Welge, Jobst
Chronicling World War II: A Brazilian Writer Reports From Italy
Revista de Humanidades: Tecnológico de Monterrey, núm. 27-28, octubre, 2010, pp. 115-127
Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey
Monterrey, México

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=38421211007
Chronicling World War II:
A Brazilian Writer Reports From Italy

Jobst Welge
Freie Universität Berlin

The essay analyzes a collection of “war chronicles” by the Brazilian writer Rubem Braga (1913-1990), one of his country’s most famous literary journalists. The collection, entitled Com a FEB na Itália (1945), relates Braga’s experiences while working as an “embedded journalist” during the campaign of the so-called “Brazilian Expeditionary Force” in Italy during the last two years of the Second World War. The essay briefly outlines the historical context regarding Brazil’s involvement in the war on the side of the American Allied Forces. More specifically, it discusses how the literary form of the chronicle (crônica) is employed by Braga to report not only on the factual military proceedings, but to reflect upon the “inter-cultural” encounter between Brazilians and Italians, the uncanny parallels between the regimes of Benito Mussolini and Getúlio Vargas, as well as the relations between Brazil and the United States. Ultimately, Braga’s texts embody, both in form and content, the condition of the writer as a “traveler” in war, his rhetoric of patriotism, but also his role as an observer and mediator of cultural/national difference.

Este ensayo analiza una colección de “crónicas de guerra” del escritor brasileño Rubem Braga (1913-1990), uno de los periodistas literarios más famosos de su país. La colección titulada Com a FEB na Italia (1945), relata las experiencias de Braga cuando trabajaba como “periodista encubierto” durante la tan llamada campaña “Fuerza Expedicionaria Brasileña” en Italia durante los dos últimos años de la Segunda guerra mundial. El ensayo revisa brevemente el contexto histórico del involucramiento de Brasil en la guerra al lado de las Fuerzas Aliadas Estadounidenses. Más específicamente, aborda cómo el autor usa la forma literaria de la crónica no solamente para informar sobre los juicios militares, sino también para reflejar los encuentros interculturales entre brasileños e italianos, los paralelos misteriosos entre los regímenes de Benito Mussolini y de Getulio Vargas, y las relaciones entre Brasil y los Estados Unidos. En última instancia, los textos de Braga representan, tanto en forma como en contenido, las condiciones del escritor como “viajero” de guerra, su retórica sobre el patriotismo, y su papel como observador y mediador de la diferencia cultural/nacional.

Rubem Braga (1913-1990) is generally recognized as the greatest practitioner of the very Brazilian genre of the crônica (“chronicle”), and he is habitually included in any list of great Brazilian writers, despite the fact that he practiced this brief, para-literary form
to the exclusion of other genres. According to Davi Arrigucci, Jr., the 
*crônica*, a type of familiar essay in which fact and fiction, journalism 
and literary narrative, are often inseparable, is distinguished in Braga’s 
hands by the emergence of an epiphanic moment that breaks through the 
surface of the everyday, a moment of interior reflection that contrasts 
with the exterior events depicted in the format of the daily newspaper 
where the *crônica* was first published.¹ Part of the literary effect of this 
hybrid genre, then, derives from the medium in which it (first) appears. 
The origin of the Brazilian crônica can be traced to the year 1836, when 
it was still classified under the name of *folhetim* (“feuilleton”) at the 
bottom of the newspaper page. In the nineteenth century, it increasingly 
aquired literary distinction when it was employed by noted literary 
writers such as Machado de Assis and José de Alencar. Aside from 
these authors, at the beginning of the twentieth century, another 
master of this genre, João do Rio, turned it into a privileged form to 
depict the vertiginous effects of the new urban experience in Rio de 
Janeiro.² During the 1930’s Rubem Braga perfected this genre so as to 
encompass a symbolic-moralistic dimension, a genuinely popular and 
easily accessible instance of the narrative *exemplum* (“example”). 

What is perhaps less well known is the fact that in his capacity as 
a journalist Braga was also a significant travel writer, or temporary 
foreign correspondent. For instance, he covered the election of Perón 
in Argentina during the year 1955, as well as Eisenhower’s in the 
United States in the following year. In this regard, one of Braga’s 
most interesting yet hardly studied collections of crónicas is the 1945 
book of *War Chronicles*, about his participation in the so-called *Força 
Expedicionária Brasileira* (FEB) in Italy during the two last years of 
World War II. The volume, *Com a FEB na Itália* (“With the FEB in 
Italy”), immensely popular at the time, collects the series of texts that 
Braga had written on roughly a weekly basis for the Rio newspaper 
*Diário Carioca*, spanning a time frame from September 1944 to April 
1945.³ As I will try to show in the following pages, despite the book’s 
time-bound significance, it is a fascinating text not only because of its 
immediate documentary aspect (the proceedings of the war, the military 
operations, etc.), but because of what appears as its more submerged 
theme: a reflection upon dislocation and what we would call today 
tercultural communication. Before I try to delineate this subject, it
is first necessary to briefly consider the historical situation that led to Brazil’s entry into the war on the side of the Allies.

The *FEB* was first created in March 1943, after a meeting between President Roosevelt and President Vargas in Brazil. Since the United States’ involvement in the war, movements toward a pan-American alignment were under way, but it was not until 1942 (when Hitler ordered an attack on Brazilian ships) when Brazil officially called off its relations with the Axis powers and signed a treatise of cooperation with the United States, which was accompanied by the so-called Good Neighbor Policy and various cultural activities promoting pan-American consciousness, one of the most interesting instances being perhaps Orson Welles’ radio program from Brazil to the United States. Quite of its own accord, Brazil joined the anti-fascist forces in June 1944, when an expeditionary force (*FEB*) was sent to fight in Europe. This was a decisive turning point in the history of Brazil, for up until then the Vargas regime (which in 1938 had more or less successfully banned the Brazilian Green Shirts, the Fascist Integralists) had navigated rather ambiguously between the democratic nations, on the one side, and the Nazi-Fascist regimes, on the other side. The totalitarian nature of the Vargas regime made many Brazilian soldiers wonder why they should defend democracy in far-away Europe rather than in their own country. Not everyone was prone to follow President Roosevelt, who dubbed Getúlio Vargas as “dictator in defense of democracy”. This contradiction erupted after the war, when the returning Brazilian troops were ecstatically celebrated in Rio de Janeiro.

The first expedition of the *FEB* to Italy occurred on July 2nd, 1944 (after initial plans to send troops to the war in Africa). Up until the end of the war in Italy (2 May 1945), more than 20,000 Brazilian men would fight in Italy, of which a total of 454 would fall in combat. For a total of 239 days (6 September 1944 – 2 May 1945) the *FEB* participated in the strategically important conquest of the Apennines. The site of Monte Castelo was conquered on February 21st, 1945, and the *FEB* captured more than 20,000 Germans.

While only official reporters accompanied this expedition, another expedition that left Brazil on September 22nd, 1944, had five independent reporters on board (along with 5,000 men), including Rubem Braga for the newspaper *Diário Carioca*. Although Rubem Braga had initially
planned to report daily on the military actions of Brazilians, a limited access to information and the exclusive reliance on the air route (the newspaper had no access to telegraphs) curtailed these plans. These exterior circumstances and impediments certainly contributed to the more “literary” style of Braga’s texts, where the external events often appear as a mere backdrop to the reporter’s conversations with simple soldiers. Although Braga’s texts are, obviously, primarily concerned with the proceedings of the war, they also include interesting references to the situation back home in Brazil. Like many writers associated with the political Left, Braga had been harassed and was also imprisoned by the Vargas regime. Of particular interest, then, is the way in which Braga’s reports from Italy return, either directly or indirectly, to Brazilian matters. For instance, in a crônica article (December 1944, “Nossa Gente”/“Our People”) he refers to the propaganda efforts of Mussolini, who tried to ridicule Brazil’s entry into the war stating, among other things, that Italian immigrants were held in concentration camps. As Braga comments,

“It is easy to imagine the effect that these reports had on the Italians that have relatives in our country. Certainly, the two million born Italians that live in Brazil have here millions of relatives and friends. In their eyes, the Italians of Brazil are suffering from all kinds of humiliations and physical pain” (Braga 108).

This example of the Fascist abuse of the press is invoked by Braga to advocate the democratic ideal of “freedom of the press,” and it is clear that this comment is also geared at the Vargas regime. Speaking patriotically, Braga asserts that the Brazilian soldiers are just as courageous as the German soldiers, an occasion in which he calls to mind the Nazi friendly Brazilian propaganda that exalted the Germans as “incomparable soldiers” and Übermenschen, a thesis defended, Braga points out, by men of an allegedly “inferior” racial composition. This is to say that Braga’s patriotic praise of the racially mixed Brazilian soldiers as well as his defense of the freedom of the press is reminiscent of the Fascist friendly propaganda in Brazil itself.

This effect of a double perspective—the war in Italy and the situation in Brazil—is also used in one of the most effective texts
in the collection, entitled “The Girl Silvana” (“A Menina Silvana,” Braga 249-54) and dated February 1945. Let me use this text as an example of how Braga uses the form of the crônica and of how he slowly and carefully builds up its deceptively simple effects. The first sentence of the crônica might be the opening of almost any generic war correspondence: “Yesterday was a very hard day: our men attacked a difficult position and had to withdraw after many hours of battle” (Braga 249). Braga then invokes an incident from the previous November, explicitly addressing the reader to recall this event—thus imagining a reader who follows Braga’s contributions in the Diário Carioca over a longer period of time. The event in question concerns the heroic feat of certain medical doctors who ceased to eat and gave instead their food rations to the fighting soldiers. One doctor, Martim Afonso dos Santos, was shot in the back while he was assisting the wounded soldiers at the front. Heroically, he operated upon himself and continued for several hours to work. This episode is recalled because Braga had decided to interview him, and while he was searching for him in vain in a hospital (where Martim was supposed to be but had already left, as it turned out), Braga distractedly passed his eyes over the various wounded people and was suddenly caught by surprise when he saw among all the men a wounded girl of ten years, named Silvana Martinelli. The appearance of this girl, her body penetrated by pieces of a German grenade, turns into a visual epiphany for the observer, whose description is not free of a certain dose of 1940’s kitsch:

“there was her white and delicate body, as a lily, now marked by blood. The head of Silvana was resting on the side, among sheets. The stupid explosion had saved that little brown head, that soft and firm profile that [Leonardo] da Vinci would love to draw” (Braga 251).

In a few sentences, then, Braga has moved from the daily grind of the war to an almost lyrical-surrealist setting, whose anesthetizing tone is not so different, perhaps, from what Curzio Malaparte does in his novel The Skin (La pelle 1949), and which is similarly concerned with the American liberation of Italy during the last year of the war. The small girl becomes for Braga an emblem for the senseless suffering of the war and gives rise to a questioning of the presence, or existence, of God.
The figure of Silvana points to the many nameless victims of the war—and simultaneously calls up the daily suffering of the poor in Brazil, which in turn leads to a critique of the political regime:

“... someone refuses to be moved: you girls of Tuscany, I saw your sisters of Ceará, with swollen bellies, feverish eyes, dehydrated, small shreds of human dust which the arid wind would touch upon the streets. Yes, I saw some things, and some things have been told to me by other men: the cold infamy of those who oppress and prohibit to think, and prohibit to eat; and they even destroy the purest sentiment, monstrous vanities which are nothing but slow and cold massacres of other human beings—yes, however distracted a reporter might be, in any part he visits, he might always see something” (Braga 252-53).  

If this *crônica* turns into a general condemnation of war, another text, entitled “Dead Christ” (“Cristo Morto” 1945) amounts to a critique of totalitarianism. At the beginning, Braga talks here about an apocalyptic scenario of destruction, dwelling especially upon the destruction of churches. As he contemplates an image of Christ, he notices a placard that reads, “Attention: mines!” This leads to a general remark of moral reflection:

“And then it occurred to me that there are not only mines geared at the imprudence of feet, but also for the one of your head. It’s not enough just to walk carefully, it is necessary to think (and this hurts more) very carefully” (Braga 371).  

Clearly, Braga alludes here to his prosecution during the so-called *Estado Novo* (1937-45). The image of Christ becomes for Braga an image for the suffering of humanity; Christ himself becomes “a war victim” (“um morto da Guerra” Braga 372).

Braga’s texts often circle around the senselessness of the war. Many of the *crônicas* dwell upon the various international co-operations and confrontations during the war: many anecdotes involve Brazilian soldiers who were descendants of German or Italian immigrants, as well as many black people. The multi-racial composition of the
Brazilian expedition throws into view the interconnectedness of the international confrontation that lies at the heart of World War II. During the moment of liberation, Braga remarks that he would like this scene to be witnessed not only by a “German Nazi” and an “Italian Fascist,” but also by a “Brazilian integralista.” The victory over Fascism is for Braga not only a victory over Germans, but indeed a victory over Fascism as an international phenomenon.

Braga’s crônicas are constantly in search of emblems for the epochal confrontation. One of those memorial sites is the Palazzo Venezia, which is the place from which Mussolini delivered his speeches to the Roman crowd. When Braga approaches this building, he expects something like a “museum of fascism” (“um museo do fascismo” Braga 95). Certainly, during this time—December 1944—the Italian version of fascism had already succumbed. Braga reports his surprise when he realizes that the Allies have installed in this building an exposition of early modern European art, in Braga’s words, “the most beautiful exposition of Renaissance painting that one might be able to see in the world” (Braga 95). Thus, in the former ante-chamber of the Duce, Braga now contemplates the “simple madonnas of Fra Filippo and Piero della Francesca,” as well as the Venus of Botticelli, Giorgione’s Tempest, etc. The contemplation of these paintings evokes a historical palimpsest: “Here there must be still the distant echo of the monologues that no one dared to interrupt—for, il Duce ha sempre ragione” (Braga 96). The contemplation of the masterworks of Renaissance painting leads Braga to a general humanist reflection: “The idea and the sentiment of Europe liberate themselves from the shadows and the oppression of the Middle Ages; by way of free art, men narrate, by way of a strange force, their great human and divine passions” (Braga 96-97).

What Hitler and Mussolini could not foresee, Braga continues, is the fact that the “famished people of Europe rise up for a new Renaissance” (“as populações famintas da Europa surgem para um outro Renascimento” Braga 97).

In this crônicas, rather typically, Braga begins with a personal observation, where he briefly evokes his witnessing of the fight of the international Allies in the Apennine mountains, to then direct the reader to what will become the moral theme of this text: “Yet it was in Rome that I encountered a sense for this war; it was in Rome
where I saw an eternal symbol for this battle of today” (Braga 94). The narrator recalls the moment when he was strolling through the eternal city, in search of the Palazzo Venezia. Yet, at the end of the text, the moment of personal anecdote or experience is transcended by a general reflection about the new, contemporary understanding of the “Renaissance” of the European people and the brandishing of Fascism as the dark medieval period (and I cannot address here the question of how Mussolini himself had channeled the symbolism of Rome, the Renaissance, and the Risorgimento into the historical self-stylization of Fascism). The ending of the crônica reads as follows: “It is a new Renaissance: I feel it in the craving for liberty and justice on the part of the Italian people. I am proud to see the Brazilian men descending into Tuscany for the liberation of the world” (97). If Braga generally refrains from militaristic rhetoric and throughout his correspondences condemns the atrocities of war, it is quite clear that his personal and unofficial observations nevertheless participate in the patriotic praise of Brazilian soldiers for contributing to a world-historical mission. Undoubtedly, the principal function of Braga’s narratives is to mediate between his own, on-site-observation and his Brazilian readers, who otherwise might only have vague notions of the war, and of the situation in Europe generally. This mediating function is underscored by the fact that Braga often takes on the role of an informal ambassador, for in numerous passages he delivers greetings from the Brazilian men to friends and family members at home.

While such personal information might appear to be rather irrelevant for a general newspaper readership, these personalized greetings have the function to anchor the war experience in a sort of familiar level, in line with the typically intimate tone of the crônica genre. Braga even has a chronicle (titled “Cartas”) that is entirely dedicated to the question of international correspondence by overseas telegram. Here we learn that the Brazilian soldiers may send a telegram for 60 lire (12 cruzeiros) that is composed of three numbers, which stand for three standardized phrases (out of a total of 124 phrases), which could refer to Christmas greetings, the state of health, promotion, money, greetings, and so on. He gives the following example:

“We can send a message to our beloved: ‘Saudades’ (‘I miss you’),
which is number 29, and this is something, but many are not satisfied. A member of the artillery, being in a veritable crisis of *saudade*, spent 180 Lire and sent three identical telegrams: 29-29-29; 29-29-29; 29-29-29” (Braga 88).  

Although the soldiers were also writing letters, the communication ways by mail were extremely slow (more than 50 days!). But also the correspondence by standardized numbers had its problems. Thus, one man shows Braga a telegram in which the wife of a general has apparently confused some of the numbers, since she sends to her husband message 66: “Kisses for the best mother of the world.” Given a situation in which the soldiers write more letters than they receive, Braga directly appeals to his Brazilian readers to send messages by telegraph and write letters. He wishes that they would all write, “enormous letters, full of things, nonsense even, without any importance—this is what counts, this is what helps to make the war” (90). Braga’s texts were sent by the not-so-fast airmail, and operated as a kind of literal and symbolic communication link between the continents—and thus also, to cite Braga, to “help to make the war.” Again and again, speaking about the most different subjects and events, he inserts sentences such as these:

> “Someone who says that he has not received letters in a long time is the third general José Francisco de Paulo, who is sending warm greetings to D. Laura Rosa de Paulo, Rua Coronel José de Castro, n. 769, Cruzeiro, São Paulo” (Braga 279).

Another aspect of communication concerns the question of language, again the subject of an individual *crônica* (“Linguagem”). Braga sets out with the observation that many people in Brazil will come to wonder about the “new” language of the soldiers once they return to Brazilian soil, for they will have adopted not only a certain military *lingo*, but they will have incorporated a number of Italian words into their speech. Throughout his texts Braga incorporates and comments upon many Italian words (and some American English and German terms) that play upon the difference/proximity between Portuguese and Italian (for example, “burro” means butter, not “stupid”). The Brazilians find especially amusing the Italian construction “Grazie-Prego.” As Braga
comments: “This means ‘Thank you’ and ‘Your Welcome’, but the Italians pronounce the word ‘prego’ with so much energy that many soldiers reply: ‘martelo’” (meaning nail and hammer in Portuguese).

As these rather trivial examples show, Braga’s texts address not only the great questions of humankind—man’s relationship to war, violence, and political corruption—they also have an ear for the small anecdote, or comical vignette, which often evolves around such questions of communication. In this sense the wartime crônicas might be said to reflect upon their own status as channels of intercultural and international communication.

In the 1945 preface to the book version of the texts (“Ao leitor”, Braga 5-8), Braga comments on the “strange situation in which a dictatorial regime found itself, a dictatorial regime with fascist tendencies and full of adherents of a fifth column, to engage in a war on the side of the democratic powers” (Braga 7). The creation of the FEB by the Vargas Regime was a logical consequence of Brazil’s entry into the war, and it was also seen strategically as a much needed modernization of the armed forces, an incitement (with American capital) for increased industrial development, and generally as a boost for Brazil’s ambition as a leading power in South America. Braga’s reports from the war voice the ambivalence of many Brazilians who wondered about their defense of democracy in far away Europe. During the 1940’s the Vargas Regime had co-opted many (formerly critical or oppositional) intellectuals, and Braga’s blend of critical distance and humanist patriotism seems to be rather typical for this constellation.

As befits the function of war correspondence, the personal component of these crônicas is rather kept in the background, although there are passages where Braga refers to himself as a “traveler,” a term which doubles back upon his fellow Brazilian soldiers, raising the question of to what degree the war experience might be seen as a kind of trip. In terms of the specific genre of the crônica, its key characteristics lend themselves especially to the communicative situation Braga is engaged in: its limited, circumscribed thematic range; its colloquial tone; its letter-like briefness and intimacy; the impressionistic, sentimental, and sometimes moralizing tone; the logic of imaginative rather than strictly causal connection; its capability to transport “exterior” experience in a circuit between narrator and reader; its origin in, and
possible transcendence of, newspaper journalism. As Braga writes in his preface, his ambition was to write an unofficial “history of the campaign,” invoking the connection between literary crônica and historical “chronicle.” Due to exterior impediments of communication, including the “stupidity of the press managers under the Estado Novo,” Braga can fulfill this ambition only in a very fragmentary form. Yet, as I have tried to argue here, today these texts gain their interest in part precisely through the “historical” and technical limitations of their communicative situation, but also because they reflect upon their own function of inter-cultural mediation and communication.

Notes


2 On the tradition and permutations of this genre, see John Gledson, ed., Conversa de burros, banhos de mar e outras crónicas exemplares (Lisboa: Cotovia, 2006). pp. 11-35.

3 Rubem Braga, Crónicas de Guerra (com a feb na itália) (Editora do autor: Rio de Janeiro, 1964). This edition reproduces the original one from 1945, with a total of eighty-three crônicas. The following quotes from this edition are cited with page numbers. All translations are my own.

4 Darlene J. Sadlier, Brazil Imagined. 1500 to the Present (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008). Ch. 6.

5 In fact, the American and British allies had to be convinced that Brazilians could successfully be enlisted in the war effort. Ultimately they received money and arms for their services. Boris Fausto, A Concise History of Brazil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 228. See also Eduordo Bueno, Brasil: uma História (São Paulo: Êtica, 2005), pp. 342-44.

6 Some generals (for the government, for example) were openly in favor of an alliance with Germany which, after the United States, was Brazil’s most important partner in economic trade; the chief of police, Filinto Müller, was known to admire the Hitler regime.


8 “É facil imaginar o efeito que não teriam essas notícias sobre os italianos
que têm parentes em nosso país. Os dois milhões de italianos natos que vivem no Brasil têm, certamente, aqui milhões de parentes e amigos. Para esses, os italianos do Brasil estariam sofrendo toda classe de humilhações e padecimentos físicos.”

9 “A véspera tinha sido um dia muito duro: nossos homens atacaram uma posição difícil e tiveram de recuar depois de muitas horas de luta.”

10 “...aquele corpo branco e delicado como um lírio—agora marcado de sangue. A cabeça de Silvana descansava de lado, entre cobertores. A explosão estúpida poupara aquela pequena cabeça castanha, aquele perfil suave e firme que Da Vinci amaria desenhar.”

11 “E às vezes um homem recusa como-ver se: meninas de Toscana, eu vi vossas irmazinhas do Ceará, barrigudinhas, de olhos febris, desidratadas, pequenos trapos de poeira humana que o vento da seca ia a tocar pelas estradas. Sim, tenho visto alguma coisa e também há coisas que homens que viram me contam: a ruindade fria dos que exploram e oprimem e proíbem pensar, e proíbem comer, e até o sentimento mais puro torcem e estragam, as vaidades monstruosas que são massacres lentos e frios de outros seres—sim, por mais distraído que seja um repórter, ele sempre, em alguma parte em que anda, vê alguma coisa.”

12 “E então me ocorreu que não há minas somente para a imprudência dos pés senão também da cabeça. Não basta andar com todo cuidado—é preciso pensar, e (ainda mais aflitivo) é preciso sentir com todo cuidado.”

13 “...na mais bela exposição de pintura da Renascença que um homem já pôde ver no mundo.”

14 “Ainda deve haver aqui o eco dos monólogos que ninguém ousava interromper—porque il Duce ha sempre ragione.”

15 “...a idéia e o sentimento da Europa se libertam das sombras e da opressão da Idade Média; através da arte livre os homens contam, com uma força estranha, as suas grandes paixões humanas e divinas.”

16 “Mas foi em Roma que encontrei um sentido para esta guerra; foi em Roma que eu vi um símbolo eterno desta luta de hoje.”

17 “É um novo Renascimento: eu o sinto na ânsia de liberdade e de justiça do povo da Itália. Tenho orgulho de ver os caboclos brasileiros trabucando na Toscana pela libertação do mundo.”

18 “Podemos mandar dizer à amada: ‘Saudades’ (número 29) e isso é alguma coisa, mas a muitos não satisfaç. Um sargento de artilharia, em crise de saudades, gastou 180 liras e mandou três telegramas iguais: 29-29-29; 29-29-29; 29-29-29.”
“Cartas enormes, cheias de coisas, cheias de bobagens sem importância—isto é que ajuda a fazer a guerra.”

“Quem diz que há tempos não recebe cartas é o terceiro-sargento José Francisco de Paulo, que manda saudades para D. Laura Rosa de Paulo, Rua Coronel José de Castro n. 769, Cruzeiro, São Paulo.”

“Isso quer dizer ‘obrigado’ e ‘não há de quê,’ mas os italianos pronunciam a palavra ‘prego’ com tanta energia que muitos pracinhas costumam responder ‘martelo!’”

A more problematic instance of Braga’s self-conscious role as communication link occurs in a later, much more personalized crônica from 1963, in which he recalls an incident in Rome during the war, when a beautiful woman, as it turns out, a Nazi spy, asks him to send a message to her uncle in São Paulo—and the moral dilemma of the text turns upon the moral ambivalence of whether he should denounce the name of the uncle to a British double agent, or not. See: Rubem Braga, “Em Roma, Durante a Guerra,” Crônicas da Guerra na Itália (Record: Rio de Janeiro, 1985) 322-323; cf. Gledson, Conversa de burros 216-18.

“...da estranha emergência em que se viu um governo ditatorial, com tendências fascistas e cheio de quinta-colunistas, a fazer uma guerra ao lado das potências democráticas.”