. Many of Battaglia's *crônicas* suggest a hardboiled journalistic lifestyle reminiscent, yet markedly tamer, of esteemed North American New Journalism writers like Hunter S. Thompson or Tom Wolfe as portrayed in their writing from the same period. The author's intimate retrospective tales of his introduction to the profession gleam with youthful excitement

and naïve optimism. However, the tone of the *crônicas* quickly diverges into a much more jaded and cynical nature.

Battaglia's coverage of the Brazilian soccer league and international soccer tournaments make up a large portion of the text. Although the role of the press in fueling the cynical, symbiotic relationship between the national squad and Brazilian fans is recognized, Battaglia's justified frustration with global soccer capitalism and the commodification of Brazilian footballers clouds a more thoughtful development of this topic. His consistent focus on inequity and rule bending in sport do allow for him to develop a clear statement on what he calls the "politics of football" or the manipulation of professional soccer results for political gain. A clear example of this is found in "O juiz é nosso" ("The Referee is Ours") where Battaglia enumerates a historical list of incidents of match fixing that glosses the concept that, "Um jogo de futebol não se ganha apenas dentro de campo (A game of soccer is not only won on the field)" (ch. "O juiz é nosso").

Battaglia establishes an effective use of understated humor, which often appears as a twist at the end of the text. These coda-like turns successfully capture the particular rhetorical or situational irony that the author is highlighting. While this technique becomes somewhat repetitive and less effective as the book goes on, a worthwhile example is found in the *crônica* from which the book's subtitle title is taken, "Atestado de óbito do *Jornal da Tarde*" ("Death Certificate of the *Jornal da Tarde*"). This text, for example, points directly to the central theme that dominates the focus of the book, the decline of traditional print journalism in Brazil. It is in this revealing *crônica* that Battaglia hammers home his somber message about the disappearance of what he calls "true" reporting. The question of authenticity in journalism is clearly emphasized at the end of the text as Battaglia concludes with a resolute declaration that the *JT*'s genuine farewell occurred long before the official last publication: "[O] JT disse adeus. Quando? Não sei dizer, mas tenham a certeza que foi muito antes de 31 de outubro de 2012 ([T]he JT said goodbye. When? I could not say, but be certain that it was well before 31 October 2012)" (ch. "Atestado de óbito"). Battaglia uses the trajectory of the *JT* toward its final closure as a metonymic illustration of the decline of traditional print journalism. *Ah!* is full of implicit references to the bleak condition of

traditional methods of journalism as corporate media consolidation and innovations in digital technology began to rapidly change the method

and standards of reporting. Early in the text, Battaglia consciously highlights both the journalistic values of the *JT's* original editorial management and the instruments that he and other reporters were using at the time, which were often limited to a note pad, a pen or pencil, and occasionally an analog camera.

At 69 years of age, Battaglia writes with the measured nostalgia of a man who has lived through periods of great strife and great prosperity. Battaglia's career with the *JT* spans a history of Brazilian civil society that is marked by two decades of military dictatorship (1964-1985) and early reckless experimentation with neo-liberal economic policies that followed the return to democracy. This book aptly alludes to many of the difficulties intertwined in skillfully reporting on Brazilian society's attempts to balance the perpetual tension between collective liberties and personal security.

The aesthetic form and temporal constraints of editorial deadlines found in journalistic reporting lends itself to the hybrid nature of the *crônica*. As is common in the *crônica*, the author often places himself at the center of the narrative thread. The subjective nature of this practice usually allows authors to take great liberty in offering their own ideological opinions, an act that can be dangerous in closed societies. In the case of *Ah!* this author-centered tendency is admirable, but often appears to move in a repetitive and tedious formula of weaving an intricate tale of Battaglia's own fortuitous proximity to an impressive, yet exhaustive list of renowned figures of Brazilian sport and politics. This impulse is solidified by the photos of the author with some of his more famous subjects included at the end of the text. Battaglia's coverage of international sporting events around the world, including Olympic games, FIFA World Cups and other important soccer tournaments afforded him the opportunity to meet and report on larger-than-life characters of Brazilian sport and politics, including Pelé, Garrincha, Luis Felipe Scolari, Zagallo, Carlos Lacerda, and Tancredo Neves, among many others. While his reflections on reporting on the Brazilian sporting and political limelight may help to legitimize his historical authority for certain readers, some of the best *crônicas* found in this collection stand

out for Battaglia's deviation from formula. On a number of occasions Battaglia contemplates moments of spontaneous political reporting that occurred while he was originally on assignment to cover soccer stories. It is in texts like "Há meia hora a morte passou por aqui" ("Death Passed through Here Thirty Minutes Ago") that he reveals professional decisions that underscore his strong sense of journalistic ethics. The method that Battaglia uses to frame important chapters in Brazilian history by re-telling stories of journalistic bravery in times of conflict is an effective attempt to bring meaning to the complexities of the contemporary Brazilian experience.

Battaglia's frank and concise approach to storytelling is one that is also not uncommon to the Brazilian *crônica*. The prose is not particularly attractive. However, this extensive collection of *crônicas* does offer a unique perspective through its effective reconstruction of the atmosphere and ethos of the time periods covered. Throughout the text, Battaglia's sights are clearly set on narrating and contextualizing what he sees to be the expiring pulse of traditional Brazilian journalism. Yet, Battaglia's writing addresses much more than a declaration of death of traditional reporting. His *crônicas* offer a record of how the changing landscape of Brazilian journalism was interacting with domains that are propped up directly by the media industry, particularly the spectacles of soccer and politics.

Battaglia is at his best when he takes controversial issues head on. His blunt and disaffected treatment of censorship, social inequality, corruption, nepotism, and impunity does not vary from mainstream Brazilian convictions. What does stand out, however, is his natural ability to connect these social ills to the same struggles in the modern soccer industry. Battaglia lays bare the plague of money laundering, bribery, and match fixing that corrupt the beautiful game.

Although Battaglia makes clear his disdain for the current state of the media, his views on the journalism industry's role in the evolution of Brazilian democracy is more implicit. Using the backdrop of the struggle that traditional journalism faced as digital technologies rapidly evolved in the early-21st century, Battaglia juxtaposes his own experience with that of the industry in which he made his mark. At times, the author's aspirations toward framing collective memory are at odds with the author's memoir-like impulses. While Battaglia's writing does not contend

with soccer *cronistas* of the quality of Nelson Rodrigues, João Saldanha, or even Armando Nogueira, the richness of the text is found in the wide range of social topics covered over such a long historical period.

In the end, Battaglia achieves what he seemingly sets out to do. *Ah!* invites the reader to take an intimate look at the parallels between Battaglia's esteemed career as a journalist and the decline of traditional journalism in Brazil. This book is a recommended reading for fans of Battaglia and those interested in the changing landscape of Brazilian journalism during the historical progression toward contemporary citizen journalism found in new social media.

Shawn Stein
Dickinson College