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## The Art Of Dying Every Second: On The Representations, Publishing Legacy, And Posthumous Writings Of Roberto Bazlen

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# The Art Of Dying Every Second: On The Representations, Publishing Legacy, And Posthumous Writings Of Roberto Bazlen

## Abstract

My dissertation aims to describe and investigate the influence and legacy of the intellectual and cultural work of Roberto Bazlen. Interlocutor and consultant of many of the major writers and intellectuals of his time, highly valued publishing adviser, and author of few posthumously published writings, Bazlen, as Eugenio Montale recalled, "spent his life with the desire of leaving no tangible traces of his own transit". He is nevertheless regarded today as a key figure of twentieth-century Italian literature. Still, because of the very nature of his intellectual activity, his figure and work have been studied only recently, and partially. In the first part of my dissertation I analyze the critical and novelistic representations of Bazlen, whose persona, in spite of his notorious discretion about his life, rose to a legendary status while he was still alive. In the second part of my study I focus on Bazlen's collaborations with writers such as Italo Svevo, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, and Eugenio Montale, and I analyze the nature of his work and interventions in their writings. I subsequently address Bazlen's publishing activity and the criteria and praxis behind his editorial opinions. In the third and final section of my dissertation I finally examine Bazlen's writings as posthumously collected fragments of a post-humanistic thought deliberately and necessarily articulated in a non-organic fashion. Through the study of the traces collected in the partial and inevitably unfaithful realizations of Bazlen's legacy, I aim to better comprehend the reasons behind his refusal of literary production and the characteristics of his primarily maieutic intellectual activity.

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THE ART OF DYING EVERY SECOND: ON THE REPRESENTATIONS, PUBLISHING LEGACY,  
AND POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS OF ROBERTO BAZLEN

Marco Lepore

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in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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## ABSTRACT

THE ART OF DYING EVERY SECOND: ON THE REPRESENTATIONS,  
PUBLISHING LEGACY, AND POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS OF ROBERTO BAZLEN

Marco Lepore

Kevin Brownlee

My dissertation aims to describe and investigate the influence and legacy of the intellectual and cultural work of Roberto Bazlen. Interlocutor and consultant of many of the major writers and intellectuals of his time, highly valued publishing adviser, and author of few posthumously published writings, Bazlen, as Eugenio Montale recalled, “spent his life with the desire of leaving no tangible traces of his own transit”. He is nevertheless regarded today as a key figure of twentieth-century Italian literature. Still, because of the very nature of his intellectual activity, his figure and work have been studied only recently, and partially. In the first part of my dissertation I analyze the critical and novelistic representations of Bazlen, whose persona, in spite of his notorious discretion about his life, rose to a legendary status while he was still alive. In the second part of my study I focus on Bazlen’s collaborations with writers such as Italo Svevo, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, and Eugenio Montale, and I analyze the nature of his work and interventions in their writings. I subsequently address Bazlen’s publishing activity and the criteria and praxis behind his editorial opinions. In the third and final section of my dissertation I finally examine Bazlen’s writings as posthumously collected fragments of a post-humanistic thought deliberately and necessarily articulated in a non-organic fashion. Through the study of the traces collected in the partial and inevitably unfaithful realizations of Bazlen’s legacy, I aim to better comprehend the reasons behind his refusal of literary production and the characteristics of his primarily maieutic intellectual activity.

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## Introduction

## The “Bobi Experience” (and Its Sources)

A forza di esclusioni  
 t'era rimasto tanto che tu potevi  
 stringere tra le mani; e quello era  
 di chi se n'accorgeva. T'ho seguito  
 più volte a tua insaputa.  
 [...] Ho assaggiato  
 la pleiade dei tuoi amici [...].  
 Erano i tuoi primi amici, altri  
 ne seguirono che non ho mai conosciuto.  
 S'è formata così una tua leggenda  
 cartacea, inattendibile. Ora dicono  
 ch'eri un maestro inascoltato, tu  
 che n'hai avuto troppi a orecchie aperte  
 e non ne hai diffidato. Confessore  
 inconfessato non potevi dare  
 nulla a chi già non fosse sulla tua strada.  
 A modo tuo hai già vinto anche se hanno perduto  
 tutto gli ascoltatori. Con questa lettera  
 che mai tu potrai leggere ti dico  
 addio e non aufwiedersehen e questo  
 in una lingua che non amavi, priva  
 com'è di Stimmung.  
 – Eugenio Montale, “Lettera a Bobi”

Roberto Bazlen (Trieste, 1902 – Milan, 1965) wrote very little and published close to nothing. Almost all of his writings appeared posthumously and against his will. As the poet Eugenio Montale recalled, Bazlen in fact “spent his life with the desire of leaving no tangible traces of his own transit”<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, the cultural legacy of his subterranean cultural work is enormous, and literally inestimable. Described as an infallible “literary hound”<sup>2</sup> or, in the words of the publisher Valentino Bompiani, as the man “who seemed to have read everything”, who seemed “to contain within himself

<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Montale, “Variazioni”, in Montale, *Prose e racconti*, ed. Marco Forti (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), 1118. All uncredited translations are ours.

<sup>2</sup> Giani Stuparich, *Trieste nei miei ricordi* (Milano: Garzanti, 1948), 17.

nothing but culture”<sup>3</sup>, Bazlen is a key figure of Italian twentieth-century literature<sup>4</sup>.

If Bazlen is usually remembered for the central role he had in the rediscovery and subsequent reevaluation of Italo Svevo's work, and as friend, interlocutor, and consultant of many of the major Italian writers and intellectuals of his time (such as Umberto Saba, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Giacomo Debenedetti), his greatest legacy is probably to be recognized in his editorial work. Expert in German, French, and Anglophone literatures, as a publishing consultant he had the merit to introduce to Italy many authors and perspectives otherwise excluded from the Italian intellectual debate. His editorial work is in fact one of the major expressions of “modernity” in the Italian culture of the first part of the Twentieth Century – conservative, and not receptive, also for nationalistic reasons, of the new perspectives that were developing abroad. Among the many works that Bazlen contributed to introduce to Italy, we can here anticipate that between 1947 and 1950 he suggested and translated into Italian for Astrolabio Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and Jung's *Psychology and Education* and *Psychology and Alchemy*; that, in the Thirties, he had a fundamental role in the publication of Kafka's works in Italy; that, in 1951, he discovered for Einaudi Musil's *The Man without Qualities*. Central was also his role in the birth of the publishing house Adelphi, for which, at the beginning of the Sixties, he conceived the initial program, and which, in addition to introducing to Italy many fundamental Central European authors,

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<sup>3</sup> Valentino Bompiani, *Vita privata* (Milano: Mondadori, 1973), 238-239.

<sup>4</sup> Already in 1969, Luciano Rebay annotated within an article on Montale's “Elegia di Pico Farnese”: “Roberto Bazlen [...] fu uno dei personaggi più affascinanti e influenti del mondo letterario italiano della prima metà del secolo, anche se rimase quasi totalmente ignoto all'infuori di una cerchia ristretta di artisti e scrittori. Uomo di vaste letture, colto e raffinato, informatissimo sempre di tutte le correnti letterarie e di pensiero più nuove, divulgatore di opere eccezionali [...], godeva di unanime rispetto per l'acutezza e franchezza dei suoi giudizi in materia di letteratura e d'arte” (“I diàspori di Montale”, *Italica* 46.1 [1969]: 47, note 7).

published, starting 1964, the complete critical edition of Nietzsche's writings, monumental work which would have become the source and the model of most editions of Nietzsche worldwide. Rolando Damiani has described Bazlen's relationship with Italian publishing as one of those “subterranean events that, as a bradyseism, changes little by little an entire landscape”<sup>5</sup>.

For the characteristics of his intellectual work and for the vast amount of anecdotes referring to his unconventional and charismatic figure, Bazlen's persona rose to a legendary status while he was still alive. Italo Calvino, who was one of his interlocutors within Einaudi, remembers: “Bazlen never had an official activity nor a definite profession: he had the mercurial vocation of bringing into contact people, ideas, books – but always individual people, unusual texts, living experiences; never collective abstractions or general ideas”<sup>6</sup>. Calvino also points out that Bazlen was absolutely remote from embodying the figure of the public, engaged intellectual – his “public” consisting of just a restricted number of friends –, and adds not to have ever seen “Bazlen's name printed while he was still alive”<sup>7</sup>. His name and figure were revealed to a larger public only through the many newspaper articles published in occasion of his death in 1965. Remembering his figure and cultural work, these articles (mostly by intellectuals who, at different times and in different contexts, had the chance to know him) revived the image of the infallible “literary hound” set in 1948 by Stuparich in *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, and contributed to create the legend of the “éminence grise of Italian contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Rolando Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen scrittore di nessun libro”, *Studi novecenteschi* 33 (1987): 74.

<sup>6</sup> Italo Calvino, “La psiche e la pancia”, *La Repubblica*, June 1, 1983, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



literature”<sup>8</sup>, of the friend and consultant of the finest Italian intellectuals of his times, of the writer who refused to write. Doing so, and relying mostly on first and second-hand personal and anecdotal memories and accounts, these articles fixed into published paper what already was part of a more circumscribed and mainly oral hagiography (already filled with suggestions and misinterpretations, with contradictions and omissions), and generated the beginning of the “unreliable, papery legend” to which Montale hints in his 1971 poem here placed as epigraph.

“Unconfessed confessor”<sup>9</sup>, Roberto Bazlen, whose friends called “Bobi”, was actually infamous for his discretion about his life. He was known for having an extremely vast amount of friends and acquaintances (“the majority of whom”, Roberto Calasso points out, was “absolutely stranger to the so called literary society”<sup>10</sup>); but, as Margherita Pieracci Harwell recollects, “despite knowing everybody, [he] managed, until he lived, to keep a sort of incognito, with many precautions, one of which was to see separately several people and groups that possibly knew each others”<sup>11</sup>. Friend Ignazio Weiss recalls:

He used to say: I lead at least three different lives: I have my silk shirts for when I have to visit my aristocratic friends; when I am a wanderer, especially on foot, I have wool sweaters, and my shoulder bag. I wear my normal clothes when I stay at home or I see the friends of mine who are not aristocrats or wanderers. [...] It is not possible for one single friend to know the several lives of Bobi; and he had a lot of friends, of any age, of

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<sup>8</sup> Michel David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1966), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Eugenio Montale, “Lettera a Bobi”, lines 20-21, in *Tutte le poesie*, ed. Giorgio Zampa (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1990), 464.

<sup>10</sup> Franco Marcoaldi, “Bobi Bazlen, Roberto Calasso. L'uomo che sapeva troppo”, *La Repubblica*, July 25, 1997, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Margherita Pieracci Harwell, “Ernst Bernhard e i letterati fiorentini”, *Il Cormorano* 2.1 (2002); available from <http://www.cristinacampo.it/public/3%20bernhard%20e%20i%20letterati%20fiorentini.pdf> (accessed April 11, 2017).

both sexes.<sup>12</sup>

Aldo Carotenuto, who investigated Bazlen's role in the introduction of Jungian theory and Analytical psychology in Italy, and doing so interviewed some of his acquaintances, also stresses that he had “an impressive number of friends, who mostly did not know of each other”<sup>13</sup>, and admits that, despite their number and their willingness to talk about him, “when someone tries to put together their recollections into a clear and precise portrait of Bazlen, he is bound to fail”<sup>14</sup>. This is a claim made by most of the writers and scholars who tried to reconstruct Bazlen's biography or to draw his intellectual portrait. See how Silvia Zangrandi opens her article on the relationship between Bazlen and Montale (quoting, in turn, an analogous claim by Claudio Marabini): “Hardly curiosity can resist the invitation ... of the genius who, maybe with a sneer, runs away. Who was, what was this Bobi Bazlen who knew everything, understood everything, foretold everything: who saw beyond everyone?’. You find yourself in front of a maze in which you gladly enter, but which is nearly impossible to leave”<sup>15</sup>.

Even in the recollections of the people who were most close to him is

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<sup>12</sup> Ignazio Weiss and Giorgio Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen nel ricordo di due amici”, *Umana* 5.6 (1966): 6. Weiss' account is consistent with writer and psychoanalyst Gianfranco Draghi's recollection of his first meetings with Bazlen, as reported by Pieracci Harwell (“Ernst Bernhard”): “Vidi arrivare un signore che mi sembrò un signore anziano, anzi se devo dire la verità vestito come un poveretto, mi sembrava claudicante, con un bastoncino, capelli non tanti e grigi, e un cappotto sdrucito e penzolante [...]. Invece ricordo il secondo incontro in una casa elegante, mi pare in via del Babuino o Via Margutta a Roma, dove Bazlen era tutt'altro uomo, era molto elegante, magro, pulitissimo, vestito grigio gessato se non mi sbaglio, teneva le mani in tasca, semisdraiato su un divano”.

<sup>13</sup> “[...] e che si sono conosciuti o avvicinati dopo la morte di lui, scoprendo di aver subito tutti una grave perdita” (Aldo Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana* [Roma: Astrolabio, 1977], 124). On this topic, Carotenuto's source is Bazlen's close friend Luciano Foà, who confessed to the scholar: “Naturalmente ognuno conosce il suo Bobi. Dopo la sua morte mi sono accorto che aveva amicizie molto diverse tra loro e che evidentemente con ognuna lui aveva un suo particolare modo di essere” (ibid., 133).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>15</sup> Silvia Zangrandi. “Il genio non parla per bocca sua. I rapporti tra Roberto Bazlen e Eugenio Montale”, *Lingua e letteratura* 11.21 (1993): 139; the internal citation is from Claudio Marabini, “Diario di lettura”, *Nuova Antologia* 3-4 (1984): 192.

recognizable a constant warning on the impossibility of being faithful to the figure of this “rather inenarrable man”<sup>16</sup>. See for instance how Calasso (close friend and collaborator, and editor and translator of most of his posthumous writings) declares the impossibility of reconstructing his thought: “It would be arbitrary to say what Bazlen thought; what is certain is that his presence forced others to think”<sup>17</sup>; or see how the critic and poet Sergio Solmi<sup>18</sup> introduced Bazlen to the readers of his first published book (*Lettere editoriali*, 1968): “Writing of Roberto Bazlen, even in the brief and elusive way I tried here, appears, especially for those who had been his friends for a long time, an almost impossible venture. The 'Bobi' experience is so much part of our own history, that we cannot simply unravel it in the dryness of a portrait or transcend it in the equivocality of a 'legend'”<sup>19</sup>.

Even the strongest and most reliable accounts on Bazlen thus acknowledge the impossibility of dealing with his work separately from his presence, from his vocation and ability to act in other's life, from the maieutic, primarily oral nature always recognized to his figure. This is a leitmotif of most of the recollections and writings on him, which at times appear disconcerting for the categories they use or for the fairy-talish portraits they deliver. Elena Croce, asked to speak about him, describes his “elfish”

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<sup>16</sup> Elémire Zolla, “L'arcaico dottor Ernst Bernhard. Terapia per psiche”, *Corriere della sera*, November 6, 1969, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Roberto Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, in Roberto Bazlen, *Scritti. Il capitano di lungo corso · Note senza testo · Lettere editoriali · Lettere a Montale*, ed. Roberto Calasso (Milano: Adelphi, 1984), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Solmi was chosen by Luciano Foà as first advisor at the moment of the decision on the appropriateness of the publication of Bazlen's posthumous writings. In this regard, see Foa's letter to Rodocanachi: “molti amici mi hanno scritto già proponendo di pubblicare qualcosa di suo... Io vorrei andare molto cauto, sapendo quanto Bobi fosse alieno da queste cose. E vorrei che Sergio Solmi, che godeva tutta la fiducia di Bobi, avesse l'ultima parola al riguardo” (Foà, Luciano. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 23 Aug. 1965. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Foà, Luciano).

<sup>19</sup> Sergio Solmi, “Nota”, in *Lettere editoriali*, 270.

nature<sup>20</sup>. Giorgio Zampa, recalling his first and only meeting with him (which happened only two days before his death), delivers a surreal account in which an unannounced and only known by reputation Bazlen appears at his door with the ostensible reason of discussing about Alfred Kubin, and finally ends up by discreetly comforting him from the psychological prostration in which he had been left by a severely debilitating accident. Zampa, after a while, realizes that his guest is dressed exactly like him: “Recalling the scene twenty years later, I am tempted to define the figure of that summer morning as an apparition, an image with visible physical attributes expressed by my need of certainties, of new reasons to be in the world. Naturally, it was not like that. The man wearing my same t-shirt was quite real at my side”<sup>21</sup>.

The recollections and critical contributions on Bazlen often focus on the importance he attributed to his personal relationships, within which even the professional and intellectual rapports were absorbed or sprung from. Clearly not an amateur of letters, he would have been horrified, Calasso warns us, by being referred to as an intellectual<sup>22</sup>; strictly speaking not a professional (in his editorial activity he seldom occupied official positions), he was rather a discreet and highly regarded interlocutor and consultant, a “cultural catalyst”<sup>23</sup>, an unambitious “sower of labyrinths and bewilderments”<sup>24</sup>. Hence

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<sup>20</sup> See Croce's account in Aldo Grasso's television special “Bobi Bazlen” of the program *Tuttilibri*, originally broadcasted on Rai TV Rete Uno on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1983 (from now on: Grasso, *Tuttilibri*). The special also features accounts by Luciano Foà, Roberto Calasso, Daniele Del Giudice, Italo Calvino, Massimo Cacciari, Lucia Drudy Dembi, Giorgio Zampa, Stelio Mattioni, and Natalia Ginzburg.

<sup>21</sup> Giorgio Zampa, “Lo sconosciuto disse: sono Bobi”, *Il Giornale*, September 13, 1985, 28.

<sup>22</sup> See Roberto Calasso, “Il Giardino Bazlen un paradiso laico”, *Corriere della Sera*, May 10, 2008, 41.

<sup>23</sup> See Aurelia Gruber Benco, “Come ricordare un uomo grande”, *Il piccolo*, December 31, 1984 (qtd. in Zangrandi, “Il genio non parla per bocca sua”, 140): “[Bazlen] appartiene alla rara categoria degli umani catalizzatori di cultura che agiscono sulla realtà culturale del loro tempo in analogia coi catalizzatori chimici e cioè delle sostanze che, per sola presenza e senza relazione quantitativa, determinano catalisi e trasformazioni di natura culturale nei complessi fenomeni della realtà alla quale

the legend of the “guru”, or, in its negative variant, of the “puppeteer”<sup>25</sup>. Daniele Del Giudice's novel *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* (1983) particularly lingers on Bazlen's supposed choice of life over art, of personal relationships over literature, with a crescendo that culminates with the words of Ljuba Blumenthal (Ljuba of Montale's *A Liuba che parte*, Bazlen's life-companion): “Other people were his life, what he could understand of them, or make them understand”<sup>26</sup>. According to Del Giudice's interpretation, even Bazlen's avoidance of written work and publication has to be ascribed to this choice; as the novelist makes one of Bazlen's old friends say: “His life, as it was, has been his masterpiece”<sup>27</sup>. The constant center of Bazlen's portraits might actually be recognized in the recollection of the effects of his presence on the narrators, in the importance of his intervention in the witnesses' lives. Publisher Luciano Foà remembers Bazlen's “extremely discreet pedagogical work” that made him discover “a new continent” of books, authors, literatures, and argues that, because of Bazlen's friendship and guidance, he came to consider him as “a second father”<sup>28</sup>; and Fabrizio Onofri claims: “Bobi has been [...] to me, and not only to me, the older brother, [...] the guide, or better, the reconnaissance on the perilous path to the irrational”<sup>29</sup>. In the accounts of his friends, Bazlen often come out as a sort of socratic figure, to whom is recognized a maieutic role which reflects itself also in the modalities of the recollections on his person. Onofri, in

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sono contemporanei”.

<sup>24</sup> Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera* (Torino: Einaudi, 1982), 136.

<sup>25</sup> See Daniele Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), 56: “Lui era un burattinaio, uno che può realizzare le cose solo attraverso gli altri, perché era un inibito”; the words are reported as a confession made by Bazlen's friend Gerti Frankl Tolazzi to the main character of the novel.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 97: “La sua vita erano le altre persone, quello che lui poteva capire di loro, o fargli capire”.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 101: “la sua vita, così com'era, è stata il suo capolavoro”.

<sup>28</sup> Foà in Giorgio Dedenaro, ed., *Per Roberto Bazlen. Materiali della giornata organizzata dal Gruppo '85* (Udine: Campanotto Editore, 1995), 11-13.

<sup>29</sup> Fabrizio Onofri, “Contributo alla conoscenza di Bobi”, *Umana* 7.9 (1966): 32.

the above-mentioned 1966 article, is already well aware of these two aspects:

In some of the recollections dedicated to Bobi, I found an excess of autobiographism, almost a pretext to talk about oneself. But I believe that Bobi was, that he has been, more than anything else, this: the invitation and the solicitation, for the ones close to him, to talk to themselves, and in case with him, about themselves. He apparently keeps doing that<sup>30</sup>.

As said above, Bazlen's "unreliable, papery legend" has been unintentionally encouraged by his discretion on his own life and by the characteristics of his work, which left elusive traces. In his editorial activity as external collaborator or consultant, he rarely occupied official positions, and his contribution to the various editorial projects he participated in is therefore difficult to accurately estimate and describe. His role as consultant and editor for other writers was also always unofficial, "hidden", and it has left important but subtle traces. Finally, almost all of his writings were published posthumously, and mostly display a fragmentary, unfinished form. His hagiography, fueled also by some of the most authoritative intellectuals of his times (Montale included), has at its center the figure of an inexplicable man who "had read everything"<sup>31</sup>, who, between the Thirties and the Forties, "dispensed suggestions that, in the context of the Italian cultural environment, were smuggled goods: psyche, the unconscious, dreams, [...] destiny, Orient, Yoga, Zen, Mitteleuropa [...]. In short: everything that was not historicism, Hegelianism, or the political ethics predominant in Italian culture"<sup>32</sup>. Bazlen is remembered as the "instigator who never appeared to the public"<sup>33</sup>; as the brilliant reader "who bought the novels of Kafka and Joyce when they appeared, because they

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>31</sup> Bompiani, *Vita privata*, 238.

<sup>32</sup> Calvino, "La psiche e la pancia".

<sup>33</sup> Weiss and Voghera, "Roberto Bazlen", 6.

were the young writers around”<sup>34</sup>, and who subsequently spread his literary discoveries primarily within the circle of his friends. Writer and art critic Gillo Dorfles remembers how he owes to Bazlen his “initiation to Mittel-European literature”<sup>35</sup>; Montale so describes his first meetings with Bazlen:

When he came to visit me, in the Winter of 1923-'24, sent to me by I don't know who, he was to me like a window thrown open on a new world. We used to see each other every day. He talked to me about Svevo, sending me later the three novels of the author; he introduced to me many pages of Kafka, Musil, [...] and Altenberg. I was already familiar with Saba's poetry, but Bobi revealed to me Giotti, Bolaffio, and, later, Carmelich. By myself I added to the list Benco, Stuparich, and, years later, Quarantotti Gambini. Between 1925 and 1930 Trieste became almost my second homeland [...]. Afterwards I saw him less and less, but our friendship did not suffer because of that, for Bobi's followers [*fedeli*] kept multiplying, and I kept receiving news about him.<sup>36</sup>

Highly regarded intellectual and cultural mediator, the fascination around his figure was also nourished by the fact that he always refused the limelight. “His name in print would scare him”, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini writes in 1932 to the director of *Solaria* Alberto Carocci, “once, after I mentioned him in *L'Italia Letteraria*, he told me he had been sick for few days”<sup>37</sup>. Montale, in the above-cited 1965 piece on his recently deceased friend, argues:

He simply was a man whom it pleased to live in the interstices of culture and history, exercising his influence upon those who could understand him, but always refusing to come to the fore. *Bon vivant*, fond of good wine, curious about everything, able to walk for twenty kilometers to

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<sup>34</sup> Roberto Calasso, “The Art of Fiction No. 217”, interview by Lila Azam Zanganeh, *The Paris review* 202 (2012); available from <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6168/roberto-calasso-the-art-of-fiction-no-217-roberto-calasso> (accessed April 11, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> Gillo Dorfles, *Lacerti della memoria. Taccuini intermittenti* (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2007), 71.

<sup>36</sup> Eugenio Montale, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, *Corriere della Sera*, August 6, 1965; now in *Il secondo mestiere. Prose 1920-1979*, ed. Giorgio Zampa (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1996), 2728.

<sup>37</sup> Quarantotti Gambini to Carocci, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1932, in Giuliano Manacorda, ed., *Lettere a Solaria* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1979), 397: “Il suo nome stampato gli farebbe paura; una volta che lo nominai sull'*Italia Letteraria* mi disse di essere stato male per alcuni giorni”.

discover a new tavern, he was most of all an unsurpassed instigator and provoker of ever new cultural and moral inquietudes.<sup>38</sup>

Alien to any sort of didacticism, Bazlen always avoided literary criticism and disregarded academic studies and perspectives (“Do not ever associate him with university!”, warns Elémire Zolla, “he despised it”<sup>39</sup>). Author, during his life, of very few published writings, even in his translations he often hid under a pseudonym. Friend and academician Alessandro Pellegrini recollects that in an epistolary exchange of 1949 he once prayed Bazlen to take note of the thoughts he mentioned in his conversation and that he punctually dropped as “thrown away sheets”<sup>40</sup>. Pellegrini, who, as requested by Bazlen, destroyed all of his letters, recalls the reply he received (“the only excessively serious one in many years of correspondence”): “In this times we are living in, between the Second and the Third World War, I wish no sign, no trace of me will remain. I say what I think to a friend of mine, in the evening, drinking a glass of wine, and I do not care about recollecting it”<sup>41</sup>. Montale, recognizing the impossibility of thoroughly understanding Bazlen's intellectual and spiritual experience and his uncompromising positions, suggests:

Maybe that within Bazlen a mystic was hidden, or at least a religious person of no religion? One may suppose so, although he would have found the conjecture offensive. Words as “spirit” or “soul” never came out of his mouth. Still, this hypothesis would be corroborated by the fact that, after a long early immersion in Freud and Jung, he explored far and wide all the possible Orphic and Mystery traditions. He didn't believe that matter or even man's body had an actual existence. He thought that “death” was a meaningless word. Anyways, no one ever knew what kind of transcendence blazed within him. I believe it was not the transcendence of

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<sup>38</sup> Montale, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2729.

<sup>39</sup> Alessandro Mezzena Lona, “Elémire Zolla: parole di luce ritrovate”, *Il Piccolo*, June 6, 2002, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Alessandro Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, *L'osservatore politico letterario* 26.2 (1980): 58.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.



the philosophers (men he despised); maybe it was an extremely private alchemy elaborated in the secrecy of an assiduous experience of the absurd. [...] If there was a faith within him, it had to be exerted as iconoclastic and completely unnameable.<sup>42</sup>

The tenor of the categories of which the above quoted recollections avail themselves invites to adopt a certain critical caution when approaching Bazlen's figure, but at the same time allows to understand the reason why Bazlen, in spite of his elusion of the written work and his desire to conceal himself and not to be remembered, quickly became a mythical, cult figure – even a proverbial one<sup>43</sup> –, to the point of becoming the object of novelistic thematization. Already in 1948 Bazlen was portrayed as Ans, friend and confidant of the main character of Fabrizio Onofri's autobiographical *Manoscritto*<sup>44</sup>. In Carlo Levi's *L'orologio*<sup>45</sup>, it is possible to recognize Bazlen in the character of Martino. In Antonio Pizzuto's *Signorina Rosina*<sup>46</sup>, Bazlen and Giacomo Debenedetti are ironically sketched in the characters of Chthés e Tumò. In Del Giudice's *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* the figure of Bazlen is at the center of the existential research of the main character. In *La fine di un addio*<sup>47</sup>, Antonio Debenedetti fictionally presents Bazlen as an acquaintance of the protagonist of his bildungsroman (anticipating many of the anecdotes and observations that he would have proposed also in his later biographical work on his

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<sup>42</sup> Montale, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2729-30.

<sup>43</sup> See Pasolini's description of the crow in the film treatment of *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966): “Un saggio quasi drogato, un amabile beatnik, un poeta senza più nulla da perdere, un personaggio di Elsa Morante, un Bobi Bazlen, un Socrate sublime e ridicolo, che non si arresta davanti a nulla, e ha l'obbligo di non dire mai bugie, quasi che i suoi ispiratori fossero i filosofi indiani o Simone Weil” (Pierpaolo Pasolini, “Le fasi del corvo – Appendice a *Uccellacci e uccellini*”, in *Per il cinema*, eds. Walter Siti and Franco Zabagli [Milano: Mondadori, 2001], 824).

<sup>44</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1948; the novel was published under the pseudonym of Sebastiano Carpi.

<sup>45</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1950.

<sup>46</sup> Roma: Macchia, 1956.

<sup>47</sup> Novara: Editoriale Nuova, 1984.

father, *Giacomino*<sup>48</sup>). In Enrique Vila-Matas' *Bartleby y compañía*<sup>49</sup>, Bazlen is depicted as an emblematic figure of the refusal of writing. Unsurprisingly, in the novels in which Bazlen or characters inspired to his figure are featured, priority is accorded to the anecdotal elements, to the extravagant behaviors, to the characteristics that made his figure so suggestive<sup>50</sup>.

The fascination exerted by Bazlen as a literary character is eloquently explained by Del Giudice in his retrospective reflection on *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*. Bazlen, he argues, even before novelistic thematization already presents the features of “a character straight out of a novel”: what would in fact be more ideal, for a novel as his own, than “a character connected to the essence of things” for whom “every cognitive act brought also to an existential repercussion”? What would be more fascinating, as the object of research of the bildungsroman of young novelist, than “the figure of a *non-writer* [...] with a suitcase in his hand”, than someone infamous for being “capable to escape in every possible way and at the same time of being present”? What finally would be more intriguing than a character “with an imperfect biography, but for this very reason surrounded by a conspicuous legend”? Del Giudice concludes suggesting what we may assume can be read as an interpretation of his own novel (interpretation in which he also seems to defend it from the accusation of having delivered a misleading portrait of

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<sup>48</sup> Milano: Rizzoli, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Hence Debenedetti, in *La fine di un addio*, focuses on Bazlen vast and peculiar culture and on his “dangerous” intelligence (“È un concentrato della mitteleuropa allo stato puro. È il dono e la malattia dell'intelligenza fatti persona” [15]; “Bazlen è mangiato vivo dalla psicanalisi e dall'intelligenza” [106]), on his uniqueness (“Le idee di Bobi, che sono sempre straordinarie, non esistono senza Bobi, senza la sua voce e il suo stile. Ecco un uomo sul serio irripetibile, come avrebbero voluto esserlo certi inglesi dell'età edoardiana” [20]), on his extravagances (“Bazlen studia le religioni orientali e si dedica a esperimenti di levitazione” [20]), on his influence on others' life (“Una signora molto bella, e dicono infelice, gli attribuisce un singolare potere: quello di distruggere, meglio di vanificare le coppie” [20]).

Bazlen): “It would be fair trying not to define such a character, but rather to allow him to produce a constant resonance in memory and fantasy. If I had to describe a character of this kind, I would try to preserve his mystery”<sup>51</sup>.

Many of the reasons that contributed to make of Bazlen a cult literary figure, are at the same time at the roots of his scarce critical fortune. Despite the attention that his figure attracted, Bazlen's work has been in fact only lately and partially studied. In addition to the scarcity and fragmentation of the documentation, a further reason for his relative absence from the critical canon has to be recognized, as Manuela La Ferla argues, in “the excessive diffidence” that surrounded him – diffidence that, according to Calasso, has to be put in relation with “a primordial fear that Italian culture tirelessly keeps showing towards all truly radical experiences, not only in literature”<sup>52</sup>.

For a succinct history of Bazlen's critical fortune: in 1966, one year after his death, remembering the help offered by Bazlen for the composition of *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, Michel David described him as an “éminence grise” of Italian contemporary literature<sup>53</sup>, and expressed the hope that “sooner or later” Bazlen's writings and letters would have been published, “so that his secret contribution to Italian literary culture could be understood”<sup>54</sup>. Two years later Adelphi started publishing Bazlen's posthumous writings in the collection “Quaderni di Roberto Bazlen”: a selection of his editorial letters (*Lettere editoriali*<sup>55</sup>) came out in 1968; in 1970 the aphorisms and notes

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<sup>51</sup> Del Giudice in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 34-39.

<sup>52</sup> Manuela La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio: vita e scritti di Roberto Bazlen* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1994), 86-87.

<sup>53</sup> David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>55</sup> Roberto Bazlen, *Lettere editoriali*, eds. Roberto Calasso and Luciano Foà, Milano: Adelphi, 1968. Now

from his notebooks and some (mostly unpublished) occasional writings were collected in *Note senza testo*<sup>56</sup>; the unfinished novel *Il capitano di lungo corso*<sup>57</sup> appeared in 1973; finally, in 1984, all the mentioned works with the addition of the letters to Eugenio Montale (*Lettere a Montale*<sup>58</sup>) were collected in the volume *Scritti*<sup>59</sup>.

In spite of the attention that Bazlen's writings and figure attracted (as demonstrated by several newspaper articles and accounts), the first in-depth critical and academic studies on his work appeared only in the Eighties (among the most relevant ones we can mention here Massimo Cacciari's essay "Un'oscura via di città vecchia"<sup>60</sup> and Rolando Damiani's article "Roberto Bazlen scrittore di nessun libro"<sup>61</sup>). *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* (1983) – condensing suggestions, collecting references in the works, letters, and accounts of Bazlen's friends and acquaintances, and finally organizing and further stimulating the hagiography of his figure – played subsequently a fundamental role in making Bazlen known to a wider public, and arguably also in opening the way for a new critical interest.

The first thorough studies on Bazlen's work appeared nevertheless only in the nineties<sup>62</sup>, and had to confront themselves with an issue that revealed itself to some extent

in Bazlen, *Scritti*, 265-353 (from now on: *Lettere editoriali*).

<sup>56</sup> Roberto Bazlen, *Note senza testo*, ed. Roberto Calasso, Milano: Adelphi, 1970. Now in Bazlen, *Scritti*, 171-264 (from now on: *Note senza testo*).

<sup>57</sup> Roberto Bazlen, *Il capitano di lungo corso*, ed. Roberto Calasso, Milano: Adelphi, 1973. Now in Bazlen, *Scritti*, 21-170 (from now on: *Capitano*).

<sup>58</sup> In Bazlen, *Scritti*, 355-389 (from now on: *Lettere a Montale*).

<sup>59</sup> Roberto Bazlen, *Scritti. Il capitano di lungo corso · Note senza testo · Lettere editoriali · Lettere a Montale*, ed. Roberto Calasso. Milano: Adelphi, 1984 (from now on: *Scritti*).

<sup>60</sup> In Massimo Cacciari, *Dallo Steinhof. Prospettive viennesi del primo Novecento*, Milano: Adelphi, 1980, 224-230.

<sup>61</sup> In *Studi novecenteschi* 33 (1987): 73-91.

<sup>62</sup> Manuela La Ferla's thesis was published in 1994 (with the title *Diritto al silenzio: vita e scritti di Roberto Bazlen*, Palermo: Sellerio, 1994) and Giulia de Savorgnani's doctoral dissertation was published in 1998 (*Bobi Bazlen. Sotto il segno di Mercurio*, Trieste: Lint, 1998). The two books, similar

unsolvable: the “actual lack of consequential biographical information” on Bazlen had created an empty space that had been filled with “anecdotes and details which [ended] up by constituting the bearing structure of his legend”<sup>63</sup>; legend against which the scholar who investigates Bazlen's figure has, while trying to unravel it, also to rely on. Most of the studies on Bazlen had thus to heavily depend on “the arbitrary nature of a mainly oral tradition”, and to the several but not always reliable written recollections of those who knew him personally, many of which tend “to confine him to a fable dimension”<sup>64</sup>. We might argue that what Valeria Tavazzi observes in regard to the interviews conducted by the main character and narrator of Del Giudice's novel in his investigation on Bazlen's life, may actually be extended to what results by the sum of many of the oral accounts and writings on him: “Bazlen's image always comes out blurred, more because of an excess of information than for the lack of it, in a framework of details which though lacks

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in structure and objectives, availing themselves of previous occasional contributions, of archival researches, and of oral accounts, aim primarily at drawing an intellectual portrait of Bazlen and at describing the range and the importance of his intellectual influence and editorial work. Both the monographs offer a biographical and cultural profile of the man (describing his formation, the characteristics of his work and thought, his relationships with contemporary intellectuals), and subsequently address more specific aspects such as the literary representation of his figure, the “Svevo affair”, the editing work on Montale's poems, the editorial work, and lastly the writings. A more accurate and in-depth study of Bazlen's editorial activity has been recently realized by Valeria Riboli (*Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, Collana Intangibili 22: 2013; available from <http://www.fondazioneadrianolivetti.it> [accessed January 25, 2014]), who, thanks to extensive archival research, has been able to reconstruct more in detail the magnitude and the characteristics of Bazlen's efforts in the editorial projects in which he was involved. Concerning Bazlen's relations with psychoanalysis and his role in its promotion in Italy, among the mentioned monographs, Riboli's is particularly effective in reconstructing his role in the publication of psychoanalytical works starting from the late forties. In this direction are also helpful David's above-mentioned *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana* and Aldo Carotenuto's *Jung e la cultura italiana* (Roma: Astrolabio, 1977), in which the author, in addition to drawing a portrait of Bazlen and trying (hazardously) to reconstruct his analytical experience, describes his role in the introduction of Jungian therapy and theories to Italy. Regarding the critical works on Bazlen's writings: in addition to the sections dedicated to them in the monographs by La Ferla and De Savorgnani, the sharpest contributions on the cultural and intellectual background and on the philosophical aspects of Bazlen's writings are the aforementioned works by Cacciari and Damiani, and Calasso's “Da un punto vuoto” (in Bazlen, *Scritti*, 13-20).

<sup>63</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 85.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

of a center”<sup>65</sup>.

The challenge, when trying to reconstruct Bazlen's biography and cultural activity or to deliver his intellectual portrait, has therefore to be recognized first of all in the nature of the sources: the studies on Bazlen, when they try to capture his figure or to deliver a consistent and thorough biographical reconstruction, have often to surrender to the actual insufficiency of documentation and with the non always reliable nature of the one they depend on. They also have to deal with a peculiar aspect of the novelistic thematizations of this man who, refusing to write for publication, met the ironic posthumous destiny of enjoying a fairly vast written fortune: if many, as we will see, rightly denounces the unreliability of Bazlen's novelistic portraits, these fictional works still arguably represent one of the most valuable sources available to approach or understand his figure and to gather information on his biography. To clarify this apparently contradictory statement it might result helpful to consider Calasso's opinion on *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*: “[Del Giudice's novel] is based on what I think is a completely wrong idea, namely the one according to which Bazlen would have been, to a certain extent, a failed writer [...], a man of enormous intelligence, of enormous knowledge who, for his entire life [...] thought of writing, but who, in the end, did not leave a work”<sup>66</sup>; in spite of the misleading nature of Del Giudice's portrait of Bazlen, Calasso admits though the reliability of some of the accounts reported in the novel (“The conversations with

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<sup>65</sup> Valeria G. A. Tavazzi, “Lo scrittore che non scrive: Bobi Bazlen e *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* di Del Giudice”, in *Auctor/Actor: lo scrittore-personaggio nella letteratura italiana*, eds. Gilda Corabi and Barbara Gizzi (Roma: Bulzoni, 2006), 276.

<sup>66</sup> Roberto Calasso, “Memoria, editoria, scrittura” (speech delivered at the festival “L'altra metà del libro”, Genoa, October 18<sup>th</sup> 2013); available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGI7JDW0G38&sns=tw> (accessed April 11, 2017).

Ljuba Blumenthal, those are authentic”<sup>67</sup>), and the same do La Ferla, Tavazzi, and Damiani<sup>68</sup>. We will later more thoroughly discuss *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, but for the moment we would like to point out that Del Giudice, who evidently had gone through a vast and keen analysis of the sources, was already aware of the described problematic nature of the novelistic representations of Bazlen: towards the end of his novel, we find the main character intent on reading an unnamed book (clearly recognizable as Onofri's *Manoscritto*) in which

there is him [Bazlen] as a character; so realistically him, in spite of being called Ans. [...] There are existential discussions, which I do not like, but the fact that they were real and probably important is moving. [...] Sebastiano [*Manoscritto*'s main character and narrator] too writes what actually happens, then, towards the end of the book, goes to the characters and reads it to them. When he reads to Ans the passages featuring him, Ans begins to laugh [...]: “It is almost offensive. In there I am a jealous and suspicious old man. I have never been like that, I swear [...]. I will need to write my counter-memoirs. [...] I do not think it will be difficult to figure out that that is me”<sup>69</sup>.

In a *mise en abyme*, we recognize the fictionalized Bazlen (Ans) complaining of the representation given of himself and of the interpretation of his words and actions; on a larger frame we discover that Del Giudice's main character is not really interested in the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> La Ferla considers *Lo Stadio di Wimbledon* “a rather reliable reportage”: “Crediamo di poter autenticare direttamente la veridicità dei brani riportati nel libro grazie a dei confronti sia con interviste da noi effettuate con le stesse persone, che con parte del materiale bibliografico su Bobi” (*Diritto al silenzio*, 101); Tavazzi also argues that the novel is “based on a series of encounters which actually happened and that were reproduced in the text overall faithfully” (“Lo scrittore che non scrive”, 273-274); Damiani, even though considering Del Giudice's novel as “very adventurously centered on Bazlen's biography”, also finds reliable the account of the narrator's crucial encounter with Ljuba (see “Roberto Bazlen”, 85-86).

<sup>69</sup> Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 108-109: “c'è lui come personaggio; così realisticamente lui, sebbene venga chiamato Ans [...]. Ci sono discussioni esistenziali che a me non piacciono, però è struggente pensare che erano vere, probabilmente importanti [...]. Anche Sebastiano scrive quello che veramente accade, poi va dai personaggi, verso la fine del libro, e glielo legge. Quando legge ad Ans i pezzi in cui c'è Ans, lui si mette a ridere [...]: 'È quasi offensivo. Io, lì, sono un vecchio geloso, sospettoso. Non sono mai stato così, te lo giuro [...]. Mi toccherà scrivere un contromemoriale. [...] Non credo si faccia molta fatica a capire che sono io”.

representation and interpretation of Bazlen, but rather in the snapshots of his conversation (“Now I’m reading only the dialogues”<sup>70</sup>), the description of which he evidently finds reliable; finally, the reader of *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* might find himself in an analogous position: he might trust the accounts reported in the novel while doubting the framework in which they are inserted and the general representation and interpretation. We thus argue that the novelistic representations of Bazlen offer reliable and precious snapshots of his figure, while the context and interpretation of him still may be partial or misleading – because of the authors' perspective and of the emphasis accorded to particular aspects, and thus because of the authors' choices and omissions. These portraits, as we will argue, are in fact mostly instrumental to the narratives or to the writers' positions. But something analogous has to be observed about many of the essayistic representations of Bazlen, which also, to different extents, feed on his hagiography, and dialogue with and rely on the fictional works.

Extremely discreet man, everything Bazlen left has been heavily mediated by publishers, critics, and novelists, who could give back only snapshots of this man whom, for the impossibility of reducing him to any cultural framework and of understanding him by means of humanistic measures, has been described as “posthumous”<sup>71</sup>, “post-historical”<sup>72</sup>, or, for his tension towards continuous change, “Taoistic”<sup>73</sup>. In our dissertation we will thus describe and analyze Bazlen's figure, editorial work, and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 109: “Ormai leggo solo i dialoghi”.

<sup>71</sup> As we will see, Cacciari includes Bazlen in his Nietzschean gallery of “posthumous people” (Massimo Cacciari, *Posthumous People. Vienna at the Turning Point*, trans. Rodger Friedman, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>72</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 16.



writings as fragments and traces mostly collected and coherently organized and interpreted by others. We will do so starting from his representations (Chapter I), to subsequently advance in the study of his publishing work and literary positions (Chapter II), and to finally analyze his posthumous writings as fragments of a deliberately unuttered and perhaps necessarily unutterable thought or philosophy (Chapter III).

The unreliability of Bazlen's "papery legend" represents the maybe obvious echo originated by an extremely intriguing and fascinating figure whose legacy, because of his own refusal of leaving one, cannot be but inevitably and necessarily betrayed. The reconstruction of Bazlen's biography and intellectual figure is partially helped by the abundant correspondence preserved in several archives, which though is still insufficient. We know in fact that Bazlen asked many of his friends to destroy his letters, and that many complied with his wish (at times with regret, as for the case of Pellegrini<sup>74</sup>). We may even suppose that the most private and significant correspondence with the most intimate friends has not yet been seen or that it might have been destroyed<sup>75</sup>, therefore it is not possible to precisely reconstruct the tenor and range of his frequentations. A more detailed biography and a deeper comprehension of his work might be achieved only when

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<sup>74</sup> See Pellegrini, "Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen", 59.

<sup>75</sup> It is for instance significant that of the long and rich intellectual relationship of Giacomo Debenedetti and Bazlen we possess only three postcards from Bazlen (preserved in Archivio Contemporaneo "Alessandro Bonsanti", Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux, Firenze). Debenedetti, possibly out of regard for Bazlen's desire of privacy, also left no written account on his friend. In Debenedetti's introduction to "Lettere di Umberto Saba" (1959), in which Bazlen is once mentioned, there is a passage that might be indirectly addressing Bazlen's reluctance to be exhibited: "Chi leggerà l'epistolario potrà, semmai, essere curioso del come quegli amici abbiano potuto superare la naturale ritrosia di veder pubblicati documenti che li espongono così al vivo. Personalmente, direi che è andata un po' come nel giorno della visita di leva, quando ci fu ordinato di spogliarci, di sfilare nudi. Dopo un attimo di rivolta, si era entrati d'improvviso in una specie di adattamento fatalistico, senza più obiezioni" (Giacomo Debenedetti, "Lettere di Umberto Saba", *Nuovi argomenti* 41 [1959]: 3).

and if his diaries<sup>76</sup> and the correspondence with Gerti Frankl Tolazzi and Ljuba Blumenthal will be published or made available<sup>77</sup>. If investigating the literary and critical depiction of Bazlen we will linger over some biographical details, we will thus do so not with the claim of delivering an exhaustive biography, but rather (given also the almost complete lack of bibliography on Bazlen in English language) to contextualize his work and writings, and to describe the echo left by his figure within twentieth-century Italian culture. In doing so, we will analyze the characteristics of Bazlen's representations, adding new materials to the research already initiated by La Ferla, Tavazzi, and de Savorgnani, and advancing our interpretation of these depictions, which, as we will try to demonstrate, often reveal more about the context in which he operated and about the authors who tried to interpret his figure than about Bazlen himself.

In the second chapter we will briefly describe Bazlen's collaborations with some coeval writers (Eugenio Montale, Italo Svevo, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini), and we will analyze the nature and characteristics of his work and interventions. Thanks especially to Riboli's investigation and to original archival research, we will subsequently focus on Bazlen's editorial activity, the part of his work that arguably had the greatest impact on Italian culture. We will finally try to identify and describe Bazlen's critical

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<sup>76</sup> One of the diaries (which covers the period between December 1964 and February 1965) was entrusted to Luciano Foà. An analytical diary, written during Bazlen's therapy with Ernst Bernhard, was entrusted to friend Silvana Radogna. Neither of them has yet been made available to scholars.

<sup>77</sup> The letters to Gerti (approximately 90 letters written in German that cover the period 1923-1962) are held in Archivio degli scrittori e della cultura regionale of the University of Trieste; some excerpts from these letters have been published, in translation, in Eva Masel, "Bobi – Gerti attraverso le lettere di Bobi", in *Gerti (1902 – 1989)*, catalogue of the documentary exhibition, Biblioteca statale del Popolo, Trieste, May 8<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> 1995, and in Waltraud Fischer, "Il viaggio di Gerti", in *Il viaggio di Gerti. Gerti Frankl Tolazzi (1902-1989)*, catalogue of the documentary exhibition, Biblioteca statale del Popolo, Trieste, December 14<sup>th</sup> 2005-January 12<sup>th</sup> 2006: 5-32. We have been informed that a book containing some of the mentioned letters might soon be published. The correspondence with Ljuba consists of more than a thousand letters, also mostly in German, which are in possession of Bazlen's heirs and have been not made available to scholars yet.

criteria and praxis with regard to his editorial activity. In doing so, we will resort especially to Bazlen's published and unpublished correspondence, the place in which the positions of this intellectual who so dexterously refused literary criticism and theorization are most clearly expressed.

In the third and final chapter we will examine Bazlen's writings as fragments of a post-humanistic thought not organically articulated – as “tendentious signals”, as Damiani describes them, “in the direction of the unspoken”<sup>78</sup>. Through an analysis of the “signals” collected in his posthumous writings, it might be possible to better understand some of the characteristics of his intellectual work, and to further define and investigate the central themes of his thought. If it might not be possible to identify a positive, consistent system at the basis of Bazlen's thought, in his writings it is however possible to appreciate the motives at the basis of his refusal of theoretical systematization and of his renunciation of the “work”, and to recognize a genealogy that necessarily leads to Central European culture and to the Vienna of the turn of the century. It is within this framework, in fact, that Bazlen's radical skepticism towards language and literature might be problematized, and his non pessimistic nihilism might be understood. We will therefore refrain from a philological study of the writings (task which has already been partially done by De Savorgnani), in favor of an analysis of the thematic veins of *Il capitano di lungo corso* and *Note senza testo*, works which reciprocally enlighten each other, and which we will thus examine in parallel. We will however examine these writings not only in function of what Bazlen seems to have left unsaid, but as original and necessarily fragmentary expressions of a radical existential and epistemological stance, which

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<sup>78</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 76.

poetically deal with what Bazlen recognizes as an ascertained but possibly virtuous shipwreck of Western reason and culture.

## Chapter I

## On an Unreliable, Papery Legend

All things resist being written down.  
– Franz Kafka, *Diaries*

## 1. In the Outpost of the Crisis of Culture and the Culture of Crisis

In his 1965 piece in memory of Bazlen, Montale wrote that with his death (in the same year Quarantotti Gambini had also died) disappeared “the last and most singular exponent of the intelligentsia of Trieste of the so called Thirties; in his case I could speak also of the Twenties, because it was beginning from 1924 that he started to take out of Trieste the treasure of its wisdom and of its inquietudes”<sup>79</sup>. The originality of the culture and literature of the Trieste of that period (during which writers such as Saba, Svevo, and Quarantotti Gambini came into prominence at a national level), has arguably to be recognized, in the first place, in the availability of literatures and perspectives unknown or unexplored during the same years in Italy. Montale so describes, in 1953, the uniqueness and the importance of Trieste for Italian contemporary culture:

If you admit that the bureaucrat Franz Kafka is completely conceivable in the streets of Trieste, and not in the streets of Milan or Rome, and if you consider that Kafka and also the first news about Altenberg or Musil entered in Italy through the door of Trieste, you can fully recognize the function of a city which brought in our culture a note of which today we could not do without.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Montale, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2727.

<sup>80</sup> Eugenio Montale, “Tre stellette per Trieste nella guida dell'Italia intellettuale”, *Il nuovo Corriere della*

At the beginning of the century Trieste held the position of crucial access of the Habsburg Empire to the Adriatic Sea, and thus represented the privileged door through which Mittel-European culture penetrated into Italy. As Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris write, already in the period preceding the First World War in Trieste “an international culture still unknown in Italy was discovered” (Strindberg, Freud, Weininger, Ibsen, Hebbel), and subsequently transmitted outside of the city by the Triestine intellectuals who between 1908 and 1916 collaborated with *La Voce*<sup>81</sup>. Trieste in fact, not merely for geographical reasons, represented an extremely sensitive outpost of the contemporary Mittel-European culture “which was diagnosing and realizing the crisis of *Kultur*, of knowledge, and of its organization, the irreparable hiatus which was widening between life and value, between life and representation”<sup>82</sup>. Magris writes:

Trieste becomes an outpost of the crisis of culture and the culture of crisis precisely on account of its position in the Hapsburg Empire, in that “true

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*Sera*, December 18, 1953; now in *Il secondo mestiere. Prose 1920-1979*, 1599-1600.

<sup>81</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 92. In those years in fact, as Ara and Magris point out, intellectuals such as Scipio Slataper, Carlo and Giani Stuparich, Alberto Spainì, Guido Devescovi, and Biagio Marin, contemporarily refusing the Italian academic tradition and the German one, turned towards “a new emerging German and Nordic literature which was antithetical to the classicistic and romantic-esque one embraced even by the German community of Trieste” (ibid.). Ara and Magris argue though that this group of intellectuals did not fully realize the importance and the novelty of the great Austrian literature, which lied in its radically “negative” character: “anche in questo caso, prevale l'ottica presbite della cultura triestina, acuta nel vedere lontano e noncurante del vicino [...]. Così gli intellettuali triestini colgono la crisi del fondamento piuttosto nelle sue manifestazioni geograficamente più remote, ad esempio nella letteratura scandinava, che in quelle che hanno direttamente sott'occhio a Vienna” (92). To their defense, Ara and Magris add though that “not even in the Vienna of the beginning of the century there was a clear intellectual awareness of the radicalism of this culture” (93). The two scholars also warn us against overestimating the actual penetration of German language and culture in Trieste, the perception of which, because of the German schools in the city, appears more consistent than what it actually was (see ibid., 32). Furthermore, at the withdrawal of the German community in 1918, coincided the interruption of the German literary life in Trieste (see Elvio Guagnini, “La cultura. Una fisionomia difficile”, in Elio Apih, *Trieste* [Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1988], 281). If thus it is true that in Trieste, already in the first two decades of the century, was available an original and modern literature at the time unknown in Italy, its penetration was circumscribed within restricted groups of intellectuals, and the comprehension of its importance was even more limited.

<sup>82</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 92-93.

Austria” which, as Robert Musil writes ironically in *The Man Without Qualities*, was “the entire world”, because it revealed with particular saliency the epochal crisis of the West. [...] Trieste is a laboratory model of the Imperial contradictions. Thus Svevo and Saba were able to treat it as a seismographic station for the spiritual quakes that were preparing to convulse the world, the locus of the crisis of the contemporary individual and his ironic and tragic, disillusioned and elusive poetry.<sup>83</sup>

Psychoanalysis<sup>84</sup> and the Mittel-European literature of crisis – and, we may add, German culture's encounter with Eastern traditions and philosophies which took place in the twenties – are the most important discoveries of what Ara and Magris describe as the “Other Trieste” (*Trieste altra*), that is to say that part or dimension of the city not understood or integrated neither by the fascist Trieste nor by the humanistic liberal and Mazzinian one<sup>85</sup>. This “Other Trieste” was a city that, in the years following the First

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<sup>83</sup> Claudio Magris, “Things Near and Far: Nietzsche and the Great Triestine Generation of the Early Twentieth Century”, in Thomas Harrison, ed., *Nietzsche in Italy* (Saratoga, California: ANMA Libri & Co., 1988), 295.

<sup>84</sup> According to Ara and Magris, psychoanalysis was the greatest contribution to Italian culture of the Trieste of those years (see *Trieste*, 136), thanks especially to Edoardo Weiss (1889-1980), pioneer of the discipline in Italy and translator and popularizer of psychoanalytical works and theory. Constantly in contact with Freud, after moving to Rome Weiss founded in 1932 the “Società italiana di psicoanalisi” (Italian Society of Psychoanalysis) and *Rivista italiana di psicoanalisi*. The centrality of Trieste is also testified by the fact that in the city, in 1925, was held the first Italian Convention of Psychoanalysis (see Katia Pizzi, *A City in Search of an Author* [London–New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 177). The reasons of the vast success of the discipline among the intellectual class of Trieste has to be recognized not only in the obvious proximity to Vienna, but also in the characteristics of the city. Voghera, in his book on the early years of psychoanalysis in Trieste, delivers an eloquent depiction of the environment in which Freudian theory and practice took root: “Gli adulti del mio ambiente (e non solo gli adulti) erano quasi tutti dei neurotici. Non dei neurotici 'comuni', come lo sono quasi tutti gli umani su questa terra, ma dei neurotici gravemente tormentati dalla propria neurosi. Era, in altre parole, della gente che soffriva molto, che non riusciva a trovare pace e durevoli soddisfazioni in questa vita e non sperava d'altro canto in nessun'altra. La psicanalisi dava finalmente un volto ben definito al loro male, ne indicava le cause, faceva balenare qualche vaga speranza di guarigione” (Giorgio Voghera, *Gli anni della psicanalisi* [Pordenone: Studio tesi, 1980], 3-4). Bazlen, in his “Intervista su Trieste”, informs that the city had “one of the highest percentage [...] of madness and of suicides in Europe” (*Note senza testo*, 251) – information confirmed by Pizzi, who reports that in 1913 Trieste “returned the highest percentage of suicides of all the cities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire” (*A City in Search of an Author*, 11). Lastly, as David argues, one of the fundamental reasons of the success of psychoanalysis in Trieste, was the interest aroused by Freudian doctrine in the Jewish environment, which was “free from Christian awe, heavily positivist, culturally independent, and proud of recognizing itself in the genius of a brother” (*La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, 179).

<sup>85</sup> See Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 133.

World War, elaborated “his own new and original culture”, and did so thanks to “isolated individuals, connected to each others by personal relationship of friendship and by the exchange of avid and revolutionary readings”<sup>86</sup>. What strongly characterized their work was precisely the availability of an original and radically modern culture radiated by the near Vienna, to which the city, for its characteristics, was particularly receptive:

In the moment of the inflated and vacuous hyperbole of bourgeoisie, fated to a tragic failure, these intellectuals live and embody the truth of late-bourgeois individualism: the truth of the isolated individual who does not abdicate his own subjectivity, but recognize that this subjectivity can not realize itself in any social institution; the truth of the individual who actually draws his own truth from this solitude, from the awareness of not being anymore the concentrate and the mirror of the social totality, but rather a marginal and ensnared fragment which denies itself to that social totality.<sup>87</sup>

This “secret culture”<sup>88</sup> of Trieste was thus nourished by Mittel-European, especially Jewish culture (which found an ideal audience in the cultural elites of the city, which included a large Jewish component<sup>89</sup>), and was not the expression of an organized movement, nor of an aware literary creative tendency.

Bazlen claims that from the multicultural, multilingual, politically unstable, neurotic Trieste of the beginning of the Twentieth century could never originate a “Triestine creative culture”, and not even a typical “Triestine type”, an individual “with fixed characteristics” representative of the city, but rather

attempts, approximations emerged: figures, and experiments of God that were never completely definitive. People with different premises, who

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>89</sup> In regard to the interconnection between the “Literature of Crisis” and its Jewish fundamental component, Ara and Magris argue that “the Jew summarizes in itself both the dispersion of the social totality and the crisis of identity, both the concentration of individuality on itself and the irreducible resistance of the defector and of the shipwrecked person” (ibid., 135).



have to try to conciliate what is irreconcilable, who naturally cannot do it; and strange types emerge, adventurers of culture and life, with all the strange and tormented failures that derive from such premises. [...] And, as a Triestine type it does not exist, a Triestine creative culture does not exist either; creating a homogenous work with similar premises would have been impossible. Trieste, for these reasons, has been an excellent sounding board [...] and has not given absolutely anything that, somehow, brought a new element in European culture (I am not saying that it never gave any respectable work, but cancel Trieste from Europe, or from the world, and Europe remains exactly as it is). [...] And you have to consider that also the other artists thrown in Trieste [Stendhal, Richard Francis Burton, Charles James Lever, Robert Hamerling, Ferruccio Busoni, James Joyce] are among the least classifiable.<sup>90</sup>

It is not difficult to recognize as the author of one of the mentioned few “respectable works” a Triestine writer that Bazlen highly valued, Italo Svevo (“with a work that was, I believe, one of the few sharp contributions that Italian language literature gave to Europe at the end of the century”<sup>91</sup>); but the figure of the “adventurer of culture and life” seems to be extremely fitting for Bazlen himself, and lead us to wonder if within the description of this “type” the author is also concealing his own figure. The reference to Trieste as a “sounding board”, namely its role as a bridge between different cultures, also lead us to read in the passage a reference to Bazlen's own role of cultural mediator. As Ara and Magris suggest, Bazlen in fact, “with his boundless knowledge of everything that at that time was in Italy unknown and banished, by both Fascism and Crocean culture”, has to

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<sup>90</sup> Bazlen, *Scritti*, 251-253: “saltavano fuori dei tentativi, delle approssimazioni, figure mai completamente definitive, esperimenti di Dio giunti fino a un certo punto. Gente con premesse diverse, che deve tentare di conciliare gli inconciliabili, che naturalmente non ci riesce, e saltan fuori tipi strani, avventurieri della cultura e della vita, con tutti i fallimenti più strani e più tormentati che derivano da una tale impostazione. [...] E come non esiste un unico tipo triestino, non esiste nemmeno una cultura creativa triestina; creare un'opera omogenea con premesse simili sarebbe stato impossibile. Trieste, per queste ragioni, è stata un'ottima cassa di risonanza [...] e non ha dato proprio nulla che abbia in qualche modo portato un elemento nuovo nella cultura europea (non parlo che non abbia dato qualche opera rispettabile, ma cancellala dall'Europa, e tanto più dal mondo, e l'Europa rimane tale e quale). [...] E pensa che anche gli artisti stranieri sbattuti a Trieste [Stendhal, Richard Francis Burton, Charles James Lever, Robert Hamerling, Ferruccio Busoni, James Joyce] sono tutti tra i meno catalogabili”.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 253: “con un'opera che è stata uno dei pochi contributi vivi, a mio parere, che la letteratura di lingua italiana abbia dato all'Europa al fin de siècle”.

be considered the most fundamental agent of the diffusion of the most original cultural discoveries made by the “Other Trieste”<sup>92</sup>. “Vanguard, extra-European civilizations, Jungian depth psychology, mysticism, exploration of the occult”<sup>93</sup>: this is some of the material that Bobi Bazlen began smuggling outside of Trieste in the middle of the Twenties, when, widening his literary frequentations outside of the city, he started to leave a strong impression and to earn important ascendancy on many intellectuals and writers of the time.

If, as Calasso argues, “the argument Trieste”, in trying to understand the characteristics and peculiarity of Bazlen's figure and thought, might reveal itself a “misleading help”<sup>94</sup>, it is nevertheless evident that his formation in the first Hapsburg and then (from 1918) Italian Trieste of the beginning of the Twentieth century had a fundamental role in shaping his inclinations and interests, and in determining an important part of his future editorial activity. Bazlen in fact, as Cacciari suggests, belongs to the Mitteleuropa of the “Viennese of the language”<sup>95</sup> and is so “deeply connected to Vienna, [that] every attempt to understand [him] solely within the scope of Twentieth century Italian culture is a priori destined to fail”<sup>96</sup>. The Viennese Central Europe was in fact “completely at home”<sup>97</sup> in the city in which he was born in 1902 and which he would have definitely left in 1934. Some biographical notes should suffice to give an idea of the kind of multicultural environment in which Bazlen grew up.

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<sup>92</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 136.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 15.

<sup>95</sup> In Grasso, *Tuttilibri*.

<sup>96</sup> Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 171.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 170.

His father, Georg Eugen Bazlen, was a German Lutheran from Stuttgart who moved to Trieste around 1895 and who was probably employed in a commercial company<sup>98</sup>. His mother, Clotilde Levi Minzi, belonged to the Jewish petite bourgeoisie of Trieste, but converted to Lutheranism after her husband. Roberto Bazlen (“Robert” in his birth certificate<sup>99</sup>), the only son of the middle-aged couple, lost his father in 1903, the year following his birth, and, despite being baptized Lutheran, grew up in a Jewish household, composed by his mother, her two sisters Elvira and Estella, and his uncle Ignazio Hirsch (Estella's husband), a Jewish wealthy broker from Trieste who took on a paternal role towards the nephew. Voghera recollects that Bazlen, in the rare cases he talked about his family, did so in a caricatural way: “He used to say that he had three mothers, and a father that actually was not his father”<sup>100</sup>. According to his friends, the household environment was overprotective, and, years later, he would have needed to “get rid not of just one mother, but of three of them”<sup>101</sup>.

Bazlen attended the German Evangelical elementary school and, afterwards, the Real Gymnasium. While German was the language of his scholastic formation and (as also made evident by his writings) would have remained his favored and most congenial language, at home Bazlen spoke Italian and Triestine dialect. The chance to study in the German schools, which were attended by youths of the German, Slovenian, and Jewish

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<sup>98</sup> Voghera, probably using as source Aurelia Gruber Benco (“Requiem per Roberto Bazlen”, *Umana* 14.6-10 [1965]: 6), argues that Georg Eugen Bazlen might have been a bookseller (see Voghera's foreword to Roberto Bazlen and Giorgio Voghera, *Le tracce del sapiente. Lettere 1949-1965*, ed. Renzo Cigoi [Udine: Campanotto Editore, 1995], 21; from now on: *Tracce del sapiente*). The conjecture is suggestive, but lacks of other evidences (on this issue see also de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 41, note 12).

<sup>99</sup> See *ibid.*, 40, note 4.

<sup>100</sup> Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen nel ricordo di due amici”, 8.

<sup>101</sup> “[...] while keeping being loyal and fair towards the mother notion-function”, Onofri continues, “which he considered one of the most difficult roles” (“Contributo alla conoscenza di Bobi”, 32).

bourgeoisie of Trieste<sup>102</sup>, also allowed him to enlarge the circle of his acquaintances beyond the Jewish petite bourgeois environment of Trieste; he had in fact also “close friends among the Slovenians – a thing not common for the Italian bourgeoisie of Trieste”<sup>103</sup>.

In 1918, with the annexation of Trieste to Italy, German schools were closed, and sixteen-year-old Bazlen resumed his studies in an Italian secondary school. Voghera argues that these last years in the Italian school were certainly crucial for Bazlen, but for the negative influence they had on him: “they inspired him an invincible aversion against everything one can learn in school [...]. The great Classics of Italian literature always remained irrelevant to him, and the philosophy thought at school (particularly Idealistic philosophy) horrified him”<sup>104</sup>. Gruber Benco and La Ferla too argue that Bazlen harsh evaluation of Italian culture might be grounded in his scholastic experience<sup>105</sup>. What is certain is that he would have always favored German culture over the Italian one.

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<sup>102</sup> In this regard, see De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Voghera, *Gli anni della psicanalisi*, 180.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-178.

<sup>105</sup> Aurelia Gruber Benco stresses the differences between the standards of education offered by the Italian and the German schools – academic the Italian one, definitely modern the German one, which was grafted into “that Central-European world whose declining civilization had produced psychoanalysis with Freud, and – with Kubin, Kafka, and Musil – an introspective literature among the most refined” (“Requiem”, 6). Ara and Magris do not agree with this supposed superiority of the German schools over the Italian ones: “la formazione linguistico-filologica, l'accostamento diretto e la lettura di prima mano dei classici, l'insegnamento delle scienze naturali e della metodologia scientifica [avevano] un posto di primaria importanza nei ginnasi italiano e tedesco di Trieste. Forse la tensione spirituale che divideva e lacerava la città adriatica costituiva, per italiani e tedeschi, uno stimolo ad offrire ai giovani triestini, in una specie di competizione, questa volta pacifica, scuole ad altissimo livello” (*Trieste*, 46-47). La Ferla thus suggests to focus rather in the characteristics of Bazlen's own scholastic experience, and especially in the crucial role held by a certain Professor Mayer, his teacher at the Real Gymnasium, “an exceptional and enlightened educator [who] was inclined to stimulate cultural growth within the different individualities, hence fostering the critical sense of everyone and encouraging everyone to express themselves freely” (*Diritto al silenzio*, 17). According to La Ferla, Mayer's methodology “complementarily adhered to the scholastic structure of the German secondary school, fundamentally based on the direct teaching of literary texts through non-annotated books which predisposed for a non academic reading of the literary fact” (*ibid.*).

“German culture is a modern culture; the Italian one, you'll agree with me, is fairly outdated”, Bazlen argues in a 1924 letter to Giovanni Papini, “There have been some sporadic cases of geniality in Italy in these last centuries, but a continuous tradition has ceased with Baroque. Furthermore, German language, religiosity, and Weltanschauung are typically erotic, while in Italy Eros has been dead for 300 years”<sup>106</sup>.

Bazlen addresses the issue of the annexation of his hometown to Italy in “Intervista su Trieste”<sup>107</sup>, in which we find an amused and amusing unrhetorical, demystifying, and anti-nationalistic portrait of the city at the beginning of the century:

Austria was a rich country, and Trieste one of the richest cities of this rich country of this rich world [...] – an almost pantagruelian world, in which people worked a lot and ate even more; they drunk, made love, and in spite of all the nationalistic rhetoric, the problem was “hurrah for Spain, where you can eat and drink!” [...]; Austria was fair and tolerant, because it was old, because it had a deposit of ancient experiences, because it had all the dignity of the ceremonious dying people; the constitution recognized the same rights to all the people subjected to Austria, and the civil servants, observant to the constitution, really did not commit any injustice.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Bazlen to Papini, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1924, in Silvia Assenza, “Lettura e creazione. Note a margine di una lettera inedita di Roberto Bazlen”, in *Letteratura e oltre. Studi in onore di Giorgio Baroni*, ed. Paola Ponti (Pisa-Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2012), 390: “La cultura tedesca è una cultura moderna; l'italiana, sarà d'accordo anche Lei che è piuttosto inattuale. C'è stato in Italia qualche caso sporadico di genialità in questi ultimi secoli ma una tradizione continua è cessata col barocco. Poi la lingua, la religiosità, la Weltanschauung tedesca è tipicamente erotica, mentre per l'Italia Eros è morto da 300 anni”. Bazlen's letter to Papini has been recently discovered by Assenza, and published in its entirety within the mentioned article.

<sup>107</sup> “Intervista su Trieste” (published for the first time in 1970 in *Note senza testo*) is one the longest and most finished writings Bazlen has left. It is not possible, as for most of Bazlen's writings, to precisely date it, but the editor Calasso indicates that it had to be composed in the years immediately following the Second World War (see “Notizie sui manoscritti”, in *Scritti*, 395). Written in Italian, we do not know if the piece was commissioned to him and if and where it was supposed to be published.

<sup>108</sup> Bazlen, *Note senza testo*, 244-245: “l'Austria era uno stato ricco, Trieste una delle città più ricche di questo stato ricco di questo mondo ricco [...] – un mondo quasi pantagruelico, nel quale si lavorava molto e si mangiava di più, bevevano, facevano all'amore, e nonostante tutta la rettorica nazionalistica il problema era eviva la Spagna dove se beve e dove se magna [...], l'Austria era equa e tollerante, perché era vecchia, perché aveva un sedimento di antiche esperienze, perché aveva tutta la dignità dei moribondi cerimoniosi; la costituzione riconosceva gli stessi diritti a tutti i popoli soggetti all'Austria, e la burocrazia, ligia alla costituzione, veramente non commetteva ingiustizie”.

In this city which shared with the rest of the Hapsburg empire an outlook on life at the same time orderly and epicurean, Austrians, in Bazlen's recollection, were always respectful and tolerant with Italians and Slovenians<sup>109</sup>; and this made the Italian irredentist component's claims even more unjustified and grotesque, since the biggest problem the irredentists had, Bazlen writes, was Austrians' magnanimity, the exemplarity of their civil servants and functionaries:

So, the city fights for its Italianity, but Austria, undaunted, grants everything. Trieste receives everything it needs, at the point that – I once was told – one of the greatest abilities of irredentist politics consisted exactly in asking for the Italian University in Trieste while managing not to obtain it. If they had obtained it, they wouldn't have had any argument left.<sup>110</sup>

To the eyes of Bazlen, the very sense of belonging to Italy of the middle class of Trieste (dialectal city surrounded by a territory in which a Slavic language is mostly spoken) appears grotesque, and its cultural points of reference ludicrous<sup>111</sup>. The

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<sup>109</sup> Trieste in fact, Bazlen writes, was entrusted to unexceptionable bureaucrats: “che permettono tutto, che (pur con più stile) sono più liberali degli irredentisti, che ogni tanto sono costretti a proibire qualcosa quando uno dei tanti Sem Benelli vuol venire a Trieste a fare una dimostrazione della mancanza di tatto italiana; che arrestano proprio quando non possono farne a meno, seccatissimi di doverlo fare, e allora grandi scandali, oscurantismo, Medio Evo, interpellanze in parlamento, evviva la libertà. E questa vita pacifica, ben nutrita, eguale, continua fino al '14, nell'ultimo tempo con un argomento di entusiasmo in più: il bel suol d'amore di Tripoli che stava per diventare italiana al rombo del canon” (ibid., 250).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 249-250: “Dunque, la città lotta per la sua italianità, ma l'Austria, imperterrita, concede tutto. Trieste riceve tutto quanto ha bisogno, tanto che, m'hanno detto, una delle maggiori abilità della politica irredentista consisteva proprio nel chiedere e farsi contemporaneamente rifiutare l'Università italiana a Trieste. Se l'avessero avuta, non avrebbero avuto più argomenti”.

<sup>111</sup> See ibid., 246-247: “E la situazione era delicata: una città che parla un dialetto veneto, circondata da una campagna nella quale non si parla altro che una lingua slava, la parte più intellettuale della borghesia, che si sente staccata dal paese cui crede di appartenere per lingua e cultura (benché non conoscano il 'toscano' e benché la cultura... ma della cultura non parliamo), e che è dunque costretta, in pieno ventesimo secolo, a ricorrere a un frasario rettorico ottocentesco da Risorgimento, che tiene alta la fiaccola, che crede che l'italiano sia l'idioma gentil sonante e puro, e Firenze la città dei fiori, che crede che a Roma mungano la lupa per dar da bere il latte alla stirpe, che offre lampade votive, che attacca dappertutto leoni di San Marco, che freme invoca palpita aspira, soffre attende, agogna, si strugge, arde, si immola, rivendica, anela, brama, e quando al Teatro Comunale davano il *Nabucco*, il pensiero di tutti i commercianti sensali direttori di banca e di società di assicurazioni, medici, avvocati, importatori e

nationalism of the Triestines seems to him even more absurd for the fact that, when they try to speak Italian, they speak an artificial and anachronistic nineteenth-century literary language<sup>112</sup>. The author finally ironically narrates of how, at last, the irredentist spirit arose within him as well; it is during his first trip to Italy (in the nearby rural Friuli) that he, seven-year-old, realizes to be an “oppressed”, and that Austrians (that is his fellow citizens and classmates) are therefore the “oppressors”:

And there, in the hotel, great celebration “pro” National League, tricolours - flags - speeches - usurpers - invaders - hangmen - foreign rule - Mameli's anthem - Royal march. And a mustached lady (I am not exaggerating) this tall and big – I will never forget her, and may God not forgive her –, when she hears that I attend German schools, she explains to *me*, with all the ill will she is capable of – to *me*, hardly one-meter-tall –, that *she* is the oppressed, and that I am an oppressor; which left on me a really shocking impression, at the point that I applied myself to become an oppressed as well, at all costs, and I believe I fairly succeeded. Therefore: down with Austria, the invader - the chump - the saucer-licker; and everything with the enthusiasm of a kid in an age in which you play at being cowboys and Indians, and suffering to death for having to attend German schools.<sup>113</sup>

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esportatori seduti in platea, di professori di scuola media seduti in galleria, di studenti e di sartine che si 'struccano' in loggione, va sull'ali dorate, e l'entusiasmo è tale da far andare, come si diceva a Trieste, 'giù' il teatro”.

<sup>112</sup> See *ibid.*, 247: “Un mio professore, che fa il primo viaggio in Italia dopo esser stato redento, mi porta in regalo un libro con dedica 'qual picciol pegno di grande affetto', e un mio cugino, che poi è diventato una persona civile, disegna [...] per la Lega Nazionale una cartolina molto De Carolis a linee sottili nere e rosse, con ara, brando, libro aperto, melograno, e con la dicitura: 'pure a noi converrà vincer la pugna', io nell'enciclopedia dei ragazzi, trovo una poesia di cui non capisco un accidente, ma mi piace tanto che finisco col saperla a memoria, e giro per la casa urlando: 'Quando Giason del Pelio / spinse nel mar gli abeti / e primo corse a fendere / co' remi il seno a Teti / cantava il vate odrisio', finché una nostra domestica mi domanda che lingua parli. Una poetessa triestina, sul vaporetto di Grignano, dice a suo figlio che ha buttato per terra la sua spada di legno: 'Dario, raccatta il brando’’. The same linguistic issue is humorously described by Svevo in *La coscienza di Zeno*, in the first meeting of Zeno and his rival and friend Guido Speier: “Egli parlava il toscano con grande naturalezza mentre io e Ada eravamo condannati al nostro dialettaccio” (Italo Svevo, *Romanzi e “Continuazioni”* [Milano: Mondadori, 2004], 735). On the same topic, see also Ara e Magris, who point out that the generation of the intellectuals from Trieste that, at the beginning of the century, moved to Florence, did so also to obtain “a linguistic formation, a more refined stylistic mastery of Italian language, which might have allowed them to ground and develop their own culture” (*Trieste*, 92).

<sup>113</sup> Bazlen, *Note senza testo*, 249: “E lì nell'albergo grande festa 'pro' Lega Nazionale, tricolori bandiere discorsi usurpatori invasori impiccatori dominio straniero inno di Garibaldi inno di Mameli marcia reale. E una signora, grossa così e alta così (non esagero) coi baffi, non me la dimenticherò mai, e che Dio possa non perdonarle, quando sente che frequento le scuole tedesche mi spiega, a me, con tutto il

It has been observed that Bazlen's portrait of the city is “indubitably tendentious and whimsical”<sup>114</sup>. In this regard it is probably necessary to point out that “Intervista su Trieste” was written in the years immediately following the Second World War, when, to the cosmopolitan intellectual of Jewish heritage, the extreme results of Italian nationalism and of its rhetoric had manifested themselves in their most dreadful and barbarous consequences. It is also to be noticed though that, if the tone of “Intervista su Trieste” is mild and ironically demystifying from its very opening lines<sup>115</sup>, it would probably be reductive to interpret Bazlen's considerations as a facetious criticism towards the rhetoric of irredentism. In this piece of prose that helps to appreciate Bazlen's unequivocal anti-nationalistic positions we in fact learn not only of his harsh judgment towards the nationalism of the Triestine bourgeoisie, but also of his condescending contempt for contemporary Italian culture and literature, considered poor and outdated compared to the German ones. This is evident in the description of the last present left by Austrians, in the aftermath of the war, to the recently redeemed city:

An entire great unofficial culture, really important and unknown books, searched and collected with loving care by people who read those books because they needed exactly those books. [...] When today I hear of definitely unobtainable books which have been rediscovered in these last twenty or thirty years, and which I will never find again, I remember that

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rancore di cui era capace, a me, che avrò avuto poco più di un metro, che lei è un'oppressa e che io sono un oppressore, il che m'ha fatto un'impressione veramente sconvolgente, tanto che mi sono messo d'impegno a diventare un oppresso anch'io a qualsiasi costo, e credo di esserci riuscito abbastanza bene. Dunque abbasso l'Austria, l'invasore il gnocco el lecapiatin, e ciò con tutto l'entusiasmo di un ragazzo che ha l'età nella quale si gioca agli indiani, soffrendo a morte di dover frequentare le scuole tedesche”.

<sup>114</sup> Guagnini, “La cultura. Una fisionomia difficile”, 310.

<sup>115</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 242: “Dunque... però bada che non vivo a Trieste dal '34, e che non ho più messo piede a Trieste dal '37, e non posso raccontarti che storie molto vecchie: Son nato nel 1902, sedici anni d'Austria, poi la redenzione, e poi, fino al '34, altri sedici anni d'Italia – più tardi mi hanno liberato ancora una volta, ma questo con Trieste non c'entra più – stiamo a vedere quante volte mi capiterà ancora”.



they went through my hands, in the bookstalls of the ghetto, thirty years ago, dusty and ready to go astray, at the price of one or two lire. I am talking about the libraries of the Germans, of the Austrian navy officials, etc.; if the situation had been the opposite, and if the Italians had left, the bookstalls would have been crushed by the weight of Carducci - Pascoli - D'Annunzio and Sem Benelli, with a side of Zambini and of other people who brought bad luck.<sup>116</sup>

Trieste, “abstract and premeditated city”, is a city of contrasts which looks “for its reason of existence in these contrasts themselves and in their insolubility”<sup>117</sup>. Bazlen knows that Trieste is “everything but a melting pot”, but also that it still is a place of many encounters, of juxtaposition of elements not normally in contact with each other<sup>118</sup>. If the many national and cultural identities within the city can not merge and determine a single common identity, the city still may represent a laboratory of multiculturalism, for the way in which in it different ethnicities, languages, and religions coexist, and for the way in which Trieste is able to welcome, adopt, and integrate within Italian culture the Mittel-European one. In this regard, Fabio Finotti points out that Trieste, thanks to “its horizons which extend beyond the national borders”<sup>119</sup>, represents an exemplary and

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 254: “Tutta una grande cultura non ufficiale, libri veramente importanti e sconosciutissimi, ricercati e raccolti con amore, da gente che leggeva quel libro perché aveva proprio bisogno di quel libro. Tutta roba che mi passava per le mani, dove scoprivo roba che non avevo mai inteso nominare [...]. Ancora adesso, se sento di libri definitivamente introvabili e che sono stati rivalutati in questi ultimi venti o trent'anni, e che non troverò mai più, ricordo che mi passavano per le mani, sulle bancarelle del ghetto, una trentina d'anni fa, polverosi e pronti ad essere dispersi, a una lira l'uno, a due lire l'uno. Parlo delle biblioteche dei tedeschi, degli ufficiali di marina austriaci, ecc., se la situazione fosse stata l'inversa, e se ne fossero andati gli italiani, le bancarelle si sarebbero sfasciate sotto il peso di Carducci Pascoli D'Annunzio e Sem Benelli, con contorno di Zambini e di altra gente che portava male”.

<sup>117</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 4.

<sup>118</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 251: “A occhio e croce, direi che Trieste è stata tutto meno che un crogiolo: il crogiolo è quell'arnese in cui metti dentro tutti gli elementi più disparati, li fondi, e quello che salta fuori è una fusione, omogenea, con una distribuzione uguale di tutte le componenti, e con caratteristiche costanti – ora, a Trieste, che io sappia, un tipo fuso non s'è mai prodotto, o un tipo con caratteristiche costanti [...] – c'erano le possibilità di quello che gli italiani chiamano 'dialoghi' (quando sono chic), di molti incontri, di accostamenti tra elementi che normalmente non si avvicinavano”.

<sup>119</sup> Fabio Finotti, *Italia. L'invenzione della patria* (Milano: Bompiani, 2016), 425. According to Finotti, the case of Italo Svevo is a particularly emblematic one of the openness and receptiveness of the city:

unrivaled site and agent of the post-national idea of “italicity”, which contemplates a notion of “variegated homeland” able to include, even within Italian borders, more than one ethnicity and language; which actually permits to individuals and groups multiple national and cultural identities; and which hence allows to leave behind the “nostalgic mythology” of nationalism<sup>120</sup>. One of the virtue of the city seems to be thus – if not for many of his fellow citizens, at least for Bazlen – its faculty to be a laboratory of anti-nationalism and anti-rhetoric. This is particularly evident in the above-quoted description of Bazlen's first trip to Italy, when the young boy – precisely in front of the patriotic songs, of the flags, and of the mustached peasant woman from Friuli who forces him to claim his national and cultural identity – experiences an impression of radical unbelonging, of complete extraneousness. This is an experience not dissimilar from the one that Ara and Magris describe as common to the writers who “lived thoroughly the heterogeneity of Trieste, its multiplicity of elements irreducible to unity”, and who understood that “Trieste – like the Hapsburg empire of which it was part – was a model of the heterogeneity and of the contradictoriness of the entire modern civilization, devoid

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“Scegliere il nome Svevo a Trieste significa [...] contrapporre un'idea di italicità aperta alla chiusa italianità dei nazionalisti, suggerire che il destino della patria si deve compiere nel coniugarsi e modellarsi reciproco di diverse identità” (ibid., 418).

<sup>120</sup> See ibid., 429-430: “[L'italianità] vede l'Italia come patria di un popolo che vive solo entro i confini della nazione, possiede la piena cittadinanza politica, parla la medesima lingua, appartiene allo stesso sangue: l'italianità appartiene solo agli italiani. L'italicità invece vede l'Italia come patria di un popolo che: - si estende al di là dei suoi confini e al di là dei diritti di cittadinanza; - è legato alla patria da una relazione non geografica o biologica, ma culturale e affettiva; - non si riduce a una sola etnia e a una sola lingua neppure all'interno della penisola. L'italicità appartiene dunque a tanti individui o gruppi che pur non avendo la cittadinanza italiana ormai vedono nell'Italia la loro patria, o una delle loro patrie: non sempre l'unica, dato che nel mondo postnazionale le appartenenze divengono molteplici, e le frontiere che attraversano il cuore degli individui possono congiungere patrie diverse. Ma certo la prospettiva che i grandi scrittori contemporanei suggeriscono all'Italia è legata alla capacità di aprire l'ex paese' al di là della mitologia nostalgica del suo passato, verso la scelta coraggiosa di non ignorare le mille forme dell'italicità, integrandole in una visione inclusiva della patria”.

of central foundation and unity of values”<sup>121</sup>.

Bazlen – analogously to other contemporary intellectuals of the same geographic area and of similar background and formation such as Italo Svevo and Carlo Michelstaedter – recognized himself as Italian, and chose the space of Italian culture and language as the space of his life and work; at the same time German remained his favored and most congenial language, and German culture (in comparison to which he considered the Italian one as backward and conservative) a fundamental point of reference. By formation and circumstances Bazlen seems thus to participate to two different worlds that cannot exhaust his cultural identity, but which in case allow him a disenchanting gaze on both of them, and on the idea of identity itself<sup>122</sup>. In Trieste – “bourgeois par excellence” city, whose history “has been essentially the history of its bourgeois rise and decline”<sup>123</sup> – Bazlen had to find first of all an unparalleled training ground of homelessness, and thus

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<sup>121</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 4.

<sup>122</sup> In regard to the issue of national identity, it is significant that in his letters of the fifties, Bazlen would have often referred to Italy as his fatherland, though ironically addressing it, within letters written in Italian, with the German term “Vaterland”. As some accounts and Bazlen's own writings suggest, his sense of belonging might in case be recognized, on a cultural and identity level, to the European dimension. Pellegrini in fact informs us that in 1937 Bazlen was offered a position as director of a bank branch office in São Paulo, Brazil, opportunity which would have allowed him to leave Italy, where one year later the Racial Laws would have become effective, but that he declined the offer: “Non mi parlò più di quell'incidente, mi disse soltanto, mesi dopo, che non gli era lecito lasciare l'Europa, sarebbe stata una rinuncia a se stesso” (“Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 60). Bazlen's “Il nazionalismo è veramente morto?” (originally published on *Comunità* on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1947, and now in La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 184-185) also allows to draw similar conclusions. In the brief piece of prose, replying to the question: “is nationalism really dead?” (by a reader or by the director Adriano Olivetti), Bazlen writes: “Come vuole che lo possa sapere? [...] Lei stesso, forse, avrebbe risposto, nel 1920, con competenza di causa che non era unicamente ingenuità, che la fase nazionalistica della storia europea era 'superata', e che il nazionalismo non sarebbe rinato mai più. Io quella volta avrei sicuramente risposto così: i poeti che leggevo, già durante l'altra guerra si erano lanciati i loro messaggi di fratellanza umana al di là delle trincee. [...] Eravamo gonfi di buone intenzioni paneuropee, si pubblicavano antologie universali che si chiamavano per lo meno 'i cinque continenti', ben presto avremmo abolito i confini e i doganieri illuministi e 'superati', non gettavano che uno sguardo formale nei vagoni-letto in cui viaggiavano i giovani lettori di Bernabooth, uno sguardo distratto, incomprensibili e superflui come tutti i rimasugli del passato. Anch'io quella volta avrei risposto che il nazionalismo era morto, e per sempre” (ibid., 184).

<sup>123</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 4.

an ideal free port from which setting out for what Contorbia has described as his “future sailing [...] in the seas (not excluded the extreme ones) of modernity”<sup>124</sup>.

## 2. Kill the Bourgeois! Voilà

We possess only few letters of Bazlen dating back to the 32 years he spent in Trieste (among them, few letters to Montale and the mentioned extracts from the letters to Gerti Frankl Tolazzi). In addition to the information deducible from “Intervista su Trieste” (in which Bazlen in any case declares nothing more than the years of his birth, of his departure, and of his last trip to Trieste), we do not have any other writing by Bazlen describing his years in the city. Thus, the recollection of his Triestine years seems to be a turf mostly controlled by his early friends and acquaintances who took upon themselves the narration of this period of his life (in this regard, La Ferla argues that in Trieste there has been a process of “posthumous appropriation” of Bazlen's name: “a multiple process of provincialization of a stateless individual”<sup>125</sup>).

In *Gli anni della psicoanalisi* (1980), Giorgio Voghera, who first met Bazlen in 1917, remembers him as “lively, carefree, iconoclast by profession, often ironic with the people he didn't esteem [...]. He always walked in a hurry, almost always carrying a book under his arm”<sup>126</sup>. Del Giudice's novel, which mostly avails itself of the recollections of

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<sup>124</sup> Franco Contorbia, “Genova-Trieste 1925: Adriano Grande tra Bazlen e Montale”, in *Studi di filologia e letteratura offerti a Franco Croce* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1997), 596.

<sup>125</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 85.

<sup>126</sup> Voghera, *Gli anni della psicoanalisi*, 174-175.

Bazlen's Triestine acquaintances, reports accounts in the same vein (“The people in the square used to say: ‘That stooping, odd young man, with many books under his arm’”<sup>127</sup>), which at times stress out the unconventional characteristics of his figure (“He loved paradoxes, boutades, like any assimilated Jew”<sup>128</sup>; “already when he was young, he lived for the sake of new experiences; he had never directed his life setting himself a goal, but rather, as he used to say, in being amused of living”<sup>129</sup>), at times his mutable, mercurial nature (“He did not have the dialectic sense of gradualness, like Goethe. He often shed his skin, and this was one of the causes of his incapacity for realization: he used to forget what he had done – not because he wanted to exceed it, he just dropped it”<sup>130</sup>; “Changing continuously, as he used to do, had to be exhausting; I mean, always starting everything from scratch”<sup>131</sup>).

Giani Stuparich dedicates important passages of *Trieste nei miei ricordi* (1948) to Bazlen (mentions that, from what we may infer from a letter to Voghera, had to upset him<sup>132</sup>). “He knew many languages, and there was not a book of which people was talking about that he did not know”<sup>133</sup>, Stuparich writes: “I had a clear impression of the way this young man cultivated himself one day I visited him at his home. [...] Bobi was

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<sup>127</sup> Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 49: “In piazza la gente diceva: ‘Quel giovane curvo, un po' matto, con molti libri sotto il braccio!’”.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 27: “Gli piaceva il paradosso, la boutade, come a ogni ebreo assimilato”.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 28: “lui viveva per il gusto di fare esperienze, già da giovane; non aveva mai impostato la sua vita proponendosi uno scopo ma come diceva lui stesso nel divertirsi a vivere”.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 33: “Lui non aveva il senso dialettico della gradualità, alla Goethe. Cambiava pelle spesso, e qui anche stava la sua incapacità di realizzare; dimenticava quello che aveva fatto, non per un voler superare, ma per un lasciar cadere”.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 54: “Doveva essere molto faticoso cambiare sempre, come faceva lui; voglio dire ricominciare tutto da capo”.

<sup>132</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Voghera of December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1949, in *Tracce del sapiente*, 29: “ho capito una volta di più perché non voglio rivedere trieste (anche il libro di stuparich, che ho sfogliato rapidamente, me lo fa comprendere, gründlich [a fondo]”. In his correspondence Bazlen often omitted capital letters.

<sup>133</sup> Stuparich, *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, 15.

in bed, laid down on the pillows: on the bedside table, a tall pile of books; on both sides of the bed, other piles of books. He later confessed to me that, even when he was not sick, he often read by his bed”<sup>134</sup>. This image of Bazlen as “horizontal” reader will keep lingering on his figure, and will be brilliantly developed, as we will see, by Rolando Damiani. We now want to underline how already in the recollections of Bazlen's years in Trieste a precise portrait was set, a portrait with at its center the range and originality of his culture, his approach to literature, and – years before his most important publishing collaborations – his role as discoverer of books and authors and of prompter of literary suggestions.

Within Bazlen's circle of Triestine intellectual acquaintances we find his peers (among them Gillo Dorfles, Giorgio Carmelich, Carlo Schiffrer, Aurelia Benco, Anita Pittoni, Gerti Frankl Tolazzi, Quarantotti Gambini), but also elder and already established artists and intellectuals (Silvio Benco, Virgilio Giotti, Vittorio Bolaffio, Umberto Saba, Italo Svevo). Stuparich, who belonged to the second group, remembers that, “when it came to modern literatures or modern currents of thought, he knew better than all of us, mature and advanced in years”<sup>135</sup>, and describes him as a man “with a special nose for tracking down authors and not well-known works that soon would have caused a sensation and would have reached universal fame. Even just leafing through publishing houses' catalogues, he managed to hit the target”<sup>136</sup>. According to Stuparich, Bazlen was the first one to “import” to Trieste authors such as Lawrence, Gide, Faulkner, Valéry, Esenin, Cocteau, Bloch, Eliot, Joyce, Hemingway, Kafka – writers that at that time

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 17.

“meant something only to few initiates to the cult of modern literatures”<sup>137</sup>. Dorflies adds to the list Wedekind, Kraus, Spengler, Rilke, Kris<sup>138</sup>. Voghera completes the inventory with Dos Passos, Döblin, Zweig, Heinrich Mann, and recalls that in those years Bazlen was already deeply interested in African, Indian, and pre-Columbian art, and also in psychoanalysis, eastern philosophies, astrology, alchemy, chiromancy, and magic<sup>139</sup>. Years later Bazlen would have recognized that exactly in these years (“right after 1920”) his “last (and already vacillating) Western certainties” were completely crushed<sup>140</sup>.

Addressing Bazlen's eccentric interests and the unsystematic nature of his readings, Stuparich argues that they were not signals of “disorderly culture” or “refined dilettantism”, but rather the result of a “deep orientation of taste”, of a sharp “attention on what was more lively”; his indications, if at times questionable, were in fact always “important and of keen interest”<sup>141</sup>, and earned him the respect and the attention of the most prominent intellectuals of the city. In this regard Stelio Mattioni, in *Storia di Umberto Saba*, describes the friendship between Bazlen and the more mature poet, starting from their first meeting: “seventeen-year-old Roberto Bazlen enters Saba's bookstore asking for books about Futurism; Saba delivers a tirade against Futurists, then gets him the books [...] but, to 'punish' him, he reads him Petrarch. A real friendship

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> See Dorflies, *Lacerti della memoria*, 71 and 146.

<sup>139</sup> See Voghera, *Gli anni della psicanalisi*, 180. Regarding a probably caricatural portrait of these interests, see the entry of December 16<sup>th</sup> 1944 of Massimiliano Majnoni's recently published diary (“*Sopravvivere alle rovine*”. *Diario privato di un banchiere (Roma 1943-1945)*, ed. Marino Viganò [Torino: Nino Aragno Editore, 2013], 258), from which we learn of a meeting between the aristocratic banker Majnoni and Giacomo Debenedetti: “Il De Benedetti [*sic*] non mi è molto simpatico. Mi ha parlato di Bazlen, e dei disegni che quest'ultimo si è dato a fare, e che senza dubbio non sono senza un certo interesse. Da giovane, quando lo conobbe lui a Trieste, Bobi faceva il mago”.

<sup>140</sup> Bazlen to Foà, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 339.

<sup>141</sup> Stuparich, *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, 17.

follows”<sup>142</sup>. According to Mattioni, Saba was pleased to spend time with “this extremely intelligent boy who [was] willing to spend whole days with him studying the displacement of an accent in a verse, or the change of an adjective”<sup>143</sup>. Bazlen, on the other hand, was fascinated by this man “who [had] published”, and who initiated him to the classics<sup>144</sup>. The image of an “unweaned” Bazlen<sup>145</sup> being instructed on versification by the mature poet is fascinating, especially in relation to the linguistic sensitivity and intelligence that Bazlen would have displayed years later in the notes and suggestions on Montale's poems. More surprising is the influence that this young man “filled with readings” and “extremely well-informed in comparison with the Trieste of these years” wielded towards the older poet, who, according to Mattioni, largely benefitted of his literary advices<sup>146</sup>. At least until 1926<sup>147</sup> Bazlen was often a guest at Saba's, and part of

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<sup>142</sup> Stelio Mattioni, *Storia di Umberto Saba* (Milano: Camunia, 1989), 81. The source of this account might be Bazlen himself, whom Mattioni met for the first time in 1959, while carrying out research for the book on Saba that he finally published thirty years later. Regarding Mattioni's frequentation with Bazlen and the mentioned encounter, see Mattioni's account in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 56-57.

<sup>143</sup> Mattioni, *Umberto Saba*, 81.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Saba, because of Bazlen's young age, referred to him as one of his own “amici lattanti” (see Paola Frandini, *Il teatro della memoria. Giacomo Debenedetti dalle opere e i documenti* [Lecce: Manni, 2001], 46).

<sup>146</sup> See Mattioni, *Umberto Saba*, 82.

<sup>147</sup> On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1926 Bazlen writes to Montale: “Ho rotto, in forma silenziosa e discreta, ogni mia relazione con i Saba. Mi dispiace per la Linuccia, cui voglio molto bene, e che resta una delle persone più rispettabili che abbia mai conosciuto, ma i due plebei erano insopportabili” (*Lettere a Montale*, 377). Two months later, Bazlen updates his friend: “I miei rapporti con i Saba: Ottimi con Linuccia, che non vedo da cinque mesi. Discreti col vate, che ho visto una volta tempo fa. Pessimi (irrimediabilmente) con la Lina, che spero di non vedere mai più in vita mia” (December 26<sup>th</sup> 1926, in *ibid.*, 378). The estrangement between Saba and Bazlen, according to Mattioni, might have been due to Bazlen's relationship with the poet's daughter Linuccia, which costed him, in 1926, the possibility of being allowed in Saba's home (see *Umberto Saba*, 106). Bazlen's frequentation with the poet, although more sporadic, continued in the following years, even after Bazlen moved away from Trieste. The relationship between the two, as Saba's letters testify, remained friendly. In this regard, see for instance the letter sent by Saba to his wife on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1945, in which he describes his most recent encounter with Bazlen and Debenedetti: “[...] Così almeno dice Giacomino, che in questo momento va pazzo per me; aggiunte ieri che, come un bambino va a funghi, io vado per Roma a gloria e *Scorciatoie*. Bobi che era presente, è caduto dal ridere sopra un divano, e ci volle un po di tempo per farlo 'rinvenire'. [...] Mi hanno anche tanto pregato un articolo su Trieste; ma sono in dubbio... Bobi mi consiglia di *non* farlo;



the group that with him regularly frequented Café Garibaldi, one of the Triestine cafés where the intellectuals of the city used to meet. The depth of this friendship and the high opinion that Saba had of his young friend are confirmed by the fact that Bazlen was one of the six recipients to which the first edition of Saba's *Canzoniere* (1921) was dedicated<sup>148</sup>.

On January 13<sup>th</sup> 1924, Bazlen writes to Giovanni Papini what he facetiously defines his “first intellectual letter”<sup>149</sup>, and which, according to the ideas expressed in it, also promises to be the last one:

Dear Mr. Papini, after a two-months fight with my divine indolence, I only today thank You for considering me for those translations, and I am sorry I have to decline. For three reasons. First of all, I am becoming day by day less intellectual and more *comme il faut* [respectable]: I go to the stock market, I will in time start selling coffee and sugar with great dedication; furthermore, I have discovered the unpredictable necessity to become as soon as possible doctor in commercial and economic sciences, which is why I have to start studying. I do not intend to waste the time I have left at a desk.<sup>150</sup>

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faccia invece – mi ha detto – un sonetto postumo. E mandi in malora i giornali” (Umberto Saba, *Atroce paese che amo* [Milano: Bompiani, 1987], 13-15). According to Mattioni, Bazlen's opinion on Saba's work and figure was however ruthless: “Bazlen ci disse: come poeta, era un lavoratore eccezionale, instancabile. E della sua poesia: una bella affermazione d'arte, ma inutile in quanto attestata su posizioni ormai arretrate rispetto al resto del mondo, andato oltre, molto oltre; tutto quello che non dice qualcosa in più, anche se si può accettare come attestazione di bellezza, è inutile all'uomo; la vita è divenire, l'opera che resta indietro non serve alla storia della civiltà; Saba è stato l'ultimo poeta matto e cieco, sordo a tutto ciò che non lo riguardava nel suo ambito stretto come un camice. Saba non poteva essere letterato perché non era colto, non poteva essere umanitario perché egocentrico. Nella sua poesia (autentica) di vivo c'è soltanto lui stesso, con le sue esperienze mediocri, da provinciale” (*Umberto Saba*, 81-82).

<sup>148</sup> The other five recipients were Dioniso Romanellis, Virgilio Giotti, Emerico Schiffer, Ruggero Rovani, and Vittorio Bolaffio (see *ibid.*, 86, and Pizzi, *A city in Search of an Author*, 57).

<sup>149</sup> See Assenza, “Lettura e creazione”, 390: “Questa è la prima lettera intellettuale che ho scritto in vita mia; mi scusi quel tanto di arido, di schematico, di superficiale e di disordinato che c'è qui dentro”.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 389-390: “Egregio signor Papini, dopo aver lottato per due mesi con la mia divina indolenza, La ringrazio appena oggi d'aver pensato a me per quelle traduzioni e mi dispiace doverLe dare una risposta negativa. Per tre ragioni. Prima di tutto, divento ogni giorno meno intellettuale e più *comme il faut*: vado in borsa, col tempo mi metterò a vendere caffè e zucchero con molta convinzione; inoltre ho scoperto l'imprevedibile necessità di diventare prima possibile dottore in scienze commerciali ed economiche, ragion per cui mi devo mettere a studiare. Il tempo che mi resta non ho nessuna voglia di

The letter shows how Bazlen, despite pursuing a degree in economics (“Economia e Commercio” was at the time the only faculty of the University of Trieste) and planning to professionally follow his uncle’s footsteps, was already known and appreciated for his expertise in German literature outside of Trieste. We do not precisely know the magnitude and the characteristics of his intellectual frequentations and how he established them, but a letter that Saba wrote to Aldo Palazzeschi in 1923 introducing him Bazlen<sup>151</sup> suggests that the twenty-one-year-old Triestine intellectual was at the time already desirous of meeting the established writers and intellectuals of his time, and of widening his literary acquaintances beyond Trieste.

Only few weeks after mailing the mentioned letter to Papini, Bazlen moved to Genoa, where he would have stayed until April 1925 (at that time he had arguably already definitively interrupted his studies at the University of Trieste). Here, he worked for a brief time for a branch office of the Atlantic Refining Company of Philadelphia, and afterwards for the import company of friend Giulio Morpurgo. According to Morpurgo's daughter Lucia (intellectual and translator with whom Bazlen would have become, years later, close friend), Bazlen was an “awful articulated clerk”<sup>152</sup>, and Bazlen himself would

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perderlo a tavolino”.

<sup>151</sup> “Caro Palazzeschi – Ti prego di concedere un'udienza al mio amico Roberto Bazlen, che ti ammira, ti vuol bene e desidera conoscerti. [...] Se il suo nome ti riesce ostico, chiamalo semplicemente, come lo chiamiamo noi: Bobi” (Saba, Umberto. Letter to Aldo Pazzeschi, 24 Feb. 1923. Archivio digitale del '900 letterario italiano. Collection: Aldo Palazzeschi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Saba, Umberto). From the above-mentioned letter to Papini, we deduce that Bazlen met him and Palazzeschi in Spring 1923: “Mi vergogno ancora quando penso a come questa primavera mi sono comportato a casa Sua: ma oltre ad un certo naturale e comprensibile 'déconcertant' c'era quel maledetto vino di Pantelleria che avevo bevuto in casa Fortuna; m'ero proposto di non bere [...] per venire da Lei colla mente perfettamente scevra. Non ne ho bevuto molto, ma gli effetti sono stati disastrosi lo stesso. Nella speranza di vederLa finalmente a Trieste più irredenta che mai, e pregandoLa di ricordarmi a Palazzeschi, resto il Suo Roberto Bazlen” (Assenza, “Lettura e creazione”, 390).

<sup>152</sup> Giuseppe Marcenaro, “Il giovane Bazlen da Svevo a Montale”, *La Stampa - Tuttolibri*, March 23, 1994,

have later caustically described his experience in Genova as his “first, very failed, experiment of practical life”<sup>153</sup>. Nevertheless, he would have kept pursuing a commercial career until 1929, and did that, according to Svevo, with some bright perspectives<sup>154</sup>. From Bazlen's letters we infer that he valued the idea of a steady commercial job<sup>155</sup>, and that his harsh judgement on his professional experience in Genoa (as well as Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi's, who actually met him only in 1937, that is twelve years after Bazlen's employment under her father), might be primarily imputable to the admission of the unlikeliness of such a career choice. We agree with La Ferla when she argues that Bazlen's attempts to pursue a steady career in commerce might be interpreted within the frame of the Hapsburg “bureaucratic ideal of *mediocritas* as lifestyle”<sup>156</sup> (ideal recognizable in the biography of writers such as Kafka, and which, as Magris points out, brought to life “one of the most typical gallery of Hapsburg characters, the memorable and extremely human *treue Diener* [“faithful servants”]: from Grillparzer's Bancban to Musil's section chief Tuzzi, or Doderer's office counselor Julius Zihal”<sup>157</sup>). Ideal so described by Bazlen in its realization in the Hapsburg Trieste: “For the ones who did not want to face the 'struggle for life', or wanted to think about something else, it was an ideal

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<sup>153</sup> Bazlen to Montale, May 5<sup>th</sup> 1925, in *Lettere a Montale*, 358: “[...] il mio primo, molto fallito esperimento di vita pratica, a Genova”.

<sup>154</sup> See Svevo's letter to Montale of March 10<sup>th</sup> 1926, in which he informs the poet about Bazlen's job at Emilio Reindl's company in Trieste: “Non vedo più Bazlen. S'è impiegato a fa il suo tirocinio con una serietà che promette di persistere” (Italo Svevo and Eugenio Montale, *Carteggio. Con gli scritti di Montale su Svevo*, ed. Giorgio Zampa [Milano: Mondadori 1976], 11).

<sup>155</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Montale of April 11<sup>th</sup> 1926 (in *Lettere a Montale*, 368) about his job at Reindl's company: “Mio caro Eusebius, come lo hai saputo da Svevo, da circa due mesi lavoro. Ho trovato un ambiente molto sopportabile, e grandseigneuresco, con orario elastico, a seconda dei miei variabili stati d'animo, ma in compenso lavoro molto, e sono molto stanco. Però mi trovo bene, e salvo nuove complicazioni, ho intenzione di starci parecchio”.

<sup>156</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 26.

<sup>157</sup> Claudio Magris, *Il mito asburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna* (Torino: Einaudi, 1988), 30.

solution – a life of slow and peaceful work, with little responsibilities, which assured all life needs, not merely the material ones – and it was not a sterile life”<sup>158</sup>.

In the above-mentioned letter to Papini, Bazlen so justifies his refusal to the request of collaboration:

I find absolutely unnecessary to introduce German Kulture to Italian intellectuals. I am becoming more and more convinced of the absolute impenetrability and of the absolute impossibility of communication between different races, and especially if the cultural premises are so different as from Italians and Germans. [...] You and that half a dozen modern people that Italy has, [...] can surely read German works in language; the others will make do with the philological virtuositities of Lonati - Cardarelli - Cecchi ~~ete~~ and of all the other national producers of which I do not remember the names.<sup>159</sup>

Considering the fundamental role Bazlen would have covered in the following years as mediator of foreign literatures, and especially German one, to Italy, his statements appear retrospectively paradoxical. His declination of Papini's request of translations is however just an early manifestation of Bazlen's notorious reluctance to be involved in any literary initiative and project. See for instance his letter to Montale of November 16<sup>th</sup> 1925:

Have you all gone crazy, to want me to collaborate in a review? I am a respectable person who spends almost all of his time in bed, smoking and reading, and who goes out once in a while to visit someone or to go to the movies. Furthermore, I almost completely lack of any messianic-divulging spirit, and I have never felt the need to share my ideas with others – especially with readers of reviews. If you need indications, discoveries, bibliographies, etc. I will be happy to help. Now I am bringing myself up

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<sup>158</sup> *Note senza testo*, 243: “Per gente che non avesse voglia di affrontare la 'lotta per la vita', che avesse da pensare ad altro, era una soluzione ideale – una vita di lavoro lento e tranquillo, di poca responsabilità, che garantiva tutte le necessità dell'esistenza, non soltanto quelle materiali – e non era una vita sterile”.

<sup>159</sup> Assenza, “Lettura e creazione”, 390: “non trovo assolutamente necessario far conoscere la Kultura tedesca agli intellettuali italiani. Mi sto convincendo sempre di più dell'assoluta incompenetrabilità e dell'assoluta impossibilità di comunicazione tra razze differenti, e specialmente se le premesse culturali sono talmente diverse come tra italiani e tedeschi. [...] Lei e quella mezza dozzina di persone moderne che ha l'Italia, hanno (ha? Non ho un'idea della grammatica) certo la possibilità di leggere le opere tedesche nell'originale, gli altri si accontentino dei virtuosismi filologici dei Leonati Cardarelli Cecchi ~~eee~~ di tutti gli altri produttori nazionali di cui non ricordo i nomi”.

to date with the new English and American literature; if you want to, in time, I will write to you about it. [...] If one day I will feel like it, I will maybe send you, for the review, a single article on the futility of divulging in Italy foreign cultures.<sup>160</sup>

We will later further investigate the reasons behind Bazlen's contempt for literary professionalism; for the moment, we may notice that the above-mentioned refusals are grounded in what Bazlen would have referred to as a “sense of decency” which urged him to refrain from mixing professional activity and culture (“decente” and “rispettabile” are terms often used by Bazlen about authors, works and people; “decency”, as Montale writes, was for Bazlen “a matter of style”<sup>161</sup>). In this regard, see his letter to Lucia Rodocanachi of November 11<sup>th</sup> 1941, in which, addressing some collections he was planning for an unspecified publisher, he confesses: “my horror, which you know, of mixing beruf [“work”] and kultur is such that i [...] defer as much as i can, and i set aside the work for the day in which i will have eaten the last piece of bread, and, at the same time, i will be persuaded that, for the moment, i cannot find any less humiliating occupation”.<sup>162</sup> In the twenties Bazlen seems thus to be pursuing a professional career

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<sup>160</sup> *Lettere a Montale*, 363-364: “Siete diventati matti di volermi far collaborare a una rivista? Io sono una persona per bene che passa quasi tutto il suo tempo a letto, fumando e leggendo, e che esce ogni tanto per far qualche visita o per andare al cinematografo. Per di più manco quasi totalmente di spirito messianico divulgativo, e non ho mai inteso nessun bisogno di partecipare agli altri le mie idee, tanto meno a lettori di riviste. Se avete bisogno di indicazioni, scoperte, bibliografie, ecc. vi aiuterò molto volentieri. Ora sto mettendomi al corrente della nuova letteratura inglese ed americana, se vuoi, col tempo, te ne scriverò. [...] Se un giorno avrò voglia, forse vi manderò, per la rivista, un solo articolo sull'inutilità di divulgare in Italia culture straniere”. As Riboli suggests, the review Bazlen refers to is probably *Solaria*, with which shortly after Montale would have started to collaborate (see Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 27-28).

<sup>161</sup> Montale, “Variazioni”, 1119.

<sup>162</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 11 Nov. 1941. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “il mio orrore, che conosci, di mescolare beruf e kultur è tale, che rimando [...] il più possibile, e mi tengo in riserva il lavoro per il giorno che avrò mangiato l'ultimo pezzo di pane e che avrò, contemporaneamente, la convinzione che per il momento occupazioni meno umilianti non ne posso trovare”. The same contempt for literary professionalism was already expressed in a letter to Montale of

outside of the cultural field for this sense of “decency” (“To the intellectual corresponds the insipid soul”, we read among his aphorisms<sup>163</sup>), but at the same time with the awareness of being dragged towards a quite opposite direction.

We learn that from *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere*, the 1993 volume in which Adelphi published the facsimiles of the typewriting exercises that Bazlen did during this period (more precisely in 1925)<sup>164</sup>. In his bizarre nature, the book is actually a precious document, for it contains one of the most intimate voices we can find within Bazlen's published writings, and might help to enlighten on a crucial moment of his life,

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October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1926, in which Bazlen, apparently replying to a request of advice from his friend regarding two different job possibilities, warned him: “Credo che un qualsiasi lavoro metodico non ti dovrebbe far male. Ammetto che un lavoro commerciale o industriale sia molto più decoroso di quel lavoro nei bassifondi della coltura che ti attende a Firenze, ma pretende una forza di energie e di concentrazione che, almeno per il primo tempo, ti costerebbe dei sacrifici troppo grandi” (*Lettere a Montale*, 377). The job offered to Montale in Florence was as secretary of publisher Bemporad, offer that Montale, going along with Bazlen's advice, would have accepted (“Io credo di poterti consigliare di accettare quel posto da Bemporad, tanto più che saresti libero di lasciarlo non appena ti divenisse insopportabile” [ibid.]). It is significant that Italo Svevo, on January 24<sup>th</sup> 1927, asking Montale news about his job with Bemporad, expressed positions similar to Bazlen's: “E come va Lei col Suo editore? Si tenga lontano dagli editori. Crede Lei che andando con costoro sarà più vicino alla letteratura che se si mettesse in qualche altro articolo, olio o pellami p. e.?” (Svevo and Montale, *Carteggio*, 50).

<sup>163</sup> Bazlen, *Note senza testo*, 211: “All'intellettuale corrisponde l'anima insipida”.

<sup>164</sup> Roberto Bazlen, *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere*, eds. Luciano Foà and Helena Janeczek, Milano: Adelphi, 1993. The volume, printed in 799 out of sale numerated copies, was sent to the friends of Bazlen in occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Adelphi. It contains the facsimiles of Bazlen's typewritten pages and the “normalized” and at times translated Italian transcriptions by the curators. The introductory note states that the 31 sheets reproduced in the book were conserved by Bazlen, and, after his death, entrusted to Adelphi by Ljuba Blumenthal: “questi fogli battuti spericolatamente a macchina ci offrono un autoritratto giovanile, tanto più prezioso in quanto involontario, dell'uomo senza il quale l'Adelphi non sarebbe mai nata. Essi hanno il potere di far rivivere la sua voce in tutta la varietà delle inflessioni e delle cadenze che le erano proprie – e insieme ci fanno rivedere quel balenio malizioso degli occhi che spesso accompagnava le sue boutades più azzardate. Bazlen aveva 23 anni quando, nel 1925, si infisse l'esercizio di imparare a scrivere a macchina per prepararsi all'improbabile (per lui) ruolo dell'impiegato. Ruolo a cui poi sarebbe felicemente sfuggito, come a ogni altro nella vita. Ma anche dalla costrizione Bazlen sa far sprigionare un senso di liberazione: lo sanno tutti coloro che lo hanno conosciuto – e ci auguriamo che lo avvertano coloro che lo leggeranno”. The fact that Bazlen (who did not conserve most of his notes, letters, and documents) did not get rid of these exercises, encourage us to think that he himself recognized some (maybe affective) importance to these pages. Regarding the appropriateness of the publication of the book, Calasso recollects: “Prima di deciderci ci abbiamo pensato a lungo. Ma alla fine l'idea di questo ragazzino ventitreenne che mimava dal dada al monologo interiore, da Rilke a Joyce, e poi mescolava il tutto con le bizzes della zia, ci è sembrata un gioco felice, che qualche amico avrebbe apprezzato. Perciò nessun intento celebrativo” (Marcoaldi, “L'uomo che sapeva troppo”, 35).

at the time wavering between the two poles of the pursuit of a career and of a harbored literary vocation. In his exercises, Bazlen starts copying some commercial letters or other writings, to soon find himself dragged into furiously typing “whatever passed through his head”<sup>165</sup>: literary quotations, familiar conversations, recollections, personal considerations, plays on words – in Italian, German, English, or in the dialect of Trieste<sup>166</sup>. If Bazlen's efforts show his commitment towards the commercial career, his divagations point towards a different direction. A rough translation of a passage of his unpointed stream of consciousness:

[...] I am and I remain a hybrid between a bourgeois and an outsider two concepts which are completely incompatible and if one has both within himself he cannot become neither of them unless he kills one of these two qualities and that's what I intend to do in the next weeks that is to say that I want to suppress at its roots the intellectual within me and what will be left will be the bourgeois! Voilà.<sup>167</sup>

In the following years this conflict would have been resolved with Bazlen embracing a diametrically opposite choice to the bourgeois one, to the point of his figure becoming, in the interpretation of many, the epitome of the eccentric and disinterested flâneur of literature. From some accounts of this period, we actually learn that this image was to a certain extent – and much to Bazlen irritation – already set during his Triestine years.

<sup>165</sup> Marcenaro, “Il giovane Bazlen”.

<sup>166</sup> Marcenaro so describes these pages: “Un gomito scrittore intrugliato, nel diritto e nel rovescio, come la tela di un ragnetto ubriaco. Ma anche un grande esercizio di scrittura automatica, illusoriamente surrealista: e, in 'lettura visiva', con richiami a certi 'esercizi di lettrismo' vicini ai preziosi *collages* di Hanna Höch e Raoul Hausmann, esperienze del più impertinente Dada” (ibid.).

<sup>167</sup> Bazlen, *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere*, 5: [...] io sono e rimango un ibrido fra un bourgeois e un outsider due concetti che sono del tutto inconciliabili e se uno li porta dentro entrambi non può diventare né uno né l'altro se non uccidendo una di queste due qualità ed è ciò che io intendo fare nei prossimi tempi vale a dire che voglio sopprimere alla radice l'intellettuale che c'è in me e quello che resterà sarà il bourgeois! Voilà”. The passage, originally in German, is here quoted in the edited and translated transcription by Foà and Janeczek.

### 3. The Most Nineteen-Twenty-Five Man in Italy

On May 5<sup>th</sup> 1925 Bazlen writes to Montale of having recently met in Trieste a common friend, the writer and journalist Adriano Grande, who informed him of an article he intended to write on Trieste and Triestines, and in which he was also planning to mention Bazlen: “When he talked to me about it, I believed it was one of his usual, onanistic, eternally unrealized projects, and I let him talk; after he had left, I was told that he had already written it. I beg you to stop him from publishing such an article, with any means, *licit or illicit*”<sup>168</sup>. Bazlen's request of discretion was disregarded, and few days later Grande's article “Pellegrinaggi italiani. Trieste”<sup>169</sup> was published, and with it the first episode of the written hagiography on his figure.

In Grande's piece Bobi Bazlen is (not too carefully) hidden under the name of Bary<sup>170</sup>:

You can not even picture Bary if you have never met him. He is the most nineteen-twenty-five man you can encounter in Italy. There's in him some Joyce and some Morand, some Dostoyewsky and some Giraudoux. He is the point of confluence of different races: German jew, of Italian mother, with some infiltration of Slav and Russian; composition of which you can find in Trieste many other resembling samples. But in his case, alas!, we are dealing with a dreadfully shrewd and savvy intelligence. He is twenty

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<sup>168</sup> *Lettere a Montale*, 358: “Quando me ne parlò, credetti si trattasse di uno dei suoi soliti onanistici progetti, eternamente irrealizzati, e l'ho lasciato parlare; dopo partito, m'hanno detto che l'aveva già scritto. Ti prego di impedirgli, con qualsiasi mezzo, *licito od illecito*, che pubblichi un simile articolo”. As we learn from the letter, Bazlen was primarily worried not to embarrass his former colleagues at Atlantic Refining Company in Genoa (see *ibid.*).

<sup>169</sup> Adriano Grande, “Pellegrinaggi italiani. Trieste”, *Il giornale di Genova*, May 8, 1925. Calasso and Zampa, in the footnotes to “Lettere a Montale”, argue that the article was not eventually published; Franco Contorbia discovered it and published it as appendix to his own article “Genova-Trieste 1925: Adriano Grande tra Bazlen e Montale”, 607-610.

<sup>170</sup> Regarding this “transparent *camouflage* of Bobi Bazlen”, see Contorbia, “Genova-Trieste 1925”, 595.



years old; he's extremely learned in all modern literatures; he does not write – he will never write – but he is friend with all young Italian men of letters. To achieve that, naturally, he pursued commercial studies.<sup>171</sup>

Grande had met Bazlen the previous year in Genoa, at the time of his “very failed experiment of practical life”, which he so describes:

After setting his heart, a certain day, on dedicating himself to commerce, he goes to Genoa, well supported by a huge company where, to begin with, they clap him in front of a typewriter. At the end of the second day, leaving the office, he calls the company's agent and gives him this chat: “Dear Sir, I have just realized that I am shamefully unaware of the most recent development of modern philosophy. You will admit that this generates a state of mind not compatible with the serenity needed to typewrite letters. Take care”. I don't know what the Dear Sir replied.<sup>172</sup>

This early portrait already contains many of the usual motifs of later writings about Bazlen (the emphasis on his mixed cultural identity, the amusement for his love of paradoxes, the fascination for his culture and modern literary tastes, the vast net of intellectual relationships), and also the weaknesses of some of them. The task of outlining the figure of a man preliminarily declared as unpicturable is here in fact assigned to the description of his extravagances and to the recourse to the anecdotal (and possibly apocryphal or embellished) account (the “discorsetto”), to the detriment of accuracy

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<sup>171</sup> Grande, “Pellegrinaggi italiani”, in *ibid.*, 607: “Bary chi non lo conosce non se lo può nemmeno figurare. È l'uomo più millenovecentoventicinque che sia possibile incontrare in Italia. C'è in lui dello Joyce e del Morand, del Dostoyewsky e del Giraudoux. È un punto di confluenza fra varie razze: ebreo tedesco, di madre italiana, con qualche infiltrazione, per li rami, di slavo e di russo; composizione di cui si hanno a Trieste molti altri campioni somiglianti. Ma qui, per disgrazia, ci troviamo di fronte a un'intelligenza maledettamente avvertita e smaliziata. Ha vent'anni; è dottissimo in tutte le moderne letterature, non scrive, non scriverà mai, ma è amico di quasi tutti i giovani letterati italiani. Per arrivare a ciò, naturalmente, seguì gli studi commerciali”.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 607-608: “Messosi in capo, un certo giorno, di darsi ai commerci, viene a Genova, bene appoggiato a una grossissima ditta dove, per cominciare, lo schiaffano davanti a una macchina da scrivere. Sul chiudersi della seconda giornata chiama, uscendo, il procuratore dell'azienda e gli tiene questo discorsetto: 'Egregio signore, poco fa mi sono accorto che sono indecentemente all'oscuro degli ultimi svolgimenti della moderna filosofia. Lei mi concederà che questo ingenera uno stato d'animo poco adatto alla serenità che ci vuole per copiar delle lettere a macchina. Mi stia bene'. Non so cosa gli abbia risposto l'egregio signore”.

(negligible fact, given that in the piece Bary is primarily used as a colorful device instrumental for its narrative). Grande's article, as Contorbia suggests, has though certainly the merit of “delivering a sort of arguably non-unintentional horoscope” of Bazlen's future path<sup>173</sup>, including his disregard for writing. Furthermore, it illustrates the role that Bazlen covered towards some of the Italian intellectuals that in those years discovered Trieste and its culture, at the time when the city established itself as a fundamental spot within the Italian literary panorama.

This role is recognized to him also by Montale, who in the same years was discovering this “trading border city” which “reacted to its isolation from the national culture creating its own originally Italian literature”; this city from which, beginning from the end of the Nineteenth century, “writers unconceivable out of here” emerged: Benco, Stuparich, Svevo, Saba, Quarantotti Gambini – “prosaists and poets who make of Trieste an important, although peripheral, breeding ground of truly 'national' authors”<sup>174</sup>. In Montale's article “I quadri in cantina”<sup>175</sup> (published in 1946, but narrating facts that happened in the second half of the twenties), a certain “B.” shows the poet round Trieste, where they also meet Giorgio Carmelich, to whose paintings the piece is dedicated. As in Grande's piece, here too Bazlen's identity is only slightly concealed. In both pieces, “Bary” or “B.” accompany the visitors in the the discovery of the city (being that a visit to Miramare, or an immersion in the cafés of Trieste), taking on the role of characters within the narration. Given the nature of the two writings (both newspaper articles), the

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<sup>173</sup> Contorbia, “Genova-Trieste 1925”, 596.

<sup>174</sup> Montale, “Tre stelletto per Trieste”, 1599.

<sup>175</sup> Eugenio Montale, “I quadri in cantina”, *Corriere d'informazione*, March 21, 1946; now in *Prose e racconti*, 202-206.

choice of including an intriguing or bizarre character within the narration is not a particularly eccentric one; still, we believe that it is significant that Bazlen actual role of informer for the two intellectuals is not absorbed or concealed within the economy of the pieces, but declared and central, and his identity slightly hidden but transparent<sup>176</sup> (at the time the two articles were written, clearly only to the insiders). What both articles openly declare is the role of cicerone taken on by Bazlen (Montale actually refers to “B.” literally as his “cicerone triestino”<sup>177</sup>), characterization which seems to explicate, in a small and vivid frame, Bazlen's role in the Italian “discovery” of Trieste – role he started interpreting during his first attempt to leave his hometown in the winter of 1923-1924<sup>178</sup>.

Moving from Trieste to Genoa, Bazlen also moved from Café Garibaldi to Café Diana<sup>179</sup>, where many intellectuals of the city used to meet. Here Bazlen became acquainted, among the others, with the mentioned Adriano Grande, but also with Piero

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<sup>176</sup> In the closing passage of his article Montale actually gives additional hints about the identity of “B.”: “Sono passati più di vent'anni e pare un giorno. Un giovane alto e slanciato attraverso la piazza battuta dal vento, le falde dello spolverino gli volano attorno, un cenno della mano ci segue ed io chiedo distrattamente: 'Chi è, Bobi?’” (ibid., 206).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>178</sup> In the case of Montale, we may argue that at times there seems to be a juxtaposition, or even an identification between Bazlen and Trieste; or rather: the Trieste that Montale knows and writes about seems to often be the city that Bazlen introduced to him. Many of the Triestine authors and artists of which Montale writes about, as we have seen, had been introduced to him by Bazlen, and some general assumptions on Triestine culture also seems to be drawn from him. See for instance how Montale, in the poem “La madre di Bobi”, expresses the non obvious conception of Trieste as “everything but a melting pot” (suggested by Bazlen as well in “Intervista su Trieste” [see *Note senza testo*, 251]): “Una fiaba narrava che Trieste / fosse crocicchio o incontro di culture. / [...] solo dopo, / nell'inamena via che porta il nome / di Cecilia Rittmeyer, una querula madre / legata a triplo filo a un figlio in fuga / mi aprì al suo Genio, a quel dio dispotico / e indifferente che poi l'ha lasciata” (Montale, *Tutte le poesie*, 832) (“via Cecilia Rittmeyer” is the street where Bazlen lived in Trieste). It is also revealing the fact that in the above-quoted passage from the poem, the possessives *suo* might be referred to “mother”, “son” or “Trieste”, hence the “despotic and indifferent God” might be interpreted as the genius of the city or as Bobi. Something analogous happens in the already quoted passage from “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen” (“fu a partire dal '24 che [Bazlen] cominciò a portare fuori di Trieste il tesoro della sua sapienza e delle sue inquietudini”), where the possessives “sua” and “sue” may be referred either to Trieste or Bazlen.

<sup>179</sup> See de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 49.

Gobetti<sup>180</sup>, and, probably through Sergio Solmi, with Eugenio Montale. In 1924, thanks to common friend Umberto Saba, Bazlen also met Giacomo Debenedetti<sup>181</sup>, who, “subjugated by the personality” of the Triestine intellectual<sup>182</sup>, would have become one of his closest interlocutors and friends<sup>183</sup>. Bazlen subsequently became a sort of intermediary between the intellectuals he met in those years and the Triestine ones<sup>184</sup>. The importance of his subterranean work is particularly evident in connection with the

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<sup>180</sup> In Bazlen's letters to Montale we find few references to Gobetti, whose cultural positions Bazlen evidently did not share. In this regard, see the letter of February 17<sup>th</sup> 1926: “La morte di Gobetti mi ha impressionato moltissimo, benché gli sia stato molto lontano, e l'abbia sentito, tu lo sai, insopportabile. Se ne hai qualche particolare, o qualche strascico, scrivimelo” (*Lettere a Montale*, 368). In a letter of September 6<sup>th</sup> 1925 Bazlen had already hinted at the distance and incompatibility between Gobetti and himself: “Non ho ancora visto in libreria il volume del poeta Pignato [Luca Pignato, *Pietre*, Torino: Gobetti, 1925]. Gobetti lo chiama: 'il nuovo lirico della nuova generazione'. Io appartengo alla vecchia. (Quando Gobetti applica l'aggettivo *nuovo* a qualche nuovo genio, quel *nuovo* ricorda sempre un poco: homo novus, nouveau riche ecc. Non ti pare?)” (ibid., 361).

<sup>181</sup> So we learn from a note sent by Saba to Debenedetti on April 1924 (qtd. in Frandini, *Il teatro della memoria*, 60, note 103): “Caro Giacomino. Ti presento Bobi il mio migliore amico (fra i lattanti) che abbia a Trieste. Lo invidio perché tra pochi giorni avrà il bene di conoscerti” .

<sup>182</sup> Frandini, *Il teatro della memoria*, 60.

<sup>183</sup> Antonio Debenedetti recalls that Bazlen, together with Saba, was his father's closest friend (see *Giacomino*, 35), but, addressing his high consideration of Bazlen, he focuses almost exclusively on the personal and domestic dimension of their relationship (“Giacomino [...] era ben deciso a imporre Bobi come una medicina necessaria alla nostra cultura, alla nostra educazione, alla nostra civiltà” [ibid., 61-62]). Recollecting his first encounter with Bazlen, Debenedetti's pupil Walter Pedullà so describes the relationship between the two: “C'era molto affetto tra Debenedetti e Bazlen, sintonia di idee e gusto. Parlarono molto di letteratura. Bazlen 'riferiva' a Debenedetti su quanto di meglio, non ancora tradotto, circolava nella narrativa europea. Si intendevano subito per somiglianze ed analogie. Tutti ignoti i nomi stranieri, che poi avrei ritrovato nel catalogo di Adelphi” (*Il Novecento segreto di Giacomo Debenedetti* [Milano: Rizzoli, 2004], 139). Regarding the intellectual relationship between Bazlen and Giacomo Debenedetti, see also Beniamino Mirisola, who for instance argues that Debenedetti became familiar with Analytical Psychology precisely thanks to his Triestine friend (“La critica come processo d'individuazione. Tessere junghiane nella saggistica di Giacomo Debenedetti” [Ph.D. diss., University Ca' Foscari of Venice, 2008-2009], 79; available from <http://dspace.unive.it/handle/10579/968?show=full> [accessed April 11, 2017]).

<sup>184</sup> Besides the already mentioned cases of Grande and Montale, to whom Bazlen introduced many artists and intellectuals from Trieste, from Bazlen's letters we also learn that he often accompanied Debenedetti during his encounters with Saba – though at times making fun with Montale of the tenor of the discussions between the poet and the critic. In this regard, see Bazlen's letter of July 8<sup>th</sup> 1926: “Ieri sera, mentre leggevo la tua lettera, è capitato a casa mia Giacomino, che si fermerà a Trieste per un due o tre giorni. [...] Ho passato la sera in casa del vates con lui, e con due suoi amici, un perfetto e molto ancien régime conte di Magnago, e un giovane politicante molto sopportabile, umano e comprensivo, Cà Zorzi [Giacomo Noventa]. Hanno parlato molto di te, e con molta stima. Hanno detto molte cose gravi e difficili, che non ho nemmeno ascoltato. Solo la Linuccia si è accorta che sono molto scemi. Questa sera, bis” (*Lettere a Montale*, 373-374).

new interest for Triestine culture that in that period arose in Genoa and in Florence within the environment of *Solaria*, which at the end of the twenties would have issued the special numbers dedicated to Saba (May 1928) and Svevo (March-April 1929), the publication of which, as Elvio Guagnini maintains, represented a fundamental moment for the Italian and international fortune of the two writers<sup>185</sup>. To understand the nature and the weight of Bazlen behind the scenes cultural work, it might be helpful to mention that Bazlen is considered by many as the invisible “grandmaster of the rising fortune of Svevo”<sup>186</sup>, whose work until that point had been neglected by Italian critics.

We find traces of the behind the scenes of the “Svevo case” in the letters to Montale written between 1925 and 1930 and published by Adelphi in 1984<sup>187</sup>. The

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<sup>185</sup> See Guagnini, “La cultura. Una fisionomia difficile”, 309.

<sup>186</sup> Giorgio Zampa in Grasso, *Tuttilibri*.

<sup>187</sup> *Lettere a Montale* contains the letters that Montale entrusted to Luciano Rebay in 1967 and that he, afterwards, according to the poet's instructions, entrusted to Luciano Foà (see Luciano Rebay, “Un cestello di Montale: le gambe di Dora Markus e una lettera di Roberto Bazlen”, *Italica* 61.2 [1984]: 160 and 167, note 1). La Ferla speculates that Montale might have deliberately destroyed part of the letters from Bazlen, given the fact that they reach only until 1930 and there is no trace of the later ones, which could have revealed Bazlen's creative contribution to his coeval poetic production (see *Diritto al silenzio*, 26, note 56). According to Rebay, Bazlen's letters of this period had probably not been conserved because mostly addressed to Gabinetto Vieusseux (see Luciano Rebay, “Montale, Clizia e l'America”, *Forum Italicum* 16.3 [1982]: 192, note 7). We find though traces of the character of Bazlen's contribution in Montale's letters to Bazlen preserved in the Adelphi archive (according to La Ferla [*Diritto al silenzio*, 27], 70 letters), which cover later years, and which had been only partially published within articles on Montale's production. These letters (especially the ones written in 1937 and 1938) contain many confidences and requests of advice by the poet, who at the time was planning to move to the United States with Irma Brandeis, the “Clizia” of *Le occasioni* (1939). From what is deducible from Montale's letters, Bazlen was supportive of his friend's plan, and, according to La Ferla, his “encouragements” would have earned him the hostility of Montale's companion Drusilla Tanzi, and subsequently the estrangement of his friend (see *ibid.*, 41, note 111). In a 1941 letter from Bazlen to Lucia Rodocanachi we in fact read: “montale non s'è fatto vivo. non è venuto e non ha scritto (devo essere in disgrazia presso la mosca [Drusilla Tanzi], e non me lo merito)” (Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 14 Mar. 1941. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto). Montale and Bazlen would have anyways gotten closer in later years. The day he died Bazlen was supposed to have dinner with Montale, who recalls: “Due sere prima l'avevo atteso invano a cena a casa mia. Gli avevo fatto preparare una pietanza di cui era ghiottissimo: il pan cotto dei contadini toscani. Non venne e ne fui sorpreso, sapendolo sempre puntuale ed esatto pur nel suo apparente disordine. Ebbi anche un triste presentimento che mi affrettai a scacciare. Solo il mattino successivo seppi che non l'avrei riveduto più”

correspondence testifies of a strong personal and cultural bond between the poet and his “intimate confidant and trustworthy adviser”<sup>188</sup>. Bazlen's letters contains confidences, offerings of advice on professional and personal issues, gossips on common friends, but also literary and bibliographical suggestions, notes on Montale's poems, opinions on works and authors. Bazlen – as testified by his words and by the dedication with which he collected the reservations for the first edition of *Ossi di Seppia* (1925) – was an early admirer of Montale's poetry<sup>189</sup>, and the collaboration in the “Svevo case” also shows how he deeply trusted and highly valued Montale's critical skills. On the other hand, Rebay underlines Bazlen's “strong ascendancy” on the the author of *Ossi di seppia*, six years older than him and already establishing himself as a poet and intellectual, who deeply trusted Bazlen's cultural suggestions, and requested and held in high estimation his at times merciless notes and advices on his own work<sup>190</sup>. The consideration that Montale had of Bazlen's opinions and of his linguistic intelligence is testified by the Ligurian poet himself, who dedicated to him the section “Mediterraneo” of *Ossi di Seppia* (“a Bobi

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(“Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2727).

<sup>188</sup> Rebay, “Un cestello di Montale”, 161.

<sup>189</sup> See Stuparich, *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, 17: “Bobi considerava Montale già un poeta di primo piano, quando pochissimi ancora lo conoscevano e nessuno ne parlava”. Regarding Bazlen's estimation of Montale's poetry, see his letter of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1925: “Ho riletto il tuo libro [*Ossi di seppia*]: m'è piaciuto molto di più, ancora, e particolarmente le cose lunghe. Le brevi (Ossi di s.) non mi dicono gran che, e mi sembrano, spesso, formalmente ingenua. Ma tra le lunghe alcune (salvo l'intollerabile penultima strofa di Mediterraneo) mi sembrano *assolutamente perfette*” (*Lettere a Montale*, 360). See also the letter of December 26<sup>th</sup> 1926: “Le tue liriche. Mi sono piaciute moltissimo, e mi sembrano (restando pur sempre in quella linea) molto migliori degli 'Ossi'. Il loro limite: l'impossibilità di uno slatinizzazione della parola italiana. Hai fatto (con Campana e qua e là D'Annunzio) il massimo che si possa fare à ce but; non mi basta” (ibid., 378-379). Bazlen collected ten subscriptions for *Ossi di seppia* (whose publication by Gobetti depended on the number of reservations); in this regard, see Bazlen's letter to Montale of May 5<sup>th</sup> 1925: “Mio caro Eugenio, ti mando le pochissime prenotazioni che ho potuto raccogliere; con la mia vita, ritiratissima, e con l'estrema diffidenza di tutta la gente che ancora vedo, contro qualsiasi forma di letteratura, non ho potuto farne di più. Scusami” (ibid., 357).

<sup>190</sup> See Rebay, “Un cestello di Montale”, 165. See also Zampa (“Lo sconosciuto disse”, 28), who recollects that “Bobi was one of [Montale's] dearest friend, and certainly one of the men he esteemed the most”.

B.”), and who years later would have recollected: “When I met him, he even pretended that our language, lacking of *Stimmung* and intimacy, could not produce anything good. I was seriously puzzled in finding in my hands an unserviceable tool. Later I would have considerably modified this impression”<sup>191</sup>.

Besides the already mentioned pieces of prose and the contribution to Montale's poems that we will address in the second chapter of this work, Bazlen's presence is directly or indirectly recognizable in other places of Montale's poetic production. We have already mentioned “A Liuba che parte”, “La madre di Bobi”, and “Lettera a Bobi”; Zangrandi convincingly suggests that the poem “Il genio”<sup>192</sup> might be dedicated to Bazlen<sup>193</sup> (“Il genio purtroppo non parla / per bocca sua. / Il genio lascia qualche traccia di zampetta / come la lepre sulla neve” [1-4]); to Bazlen is also addressed the epistolary poem “Notizie & consigli”<sup>194</sup>, the jocular composition in which the Triestine intellectual (“Ricerchi invano / posti a Milano, / solo tra i proci / mangi peoci. / [...] / Non esser vile, / fuggi in Brasile” [5-26]), together with some common friends (among them: Tommaso Landolfi-“Thomas di Pico” and Leone Traverso-“Leon perverso”), is the target of the poet's jest. An idea of the relationship between Bazlen and Montale, particularly intense at least until the end of the thirties, can be inferred by a 1937 letter from Carlo Bo to the common friend Lucia Rodocanachi: “I also do not know of Eusebio: he is silent, maybe he is still a victim of Bobby Basslen's Bacchic mania”<sup>195</sup>.

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<sup>191</sup> Montale, “Variazioni”, 1119.

<sup>192</sup> In Eugenio Montale, *Satura* (1971), now in *Tutte le poesie*, 406.

<sup>193</sup> See Zangrandi, “Il genio non parla per bocca sua”, 144.

<sup>194</sup> The poem, sent to Bazlen and dated March 5<sup>th</sup> 1938, can now be found in “Poesie disperse”, in *Tutte le Poesie*, 819-820.

<sup>195</sup> Bo, Carlo. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 24 Nov. 1937. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bo, Carlo: “Anch'io non so più

In the period of the published correspondence with Montale, Bazlen lived in Trieste, leaving the city from time to time and only for brief intervals. From some pages of *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere*, we learn about Bazlen's regrets about the lost professional opportunity in Genoa<sup>196</sup>, regrets maybe due to the fact that back in Trieste he was doing similar jobs, but in a city and within an environment he felt at that point as provincial and claustrophobic<sup>197</sup>. On December 26<sup>th</sup> 1926, while working for the Reindl company, he writes to Montale: "I am still working, and it is not that bad. But I hope, if it will be possible, to leave Trieste. It is indifferent where to (Genova would work too!), but all the complications of these last weeks are making my life here impossible"<sup>198</sup>. The complications Bazlen refers to are probably to be recognized in the health problems of the members of his extended family<sup>199</sup>, and in his growing impatience towards his own household. Between 1924 and 1928, his two aunts and his uncle died, and Bazlen was left alone with his overprotective mother. In 1929 he quitted working – he "retired", as he

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nulla di Eusebio: tace, non so se sia sempre vittima della mania bacchica di Bobby Basslen [*sic*"]. Eusebio is the nickname assigned to Montale by Bazlen; as we learn from *Lettere a Montale* (359, note 1): "Bazlen aveva suggerito a Montale di scrivere una poesia sul personaggio schumanniano di Eusebius. Montale non scrisse la poesia e Bazlen da allora cominciò a chiamarlo Eusebio (o Eusebius), nome che sarebbe poi stato usato familiarmente anche dagli altri amici di Montale".

<sup>196</sup> See Bazlen, *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere*, 11: "una delle mie stupidaggini più grandi è stata quella di non aver resistito a Genova dove andando subito alla Nafta avrei potuto imparare certo molto di più di quanto lo imparerò in qualsiasi altro ambiente e per di più coll'appoggio di quel mio amico greco che si chiamava Sandro Maria Psyllas procuratore degli Oleifici Nazionali di Genova [...]".

<sup>197</sup> See Masel, "Bobi – Gerti attraverso le lettere di Bobi": "Già in questo periodo, Bobi sembra in crisi con la propria città natale e afferma che si sente 'nato per la vita internazionale e soffocato dalla grettezza anemica della vita provinciale'" (the internal citation is a translation from German of Bazlen's letter to Gerti Frankl Tolazzi of March 28<sup>th</sup> 1926).

<sup>198</sup> *Lettere a Montale*, 378: "Lavoro ancora, e non mi trovo male. Spero però, se mi sarà possibile, di andare via da Trieste. Indifferente dove (anche Genova!), ma per tutte le storie di quest'ultimo tempo, la vita qui mi è resa impossibile".

<sup>199</sup> See the letter to Montale of February 17<sup>th</sup> 1926: "in casa mia sono stati, tutti, molto male, sono vecchi, e credo che mi sarà impossibile di lasciare Trieste" (*ibid.*, 367).



wrote to Gerti<sup>200</sup>. Hirsch, who had no children, had left him a considerable inheritance, which Bazlen would have deliberately gotten rid of within a few years, lending and giving away money to many friends<sup>201</sup>.

Bazlen definitely left Trieste in 1934. Besides his longing for a less provincial cultural environment, and, as La Ferla suggests, his need to move away from the exasperated and anxiety-inducing relationship with his mother<sup>202</sup>, his departure from the city had also to be connected with the deterioration of the relationships with some friends and acquaintances<sup>203</sup>. Bazlen would have subsequently maintained a conflictual

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<sup>200</sup> See Fischer, “Il viaggio di Gerti”, 12. The importance of this date is confirmed by one of the notes collected in *Note senza testo*: “Nel 1929 finì la mia infanzia / fino a oggi periodo di latenza / Prossimo passo: la crisi della pubertà” (203).

<sup>201</sup> See Foà's account in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 131. According to Voghera, Bazlen inherited from his uncle “an estate that would correspond today [1980] to several hundreds of millions of lire” (foreword to *Tracce del sapiente*, 22) – and today to at least a hundred thousand euros. According to Livio Corsi, interviewed by Del Giudice for his novel, the inheritance amounted to roughly 80,000 lire (see *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 49) – what today would correspond to approximately 70,000 euros. Regarding how Bazlen got rid of his inheritance, see also Weiss, who recollects that in his Roman years “Bobi was poor, after consuming, not for his own benefit, two estates inherited from his father and his uncle” (Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen”, 6). Bazlen's nonchalant relationship with money is remembered as one of his characteristic features: Mattioni argues that, as a young man, Bazlen surely was rich, but also a “spendthrift” (*Umberto Saba*, 102); Montale maintains that “his contempt for money was constant” (“Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2729); in Del Giudice's novel, Ljuba recollects: “Ha ereditato una fortuna e l'ha sperperata subito. Era a cena con qualche donna, diceva: È il più bel giorno della mia vita, sto spendendo l'ultimo soldo della mia eredità. Andava avanti non so come. Nessuno lo saprà mai” (*Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 97).

<sup>202</sup> See La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 36.

<sup>203</sup> Regarding the “misunderstanding” with his friends, see *ibid.*, 36, note 92: “Ad un certo punto della sua esistenza, devono essersi verificati degli episodi tanto dolorosi da impedirgli per sempre di tornare a Trieste. [...] Già troppe volte si è finito con l'accreditare eccessivo valore alla sua presunta invadenza nel vissuto degli altri, ma è bene sottolineare che il suo interessamento e la relativa curiosità verso quanti lo circondavano erano spesso solo una conseguenza della sua generosità e bontà. Certo, è anche probabile che egli talvolta finisse col decidere della vita altrui, indirizzandone le scelte, anche private, che dovevano venirgli poi incolpate. Ma spesso si trattava solo di consigli richiestigli esplicitamente”. La Ferla refers here to “the marriages affair”, which is so addressed by Gerti Frankl Tolazzi in *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* (55): “Era un malefico. [...] Lui complicava il vissuto degli altri. [...] Unire o dividere le persone. Questa era la sua grande occupazione quando stava qui... Lui amava molto platonicamente una ragazza, fin dai tempi della scuola. Poi si innamorò di un'altra. E quella di prima volle darla a mio marito. Infine cercò di sistemare anche me”. Towards the end of the novel, Ljuba also condescendingly addresses the issue: “Parlano ancora dei matrimoni? [...] È così strano... La gente sarà andata da lui, avrà detto 'sono talmente infelice', e lui avrà risposto che se una cosa non può continuare è meglio interromperla” (*ibid.*, 93). References to Bazlen's “intrusions” in his friends' private lives can be found

relationship with his hometown. Although he often said to many of his friends of “hating Trieste”<sup>204</sup>, according to Ljuba he would have always missed the city<sup>205</sup>. We know that, after leaving, he maintained friendly relations with some of the old friends (excellent relations in some cases, as with Voghera and Quarantotti Gambini, and more tepid in others, as with Gerti Frankl Tolazzi and Saba), but also that, in the following thirty years, he probably went back to his hometown no more than three or four times<sup>206</sup>.

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also in Montale's “Lettera a Bobi” (“Ho assaggiato / la pleiade dei tuoi amici, oggetto / dei tuoi esperimenti più o meno falliti / di creare o distruggere felicità coniugali” [10-13]) and in Antonio Debenedetti's *Giacomino* (61-63): “Bobi è nemico delle mogli, di tutte le mogli, non poteva fare a meno di ripetere Renata, riferendosi a Roberto Bazlen. [...] 'A casa non lo voglio' [...]. Bazlen rappresentava, secondo lei, la negazione vivente della famiglia. In cuor suo lo accusava di giustificare qualunque fuga dalla normalità, dall'equilibrio, dal buon senso. [...] 'Bobi distrugge tutto quello che tocca [...]. Chiama “mia moglie” delle donne che non vede quasi mai, che non ha sposato' si esasperava Renata, che il furore polemico rendeva paradossale”. A self-parodic hint to his own intrusiveness can be found in *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere* (9): “ed ora passiamo ad altro p.e. alle complicazioni di quella celebre sorella di un mio amico che sposò un brutto che non amai nemmeno un momento ma della quale ora mi occupo per quella mia celebre mania di interessarmi alle cose degli altri per mancanza di mia vita personale privata. Ho sempre fatto il parassita tutta la mia vita e devo dire che non mi sono nemmeno trovato tanto male”.

<sup>204</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 26. See also Voghera (*Gli anni della psicanalisi*, 183), who recollects that in the following years Bazlen would have not even spoken gladly of his city, “which reminded him of the misunderstandings and disagreements with his friends, and of a nationalistic and fascist imbued environment”. On the same topic, see also the accounts reported by Del Giudice in *Lo Stadio di Wimbledon*: Franca Malabotta recollects that Bazlen never asked about Trieste (“mai che chiedesse notizie di qui” [38]); Livio Corsi quotes one of the letters from his friend: “Scrivimi i morti, quando saranno tutti morti tornerò a Trieste” (49) (Del Giudice's account of Corsi's recollection is consistent with a letter sent by Bazlen to Corsi on July 15<sup>th</sup> 1950 quoted in de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 109, note 134).

<sup>205</sup> See Anita Pittoni, “La città di Bobi”, in *L'anima di Trieste. Lettere al professore* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1968), in which the author quotes a letter she received from Ljuba Blumenthal: “Trieste era sempre nei suoi pensieri. Egli desiderava moltissimo farmi conoscere la sua città e io sapevo di tutti i luoghi che avevano importanza per lui” (92-93). See also Bazlen's letter to Gerti Frankl Tolazzi of December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1952 (quoted in Fischer, “Il viaggio di Gerti”, 24): “io a trieste, nonostante le tante tentazioni, non ci vado, ma un giorno mangeremo sicuramente molto *pesce fritto* in qualche luogo sul mare, in una delle poche trattorie che sono sopravvissute al mio tempo (ormai sono passati già più di quindici anni dall'ultima osteria a trieste)”. Few weeks before his death, as we learn from a letter to Voghera of July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1965, Bazlen seemed to ponder the possibility of moving back to Trieste: “Che ne diresti se rimettessi radici a Trieste? Ce la farei?” (*Tracce del sapiente*, 89).

<sup>206</sup> Bazlen visited Trieste in 1935 (as testified by a postcard sent to Carlo Emilio Gadda from the city on December 31<sup>st</sup>, and now held in Archivio Contemporaneo “Alessandro Bonsanti”, Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux, Firenze. Collection: Gadda. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto) and in 1937, for the funeral of his mother; Voghera recollects that in that occasion: “Non si dimostrò affatto addolorato (non era certo il tipo da fingere in pubblico; anzi ogni atteggiamento convenzionale da parte degli altri provocava in lui una reazione anche troppo viva) e disse apertamente che si sentiva sollevato al pensiero

#### 4. Like the Lilies of the Field

In the winter of 1934-1935 Bazlen moved to Milan (for the first period probably with Linuccia Saba<sup>207</sup>), where he soon dissipated large part of his patrimony, and subsequently started working for the advertising office of Olivetti. Foà recollects: “The story goes that he used to spend hours, in the office, lying on a carpet, hoping to come up with a slogan”<sup>208</sup>. Pellegrini informs us that Bazlen also worked for some months for an unspecified important bank, and that in 1937 he was offered the position of director of an associated bank in Brazil, but that he sabotaged the encounter in which the job was offered to him<sup>209</sup>. Bazlen's activity as publishing consultant started in 1937 with the publisher Frassinelli. In the same year, Bazlen met Luciano Foà, who at that time worked for his father Augusto at Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale, which negotiated the

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che avesse cessato di soffrire” (*Gli anni della psicanalisi*, 183-184). He maybe visited Trieste also in 1953 (see “Nota ai testi”, in Antonio Pizzuto, *Così* [Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 1998], 143), and finally one last time at the end of fifties, when, according to Ljuba's words as reported by Pitoni, he though visited the city incognito (see “La città di Bobi”, 93).

<sup>207</sup> Voghera recalls that Bazlen and Linuccia Saba “actually almost eloped from Trieste” (*Tracce del sapiente*, 24).

<sup>208</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 132.

<sup>209</sup> See Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 60: “Qualche sera dopo vi fu un pranzo con i tre maggiori dirigenti della banca e Bobi in una trattoria in Brianza. Parlò di temi inattesi, il sabba delle streghe, il rapporto fra astrologia e storia, il cassidismo come meditazione religiosa, e la vita dei poveri villaggi ebrei polacchi [...]. Quando gli fu esposto in termini precisi il progetto che lo riguardava, affermò che il problema era psicanalitico; si doveva esaminare quale sarebbe la reazione di un incontro tra due poli: Roberto Bazlen – America del sud. Vi fu un attimo di silenzio; la frase di Bazlen equivaleva a un rifiuto. Si deviò la conversazione.” La Ferla signals that a reference to the possibility of moving to Brazil can be found in an unpublished letter sent by Montale to Bazlen on September 24<sup>th</sup> 1937 (and now preserved in the Adelphi archive): “Andrai in Brasile? È poco rallegrante, ma forse è meglio che un'infinita aspettativa a Milano. Ma credo che non andrai. Parigi è poi sfumata?” (*Diritto al silenzio*, 38, note 98). Montale hints at the possibility also in the already mentioned “Notizie & consigli”: “Ricerchi invano / posti a Milano, / [...] / Non esser vile, / fuggi in Brasile” (Montale, *Tutte le Poesie*, 819).

copyrights of foreign works in Italy and of Italian works abroad. Two years later Bazlen started working with Adriano Olivetti<sup>210</sup> for the creation of the ambitious and “magnificent project”<sup>211</sup> of Nuove Edizioni Ivrea, which (as we will see) would have been though abandoned in 1943 because of the difficult historical conjuncture. In 1938 Bazlen also met Ljuba Blumenthal, with whom, despite the long periods of separation, he would have shared a bond that would have lasted until the end of his life<sup>212</sup>.

Bazlen's letters show that in 1935 he already was in good relations with Carlo Emilio Gadda<sup>213</sup>, whose frequentation unfolded especially within what de Savorgnani describes as “the Arenzano Club”<sup>214</sup>, after the Ligurian locality in which Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi lived and received many intellectuals of the time (among them: Bazlen, Montale, Gadda, Carlo Bo, Camillo Sbarbaro, Gianna Manzini)<sup>215</sup>. Apart from Montale

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<sup>210</sup> Olivetti and Bazlen shared a long friendship, rooted in common interests and in personal affinities. Regarding the importance that both attributed to dreams, coincidences, and destiny, see Foà's recollection of his first meeting with Olivetti in 1941: “[Olivetti] si presentò come amico di Bobi Bazlen [...]. Lui gli aveva parlato spesso di me, in vista del suo progetto editoriale, tanto che Adriano fece un sogno che mi riguardava e che lo convinse a offrirmi di iniziare il lavoro di organizzazione della nuova casa editrice [Nuove Edizione Ivrea]” (Giorgio Soavi, *Italiani anche questi* [Milano: Rizzoli, 1979], 132).

<sup>211</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 13-14.

<sup>212</sup> La Ferla informs us that Bazlen met Ljuba Blumenthal while staying at the same hotel in Milan, when he intervened and protected her from a fit of madness of her first husband, who was later sent to the mental hospital of Milan (*Diritto al silenzio*, 40). After moving to Rome, Ljuba, who was of Jewish descent, had to flee from Italy in 1939 because of the racial laws (the episode inspired Montale's “A Liuba che parte”). She and Bazlen continued to see each other in the following years, in Italy, in London (where Ljuba had moved), and in other European localities. According to Bazlen's friends, Ljuba Blumenthal shared with him a deep bond, the more unique for the fact that Bazlen in his private life too conducted himself rather freely. Their relationship, La Ferla writes, was “based on a deep reciprocal esteem [...] which [allowed] both to live their own life with great freedom, although always being close to each other” (ibid.).

<sup>213</sup> In this regard, see Bazlen's above-mentioned postcard to Gadda of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1935. Archivio Contemporaneo “Alessandro Bonsanti” (Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux, Firenze. Collection: Gadda. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto) holds 8 letters from Bazlen to Gadda, from which we learn of their frequentation in Milan, and that Bazlen was at least once guest of Gadda's in Longone, Lombardy, where he stayed for some days to work; see in this regard the letter of August 5<sup>th</sup> 1936 and the one of September 14<sup>th</sup> 1936, in which Bazlen thanks Gadda for his hospitality.

<sup>214</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 57.

<sup>215</sup> Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi (1901-1978) was the daughter of Giulio Morpurgo, for whom Bazlen had

and Rodocanachi, we do not know much of Bazlen's relations with the other visitors of Rodocanachi's house. We know that, although Bazlen's relationship with Gadda remained (as the tenor of Bazlen's letters suggests) to a certain extent formal, they valued each other. From their letters to Lucia Rodocanachi we learn that Bazlen, who was especially severe in his judgments on Italian writers, thought highly of Gadda's work<sup>216</sup>, and that Gadda used to look for the company of the younger friend<sup>217</sup>. From Sbarbaro's frequent requests to Lucia Rodocanachi about Bobi's feedback on his own work, we also learn of the great consideration that the poet had of Bazlen's opinion on literary matters<sup>218</sup>.

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worked during the time he spent in Genoa, and the wife of painter Paolo Rodocanachi, who Bazlen had met in the same occasion. In regard to her intellectual profile and her relations with many coeval intellectuals, Giuseppe Marcenaro writes: “La sfrenata passione per la lettura e la conoscenza delle lingue furono la sua nemesi. Ironizzando con consolatoria e sottile perfidia, chiamandola *négresse inconnuë*, Montale auspicava per lei un po’ di maggiore notorietà: sconosciuta negra, schiava dei suoi amici letterati per i quali traduceva romanzi stranieri, le cui celebrate 'versioni d'autore' firmavano impudicamente come eseguite da loro. L'infingarda combriccola degli amici letterati, sempre sull'orlo di una crisi col centesimo, cercava di ottenere lavori di traduzione, ma a causa della vaga conoscenza delle lingue riusciva con difficoltà a mantenere gli impegni presi con gli editori. Fu 'inventata' la *négresse inconnuë*” (“Rodocanachi, la musa segreta”, *Il Secolo XIX*, September 22, 2008). From her letter to Carlo Bo of November 27<sup>th</sup> 1937, we learn that she first met Bazlen in the same year: “Ieri è apparso non so per quale incantesimo o sortilegio Bobi Bazlen che non conoscevo – sicché Eusebio non ha più neppure questa attenuante ai suoi silenzi –, col quale abbiamo ricostruito mondi scomparsi sui piccoli frammenti della nostra memoria” (Giuseppe Marcenaro, *Una amica di Montale: vita di Lucia Rodocanachi* [Milano: Camunia, 1991], 154). Both of Triestine origin, both polyglot, avid, cultivated, and curious readers, both discreet and hidden persons of letters and friends with many writers and intellectuals of their times, Lucia Rodocanachi and Bazlen shared a long friendship based on personal and cultural affinities. Their correspondence (106 letters), which covers the period from their first meeting until 1961, shows profound complicity: alongside literary suggestion and discussions, exchanges of books and proposals of translations and collaborations, we also find humorous and affectionate letters with exchanges of recipes, gossips, and jokes on common friends (with Gadda, at times with the complicity of Montale, as one of their favorite targets).

<sup>216</sup> See Bazlen's postcard of September 19<sup>th</sup> 1941: “mia cara lucia, ti scriverò da roma – questo è il maggior sforzo intellettuale che abbia fatto qui a alassio (all'infuori di quello di leggere il libro di carlo e., che è importantissimo)” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto). The book Bazlen refers to is arguably *La cognizione del dolore*, published on *Letteratura* between 1938 and 1941.

<sup>217</sup> “Bazlen è in via Margutta N.? e si è ben guardato dallo scrivermi” (Gadda, Carlo Emilio. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 31 Mar. 1939. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Gadda, Carlo Emilio).

<sup>218</sup> See Sbarbaro's letter of November 28<sup>th</sup> 1964: “Se Bobi t'ha detto dell'*Autoritratto*, riferiscimi quando vieni, il suo apprezzamento” (Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Lucia. 1931-1967*, ed. Davide Ferreri [Genova: Edizioni San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2007], 197-98). Sbarbaro's requests to Lucia

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1939 Bazlen informed Lucia Rodocanachi that he would have soon moved to Rome (signed: “dal suo attualmente molto apolide Bobi”<sup>219</sup>), city in which, despite his frequent travels, he would have been based for the rest of his life. According to Foà, Bazlen had to leave Milan because at the time he was “absolutely moneyless” after he had gotten rid of his uncle's inheritance<sup>220</sup>. In Rome he started working for a fur trader, for which, for one year, he handled the foreign correspondence. Foà recalls that he absolutely refused to talk about this job, for which he received “a miserable salary”<sup>221</sup>, and that, when he finally left it, he wrote to him: “I was going definitively crazy. Quitted working (Thursday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 5:55 PM) for good: from now on I will live like the lilies of the field”<sup>222</sup>. This would have been indeed his last proper job. Weiss argues that Bazlen “was absolutely unable to dedicate himself to what normally is defined as a serious, permanent job”<sup>223</sup>. Foà claims: “I have never met in my life anyone whose ideas and way of living were so strictly bound. [...] The only 'job' he could do, and which he liked, was the very singular one of publishing consultant – the only one because

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Rodocanachi kept coming also after Bazlen's death, as shown by a letter of August 5<sup>th</sup> 1965: “Bobi aveva fatto nessun commento sull'autoritratto?” (ibid., 200); the work Sbarbaro here refers to is *Autoritratto (involontario) di Elena de Bosis Vivante da sue lettere*, ed. Camillo Sbarbaro, Milano: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1963.

<sup>219</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 2 Feb. 1939. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto.

<sup>220</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 131.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 48: “Io diventavo matto definitivamente. Smesso di lavorare (giovedì 31 luglio alle ore 17:55) per sempre: d'ora in poi vivrò come i gigli nei campi”.

<sup>223</sup> Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen”, 6. Regarding Bazlen's deep aversion towards any steady job, see also his letter to Lucia Rodocanachi of May 14<sup>th</sup> 1940: “sono già stato costretto a rifiutare parecchi straordinari posti angenehm [piacevoli] e ben pagati per l'altro mio vecchio handicap che continua a sussistere und gegen den nichts zu machen ist [e contro cui non c'è nulla da fare] – ma in un modo o nell'altro me la caverò” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

it perfectly coincided with his vast voracity as a reader”<sup>224</sup>.

From the beginning of the forties Bazlen would have thus limited his professional (though often unofficial) activity to the collaboration with several publishing houses. After abandoning the project of Nuove Edizioni Ivrea, already at the beginning of the forties he started to collaborate with Bompiani. In the aftermath of the Second World War he resumed working with Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale, and commenced his collaborations with Astrolabio and Guanda. In the same years, he resumed his collaboration with Olivetti, now within the project of Edizioni di Comunità. At the end of the forties, he started his long but not always fruitful relation with Einaudi. In the fifties he also begun collaborating with Paolo Boringhieri (ESE) and Bocca. Finally, at the beginning of the sixties, he embarked on the project of Adelphi. For the publishing houses with which he collaborated, Bazlen read and recommended foreign books, suggested collaborators, realized translations, planned and projected collections – which though seldom were realized. Until Adelphi in fact Bazlen's editorial activity met variable and often disappointing results.

Bazlen's first years in Rome coincide with the Second World War and with the German occupation of the city. Pellegrini recalls: “He used to speak to me enthusiastically of the courage of the whole population: 'The city has been wonderful – he used to say: many armies over the millennia have encamped here, no one managed to take it over'. In those months of the Resistance he felt to be a citizen of Rome”<sup>225</sup>.

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<sup>224</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 133.

<sup>225</sup> Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 61.

Cavaglion and Voghera claim that Bazlen actively collaborated with the Resistance<sup>226</sup>, while La Ferla is more cautious<sup>227</sup>. According to the accounts on this period, Bazlen seems to actually have been only indirectly involved in the activities of the antifascist front through and within his relationships with his antifascist acquaintances – being them communist (Fabrizio Onofri), liberal (Massimiliano Majnoni), or members of Partito d'Azione (Carlo Levi).

Onofri's *Manoscritto* (1948) is set (and was written) in Rome exactly during the period of the Resistance, in which the main character and narrator Sebastiano Carpi (self-confessed alter-ego of Onofri) is actively and extensively involved<sup>228</sup>. In the novel, Bazlen's figure is clearly recognizable in Sebastiano's friend and confidant Ans<sup>229</sup>, who is only indirectly involved in the activity of the narrator when he is forced to flee from home and hide because the police might be looking for him. Onofri would have years later revealed that Bazlen was actually forced to do so after the arrest of Franco Calamandrei, who was found in possession of a notebook with many telephone numbers,

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<sup>226</sup> See Alberto Cavaglion, “Trieste vicina e lontana”, *Millelibri* 7.68 (1993): 55, and Voghera's foreword to *Tracce del sapiente*, 24.

<sup>227</sup> See La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 51.

<sup>228</sup> Regarding the autobiographical nature of *Manoscritto*, see Onofri's “Contributo alla conoscenza di Bobi” (31), in which he, twenty years after the composition and publication of the novel, describes it “as a sort of diary”, “an auto-da-fé”, and “a proof of truth” in which he registered the circumstances and the conversations of those years. Onofri actually reveals this peculiar nature of the novel already in its introductory note: “Questo libro non è un Diario ma solo un Manoscritto. Io scrivevo qua dentro le mie faccende e i miei problemi, di quell'uomo che ero: e neppure di tutto riuscivo a scrivere. Non potevo raccontare quello che accadeva nelle strade, quello che, tutto il giorno, accadeva dentro Roma. In queste pagine non c'è scritta la lotta di ogni giorno contro tedeschi e fascisti. C'è scritta solo la lotta che io, di ventisei anni, combattendo fascisti e tedeschi da militante della classe operaia, combattevo ogni giorno dentro a me da intellettuale e militante qual'ero. [...] Non sono pagine da leggere come un romanzo, ma come un documento: materiali da consultare. Per chi vuole, si capisce” (Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 8).

<sup>229</sup> If the identification of Ans with Bazlen is fairly manifest, in 1966 Onofri explicitly confirmed the exactness and the accuracy of the portrait of his friend: “C'è [un mio libro], scritto durante l'occupazione di Roma e la lotta clandestina, in cui il Bobi si chiama 'Ans' e l'autore si chiama 'Sebastiano'. [...] Lì il Bobi c'è continuamente, in prima persona, col suo modo di parlare e di muoversi” (“Contributo alla conoscenza di Bobi”, 31).



among which there was also Bazlen's one<sup>230</sup>. "He is foreign to our work"<sup>231</sup>, we read in relation to Ans' extraneousness to the narrator's activity. Years later, without entering into details, Onofri would have directly addressed and slightly modified his assessment on the nature of Bazlen's involvement: "During the Resistance Bobi was full of vitality. He was involved in everything that seemed to regard him the least [...] in the only way congenial to him, through the channels of friendship and affection"<sup>232</sup>.

A certain degree of involvement is testified also by Massimiliano Majnoni's recently published diary<sup>233</sup>, which covers the period of the last two years of the war, and in which Bazlen is a constant presence. In this case as well, the relationship between Bazlen and Majnoni had to be first of all one of friendship (as also testified by the correspondence that the two would have kept exchanging during the following years<sup>234</sup>). Majnoni (1894-1957), catholic and liberal Lombard aristocrat who had deep connections with the Roman aristocracy and court and with the Holy See, during this period was at the head of the Roman office of Comit (Banca commerciale italiana). Although hostile to

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<sup>230</sup> See *ibid.*, 31, note 3. See also Ans' account of the episode: "Tu pensa a un signore che se ne sta pacifico a casa sua mentre gli altri fanno la rivoluzione, e alle otto riceve una telefonata che gli dice di andare subito via da casa perché la polizia lo può cercare. Pensa che questo signore pacifico, alle otto di sera, non sa dove andare e incontra l'amica Maura e l'amica Maura gli dice di andare a casa sua. E pensa alla casa di Maura, una casa grande, dove non c'è mai nessuno, si sta tutto il giorno in pace, e pensa a quel signore di quarant'anni che per quattro giorni sta chiuso là dentro senza uscire mai, senza vedere nessuno. Pensa che Maura è una ragazza di venticinque anni: bella, intelligentissima, tu sai che stima ho di Maura... Cari ragazzi, siete voi che mi avete fregato. Io non ci pensavo per niente, mi ha fregato la rivoluzione, forse sono la prima vittima della rivoluzione" (Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 274).

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 198: "lui è lontano dal nostro lavoro".

<sup>232</sup> Onofri, "Contributo alla conoscenza di Bobi", 31.

<sup>233</sup> "*Sopravvivere alle rovine*". *Diario privato di un banchiere (Roma 1943-1945)*, ed. Marino Viganò, Torino: Nino Aragno Editore, 2013.

<sup>234</sup> The correspondence between Bazlen and Majnoni (conserved in the fund "Max" Majnoni of the archive of Majnoni's family in their residence in Marti, Pisa) covers the years 1941-1952, and consists of twenty-two pieces from Bazlen (letters, postcards, and notes) and three from Majnoni.

republicans and to the members of Partito d'Azione<sup>235</sup>, according to Daniele Menozzi, Majnoni nevertheless was the principal distributor of the funds set aside by banker Raffaele Mattioli to support the activity of the antifascist groups<sup>236</sup>. Majnoni's diary entries tell about his encounters and conversations with Bazlen, at times reporting of simple walks or meetings, but mostly recording discussions and exchanges of information on the facts of Rome. We thus learn that Bazlen – thanks to his vast circle of acquaintances, which extended to the German embassy – used to inform Majnoni of the recent events, delivering information and hypothesis on the next moves of the Germans and on the strategies of the different currents of the Roman Resistance<sup>237</sup>. In Majnoni's recollection of their conversations, we recognize at times some conspiratorial irony on the communists<sup>238</sup>, other times we learn of the people in need of help that Bazlen brought

<sup>235</sup> See Marino Viganò's introduction to Majnoni, *"Sopravvivere alle rovine"*, xxxv.

<sup>236</sup> See Menozzi's foreword to Majnoni, *"Sopravvivere alle rovine"*, xvii.

<sup>237</sup> See the entries of August 31<sup>st</sup> 1943: "Bazlen, sempre impaurito dal *putsch*. Mi ha raccontato che le opposizioni si erano messe d'accordo per invitare le masse a *non* scioperare domani. Unica voce dissidente il Partito d'Azione, che poi s'è dovuta *rallier* [accordare] alla maggioranza" (ibid., 58); September 7<sup>th</sup> 1943: "Poi Bazlen, che dice i tedeschi in Italia sono estremamente confusi e disorganizzati, essendo comandati dall'ambasciata, dai comandi dell'Esercito, della Marina, dell'Aviazione, dalla Gestapo e dalle S.S. Forse c'è qualcosa di vero" (ibid., 64); September 18<sup>th</sup> 1943: "Bazlen mi ha detto che dei comunisti sono partiti per Napoli per entrare in contatto con le autorità angloamericane" (ibid., 77); September 26<sup>th</sup> 1943: "Stamane ho avuto Bazlen, anche lui piuttosto agitato, per quanto a parer suo i tedeschi si preparino a lasciar Roma. Come dettaglio mi ha raccontato che all'ambasciata tedesca, per far partire i tedeschi ancora residenti a Roma, hanno dichiarato che le rappresaglie degli italiani sarebbero ferocissime" (ibid., 86); October 11<sup>th</sup> 1943: "Da Zottoli la conferma di quanto mi ebbe a dire Bazlen giovedì scorso, ossia che i tedeschi sono rimasti assai male del rifiuto russo alle loro offerte di pace" (ibid., 102); October 12<sup>th</sup> 1943: "Da Bazlen ho saputo, tramite un suo prete danese che è in contatto con un padre Leibl, S.J. che vede quotidianamente il papa, che Weizsäcker avrebbe fatto velate proposte al papa onde egli avesse in questi casi d'emergenza ad assentarsi da Roma. Il Santo Padre avrebbe recisamente rifiutato" (ibid., 103); as we learn from the entry of September 8<sup>th</sup> 1943, Bazlen was the one who informed Majnoni of the Armistice (see ibid., 66).

<sup>238</sup> See the entry of July 12<sup>th</sup> 1944: "Lunedì ebbi una lunga e divertente visita di Bazlen che mi ha raccontato del discorso di Togliatti, dell'arredamento della sala, tipo semplicista russo contadino [...], dello spirito piccolo borghese dell'uditorio, del discorso serio e conseguente del capo comunista" (ibid., 171-172).

to Majnoni<sup>239</sup>, or of the help sought by Bazlen for himself<sup>240</sup>.

In spite of his “deep repugnance” to Fascism<sup>241</sup>, of his frequentation with figures involved with the antifascist front, and of his proximity to many intellectuals close to the Italian Communist Party (such as Onofri, Debenedetti, and Foà), Bazlen never sustained or adhered to any political movement, and in those years kept seeing exponents and sympathizers of different political sides (probably even fascist sympathizers, as depicted in *Manoscritto* in Ans and Sebastiano's visit to Ans' friend Mirna<sup>242</sup>). His disenchantment with the political dimension and his non-engaged cultural positions have encountered some criticism. The most categorical is probably the one by Ara and Magris, who, addressing his anti-ideological disposition and his political non-involvement, denounce the concealed aridity (“la larvata aridità”) of his stance towards the “‘good fight’ that in the same years other men and classes fought”<sup>243</sup>. Good fight in which, Ara and Magris argue, “certainly no one has the obligation to take part to, if his nature is different, but

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<sup>239</sup> Such is the case of Giacomo Noventa, mentioned in the entry of January 10<sup>th</sup> 1945, and introduced to Majnoni by Bazlen in a moment of indigence (see *ibid.*, 283).

<sup>240</sup> See the entry of January 29<sup>th</sup> 1945: “Stamane è venuto Bazlen, che mi è venuto a raccontare che s'è messo con una mezza ebrea, che è il suo ideale. Buon pro. Era molto sporco povero Bazlen e puzzava. Ma l'amore si fa lo stesso, anche coi puzzi evidentemente. Mi ha chiesto se lo potevo aiutare un po' di più per questi mesi. E lo farò, senza dubbio, pro conto della banca, per quanto col suo spirito bizzarro potrebbe farsi un po' di soldi anche per conto suo” (*ibid.*, 303); see also the entry of September 19<sup>th</sup> 1943: “Quindi di corsa a casa dove ho trovato Bazlen, che non mi ha detto nulla di particolare, ma voleva semplicemente mangiare” (*ibid.*, 77). Majnoni's accounts on Bazlen show at times classist condescension, at times fascination for the friend whom he seems to value, but perceives as extravagant; in this regard see for instance the entry of July 4<sup>th</sup> 1944: “Dunque Bazlen senza essere, anzi essendo tutt'altro che un santo, ha di quelle *marottes* [fissazioni] dei santi. Ora s'è messo in testa di essere il solo che possa capire la Germania e che sia in grado di fare la pace con la Germania. Ma poi, col mese prossimo non avrà più un centesimo ed allora cerca lavoro. Ma oggi giorno a Roma, chi vuol mai dare lavoro a Bazlen, e come glielo retribuirebbe?” (*ibid.*, 164).

<sup>241</sup> Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen”, 9. In this regard, see also *Note senza testo*, 179 and 180: “La piramide piccoloborghese del fascismo – tutti con paura di essere licenziati, fino al vertice, M., che viveva solo in funzione della sua carriera”; “Il fascismo è stato il tentativo di realizzare lo Stato del Sole quando ormai era diventato una figura retorica”.

<sup>242</sup> See Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 169.

<sup>243</sup> Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 137.

which intelligence has to humbly reckon with – even while legitimately proceeding in his own solitary path – to understand the world”<sup>244</sup>. Bazlen's stance and writings actually give some grounds to such critiques. As we read in one of his notes:

Wars are public business of private nature of a mass with which I share some merely anatomical features. At worst, I can die at war, that is: I cannot escape from some disguised plebeian in me, and I thus need to draw my conclusions... The others can die at War at best, and then they are at least Fallen in war (otherwise, at a certain point, they would have died of cancer)...<sup>245</sup>

Still, Ara and Magris' criticism seems to be inappropriately interpreting Bazlen's political disengagement and his repulsion for nationalistic rhetoric as an alleged indifference towards coeval political and social reality.

A similar assessment of sterility (more ambiguous, and also more indirect, given the fictional nature of the work) is advanced in Carlo Levi's *L'orologio* (1950), in which Bazlen's traits are clearly recognizable in the character of Martino<sup>246</sup>. Levi's novel has at

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> *Note senza testo*, 231-232: “Le guerre sono pubbliche faccende private di una massa con la quale ho in comune alcuni caratteri meramente anatomici. Nel caso peggiore posso morire in guerra, cioè: non sono riuscito a sfuggire a un qualche camuffato plebeo in me e debbo trarne le conseguenze... Gli altri possono, nel caso migliore, morire in guerra, e allora sono per lo meno dei caduti di guerra (altrimenti, a un certo punto, sarebbero morti di cancro)...”.

<sup>246</sup> Despite the customary warning (“Com'è abitudine, si dichiara che fatti, nomi e personaggi di questo romanzo sono immaginari” [Levi, *L'orologio*, 313]), the character of Martino has been unanimously recognized as inspired to Bazlen (see Tavazzi, “Lo scrittore che non scrive”, 272; La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 94-95; de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 113-115). Levi, on the other hand, did not try to conceal the real identity of Martino's model, of which his character malevolently reproduces even the physical features and manners: “qualcuno saliva, adagio, davanti a me: vidi [...] il profilo curvo della sua schiena ingobbata, il vestito trasandato, la camicia bianca aperta sul collo come quella di un giovinetto, il lungo viso di ragazzo invecchiato, e l'aspetto di uccello frettoloso, che saltella da un ramo all'altro, come spinto da chissà quale impazienza, del mio amico Martino. 'Come va?' gli dissi, [...] e già sapevo come mi avrebbe risposto. [...] 'Benissimo, benissimo! Molto bene. Veramente bene! Adesso va veramente bene!' ma io sapevo che l'affermazione era falsa, e che non nasceva che da una delle mille regole psicologiche di Martino” (Levi, *L'orologio*, 43-44). According to Foà, Bazlen, who held Levi's work in high opinion, felt let down by reading the portrait that Levi made of him in *L'orologio* (see La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 94). Regarding Bazlen's high estimation of Levi's work, see his note: “A proposito di Carlo Levi – solo dove c'è scelta, c'è arte – cioè dove domina la resistenza, o il dubbio – che per influsso dell'uomo qualcosa diventi qualcos'altro, che dove dominava una legge naturale, per

its center the Italian political crisis of November 1945, which decreed the conclusion of the resistance government of Ferruccio Parri<sup>247</sup> and the consequent crumbling of Italian antifascist political forces with the rise to power of the Cristian democrats (facts read by Levi as the failure and missed occasion of political and social renovation offered by the end of the war). The events are here followed from the perspective of the narrator, the editor of a Roman newspaper under which is recognizable *L'Italia libera*, the newspaper of Partito d'Azione which Levi directed starting from September 1945, and with which Bazlen also had to a certain extent to collaborate<sup>248</sup>. Just as in the case of Onofri's *Manoscritto*, with Levi's *L'orologio* we find ourselves in front of a novel inspired by a personal experience and which presents itself as a document, but this time of a wider historical and political significance. Martino is here presented as a collaborator of the newspaper, and his role, if episodic, is nevertheless “of significant impact”<sup>249</sup> (to him is for instance assigned the task of interpreting the dream of the narrator concerning the symbolic figure of “the watch” from which the novel takes its title<sup>250</sup>).

Levi's transposition of Bazlen is particularly interesting, for it represents a rare

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mezzo di un filtraggio attraverso l'uomo si sviluppi un'altra legge – l'artista che viene spinto da ragioni inconscie a dare forma coscientemente all'inconscio – tutto il resto è burocrazia, programma, vanità” (*Note senza testo*, 187). Bazlen and Levi knew each other at least from the beginning of the forties (as also testified by a portrait of Bazlen painted by Levi in 1941).

<sup>247</sup> Ferruccio Parri (1890-1981), central figure of CLN (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale), was for a brief but crucial period (June-November 1945) the leader of the coalition government formed in Italy after the Liberation.

<sup>248</sup> We infer that not only from Levi's novel, but also from a letter sent by Bazlen to Lucia Rodocanachi on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1945 (and hence only few weeks before the facts depicted in the novel took place), in which Bazlen hints at his contacts with the editorial office of *L'Italia libera*: “inoltre sarebbe disposto [Sbarbaro] a collaborare per dei giornali? carlo levi, che dirige il quotidiano del partito d'azione a roma, m'ha chiesto proprio mezz'ora fa buoni collaboratori (per polemiche, and so on)” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>249</sup> Tavazzi, “Lo scrittore che non scrive”, 272.

<sup>250</sup> See Levi, *L'orologio*, 60-62.

case of a malicious portrait of his figure, and for it provides a vivid example of how his unconventional interests and his non-aligned cultural positions had to be interpreted and judged by part of the coeval intellectual society. Introducing Martino as a friend, the narrator of *L'orologio* immediately informs us of his life, which, “lacking any chance for real ties, had become interwoven with yoga, psychoanalysis, astrology, chiromancy, symbolism, and a good dose of sharp wits”<sup>251</sup>. Levi continues addressing many of the aspects we have already observed in several accounts and novelistic thematizations of Bazlen, but in this case under a malevolent light – which, as Tavazzi points out, is rather unusual, in “Levi's generally balanced writing”<sup>252</sup>. Right from the first appearance of Martino, Levi seems in fact to be eager to stress the vacuity of his interests and the sterility of his positions, which find their roots in what is interpreted as a lack of contact with reality, as a form of deep and desperate alienation:

I didn't know the everyday events of his private life, events that he usually kept hidden; but I knew or could guess the fundamental weakness at the root of his life, otherwise so brilliant with talent and varied in interests. It was a fundamental weakness common to so many men, an inability to live, a lack of compatibility with life around him, a horror of blood, an impotence that isolates many men in an empty despair and drives the best of them along the streets of symbols, the involved patterns of escape, quests, religion, and heroism. As for Martino, he took refuge in intellectuality, in strange and infallible erudition, concerned in large part with a world symbolic and arcane, still the best substitute for simple knowledge. Like many other men, he was incurably deaf to the direct voice of things, to a sense of color, form, sound, and sentiment, and did not accept this deafness but restlessly fought to get out of it, always looking beyond for what was bound to elude him forever. No phase of human activity escaped the eager interests of Martino, from psychology to politics, from the most abstruse science to the smallest private love affairs of his acquaintances, particularly if they were women. He knew all about

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<sup>251</sup> Carlo Levi, *The Watch. A Novel*, trans. John Farrar and Marianna Gifford (South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>252</sup> Tavazzi, “Lo scrittore che non scrive”, 272.

each one, yet he did not accept them for what they were but saw them as clues to something else, a hidden truth one couldn't know but only try to interpret. Yes, Martino was the interpreter of a nonexistent world, an interpreter (a priest) enthusiastic and desperate.<sup>253</sup>

Even Martino's interest and involvement in his friends' lives are within this frame represented as nothing more than a corollary of his own inability to live: "Martino's action is the only one the dry perfection of his nature allows: he is one who plays the accompaniment to souls of others, a Hermes with hazel eyes"<sup>254</sup>.

If it might be true that this bitter caricature may be first of all motivated by real life situations, rather than by an actual intellectual incompatibility<sup>255</sup>, it is nevertheless clearly observable in it a censure towards Martino's cultural positions and to his sterile stance towards politics ("Martino came up muttering something about brothers and fathers, fratricide and parricide, the two diverse foundation of politics"<sup>256</sup>). This censure is not dissimilar from the one we have observed in Ara and Magris, and concerns Bazlen's supposed political indifference and his lack of engagement, interpreted in both cases as a result of a wrongly directed or "wasted intelligence"<sup>257</sup> (an ulterior case of intellectual or cultural incompatibility might probably be recognized in the case of Italo

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<sup>253</sup> Levi, *The Watch*, 42-43.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>255</sup> La Ferla conjectures that Levi's aversion towards Bazlen might have been connected to Bazlen's past relationship with Linuccia Saba, who had become Levi's companion (see *Diritto al silenzio*, 94). Other hints of Levi's antipathy towards Bazlen can be found in Levi's letters to Linuccia: "Ieri sera ho trovato Bobi, che era forse ubriaco: ma certamente pazzo e sconnesso oltre misura" (letter of September 8<sup>th</sup> 1949, in Carlo Levi and Linuccia Saba, *Carissimo Puck: lettere d'amore e di vita (1945-1969)* [Roma: Carlo Mancosu Editore, 1994], 99). See also Bazlen's letter to Foà of July 4<sup>th</sup> 1954: "old calabria: mio esemplare [...] prestato anni fa a carlo levi, che lo avrà mindestens [almeno] atomizzato" (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>256</sup> Levi, *The Watch*, 213.

<sup>257</sup> Claudio Magris' definition of Bazlen's intelligence as "prodigal and wasted" ("l'intelligenza prodiga e bruciata di Bobi Bazlen" ["Il cielo chassidico di Boby Bazlen", *Il piccolo*, November 15, 1967]) does not necessarily have a negative connotation, but it rather emphasizes the anti-utilitarian nature of his activity and his "regal nonchalance and unpredictable eccentricity" (*ibid.*), for which Magris in his article actually shows great fascination.

Calvino, who, in the blurb to the first edition of Del Giudice's *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, never nominates Bazlen, and ungenerously reduces him to an “original figure of Italian literary life, friend of poets and writers”<sup>258</sup>). This criticism seems though to be vitiated by a misunderstanding motivated by radically different aptitudes and positions, and appears too categorical if we consider Bazlen's irregular but actual involvement with the antifascist front, and especially the cultural weight of his editorial work, which reveals factual interest and commitment in the political and social dimensions. His efforts with Nuove Edizioni Ivrea probably represent the most manifest proof of this commitment, which is also testified by some of his writings of the late forties which deal with the issue of nationalism.

As we have seen, Bazlen's anti-nationalism is clearly expressed in “Intervista su Trieste”, in which he retrospectively demystifies the nationalistic and preposterous characters of its ideology and activity. “Il nazionalismo è veramente morto?” (1947, one of the very few writings published by Bazlen during his life) is just as eloquent in regard to his positions, and might also help to understand the reasons behind his avoidance of political involvement and his abstention from the political debate. In the brief article, he addresses the issue of nationalism in relation to its recrudescence between the two World Wars. According to Bazlen, nationalism is an historical wreckage, which he, like many, thought was already “dead” in the aftermath of the Great War, since the progress of Western thought and civilization seemed to have ruled it out. Criticizing the idea of an historically linear and necessary progress, Bazlen nevertheless firmly points out:

But I assure you: you don't have to believe that I do not conceive an end,

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<sup>258</sup> Now in Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 127.



or that I rule out evolution. It is just that I have no right to name this end; if I knew it, I would already be there. And evolution proceeds through impervious paths, which are not as direct as we used to think, in a continuous fight of the future against the past, in which often the future wins, often the past does.<sup>259</sup>

His conclusion is that he hopes nationalism is actually dead, but also that it is necessary to constantly operate “to make it die”, keeping in mind that it may as well be still alive. Emphasizing the centrality of individual and personal commitment, he finally expresses a firm detachment not from political issues themselves, but rather from the contemporary predominant perspectives on them:

But if you want to fight with solid tools, and not to kill windmills leaving alive the germs of the colored shirts to come, you cannot delude yourself, and you must realize that not everybody lives in the same historical moment in which you live; you must realize that, even if you live in the Twentieth century, not everybody lives in the Twentieth century – and in this regard, just think that the real *historical moment* is the result of your moment, mine, and everyone else's. You have to remember that next to us we have the representatives of all historical periods, that we do not have just our contemporaries. You will realize that if you think that I am not a contemporary with Farinacci (but that Farinacci could have nevertheless got me killed), and that, fortunately, I am not contemporary with most contemporary political thinkers.<sup>260</sup>

Bazlen's refusal to adhere to any ideological or militant position seems thus not to be motivated by indifference towards the political dimension, but rather by his distance from

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<sup>259</sup> *Note senza testo*, 184-185: “Con ciò non creda, glielo assicuro, che io non pensi a una meta, che io neghi un'evoluzione. Soltanto che alla meta non ho diritto di dare un nome; se la conoscessi sarei già là. E l'evoluzione passa per vie impervie, meno dirette di quanto credevamo, in una lotta continua dell'avvenire contro il passato, in cui spesso vince l'avvenire, spesso anche il passato”.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 185: “Ma per lottare con mezzi concreti, per non ammazzare mulini a vento lasciando vivi i germi di future camicie colorate, è necessario che lei non si faccia illusioni, che sappia che non tutti vivono nel momento storico in cui vive lei, che anche se lei vive nel ventesimo secolo, non tutti vivono nel ventesimo secolo, (e qui pensi che il vero *momento storico* è la risultante del momento suo e di quello di tutti gli altri). Si ricordi che abbiamo vicino a noi i rappresentanti di tutti i periodi della storia, che non abbiamo solo contemporanei. Lo capirà se riflette che io, che le scrivo, non sono contemporaneo di Farinacci (ma Farinacci avrebbe lo stesso potuto farmi ammazzare), e che, per fortuna, non sono contemporaneo della maggior parte dei pensatori politici contemporanei”.

“most contemporary political thinkers” and, we might presume, has to be related to an early disenchantment with the political dimension – disenchantment arguably connected to his early life experience, and fostered by his mixed cultural identity. As Renate Lunzer points out, Bazlen spent in fact his youth and first manhood years in the period between the two World Wars, thus “during the rising tide of ethnocentrism, nationalisms, and authoritarian regimes in several European countries, and during the two decades of the fascist regime in Italy”<sup>261</sup>, and in a city and in an environment particularly sensitive and exposed to this tide. From one of Montale's letters to Svevo we actually learn that in 1927 Bazlen was already persuaded of coeval Italy being “the most fetid and unlivable country in the world”<sup>262</sup>. His visceral anti-authoritarianism and his personal political program are so expressed in one of his aphorisms (arguably of the first fifties):

Political program:	
space with no people	Dictatorship of
freedom from the State	a free man –
a place in the shadow	but he does not become
right to silence	a dictator <sup>263</sup>

Bazlen's disenchantment seems thus not to be connected to a contemplative stance, but rather to be motivated by a disregard for the level of the (especially Italian) cultural and political situation and debate, and by a deeply rooted nonconformism. With regard to that, it is eloquent how Bazlen, years later, would have clarified the motives of his non-alignment, during the Second World War, with any of the antifascist forces, and

<sup>261</sup> Renate Lunzer, *Irredentisti redenti. Intellettuali giuliani del '900* (Trieste: Lint, 2009), 246.

<sup>262</sup> Montale to Svevo, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1927, in Svevo and Montale, *Carteggio*, 63: “L'anno prossimo [...] se potrò farò un salto colà a Trieste, come l'anno scorso. [...] Se non facessi così non potrei certo rivedere Bobi, convinto com'è a considerare la nostra penisola come il più fetido e inabitabile paese del globo”.

<sup>263</sup> *Note senza testo*, 232: “Programma politico: / spazio senza popolo / libertà dallo Stato / un posto all'ombra / diritto al silenzio / Dittatura di / un uomo libero – / ma lui non diventa / un dittatore”.

also – arguably with hindsight and disappointment on the evolution of the political situation after the Liberation – the motives of his distance from the antifascist front itself:

The fascists could not be the real enemies. Although they were in power, at the time of Nuove Edizioni Ivrea they didn't exist anymore, or maybe they had never existed; we already knew that they would have eventually died down by themselves. The danger was represented by the antifascists, who, instead of trying to understand, put themselves on the level of the fascists, becoming a mere negative of whatever positive; but with arguments that could have also been our own. And the only true danger, as far as I am concerned, is the right argument or the right word in the wrong mouth. It's not a matter of words, it's a matter of mouths. I, who notoriously speak by paradox, had invented the anti-antifascism.<sup>264</sup>

At this point (1962) Bazlen's discontent had to be exacerbated also by the resistance encountered by his editorial proposals in the previous years at Einaudi, and by his somehow isolated position within the Italian cultural society<sup>265</sup>. However, in a letter to Rodocanachi of September 1945 he had already expressed his disappointment about many of the former companions: “Now that the anti-fascist complicity has run out, the only bond that I had with all these good people who have waited twenty-two years to work their way up has disappeared as well”<sup>266</sup>.

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<sup>264</sup> Bazlen to Foà, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1962, in *Lettere editoriali*, 323: “I fascisti non potevano essere i veri nemici. Per quanto dominassero, ai tempi delle N.E.I. [Nuove Edizioni Ivrea] non esistevano più, o forse non erano mai esistiti; si sapeva a priori che si sarebbero sgonfiati da sé. Il pericolo erano gli antifascisti che invece di tentare di capire si mettevano sul piano dei fascisti, e si riducevano a una qualsiasi negativa di una qualsiasi positiva; ma con argomenti che potevano essere anche nostri. E l'unico pericolo vero, per me, è l'argomento giusto o la parola giusta nella bocca sbagliata. Non è un problema di parole, è un problema di bocche. Io che notoriamente dico paradossi avevo inventato l'anti-anti-fascismo”.

<sup>265</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Voghera of August 30<sup>th</sup> 1961, in *Tracce del sapiente*, 45: “fuori dal Klatsch letterario, lo sono da anni e anni”.

<sup>266</sup> Bazlen to Rodocanachi, September 9<sup>th</sup> 1945, qtd. in Marcenaro, *Un'amica di Montale*, 190: “ora che è venuta a mancare la complicità antifascista, è venuto a cadere l'unico legame che avessi con tutta questa brava gente che ha aspettato ventidue anni per fare carriera”. On the same issue, see also Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 125: “[Onofri] ci ha detto di un certo suo aristocratico snobismo di fronte alle vicende politiche, non senza una punta di disillusione per alcuni celebri 'giri di valzer' cui aveva assistito dopo la caduta del fascismo”.

## 5. Via Margutta 7

The two decades after the Second World War had to be for Bazlen a period particularly rich of encounters and satisfactions<sup>267</sup>. In Rome, he had moved in the apartment previously occupied by Ljuba Blumenthal<sup>268</sup>, where, as Dorflies recollects, he “almost lived in poverty”<sup>269</sup>. The apartment of via Margutta 7, which Bazlen would have occupied until few months before his death, consisted of a room of only few square meters on the second floor of an old house, furnished only with “a sofa bed, two big cupboards, shelves stacked with books, two small tables, two typewriters”<sup>270</sup>. Pellegrini claims that many remember that apartment where “writers, scholars, and politicians of different parties” visited Bazlen and “reasoned with him of their own problems”<sup>271</sup>. The

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<sup>267</sup> They were “probably the best period of his life”, Pellegrini suggests (“Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 62). Gillo Dorflies too recollects that when he met him in Rome, Bazlen was “more at ease than in Trieste or Genoa” (*Lacerti della memoria*, 34).

<sup>268</sup> See Ljuba Blumenthal's account in Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 94: “Sa che gliel'ho trovata io quella casa? [...] Ci avevo abitato prima di venire a Londra per le leggi razziali. [...] Comunque prima di partire ho pensato che le due sorelle, una cieca e l'altra sarta, che affittavano quell'appartamento erano perfette per lui, e infatti è stato sempre lì. E quando ha dovuto andarsene è stato terribile”.

<sup>269</sup> Gillo Dorflies, “Quando l'intellettuale aiuta il genio altrui”, *Corriere della Sera*, March 28, 1984, 3. Weiss also recollects that “he lived with very little, he did have no need of comforts” (Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen nel ricordo di due amici”, 6). We find references to Bazlen's constant precarious economic situation also in his letters to Lucia Rodocanachi. See for instance the letter of March 14<sup>th</sup> 1941: “il resto, tutto malissimo: certe mie trattative con un giovane editore stanno per finire male per mancanza di fantasia sua e di remissività mia, e martedì o mercoledì prossimo comincerò a morir di fame” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto). See also the letter of August 7<sup>th</sup> 1957 (in which Bazlen also arguably hints to a life annuity that he probably started again to receive, irregularly, years after the end of the war): “Ho pochi soldi, cioè regolarmente quel tanto che mi basta per mangiare dormire fumare e per le spese più indispensabili; più irregolarmente parecchi soldi che vengono o non vengono, e che da parecchio tempo a questa parte non sono venuti” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>270</sup> Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen nel ricordo di due amici”, 7.

<sup>271</sup> Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 63.

room of via Margutta – “where all of us met him”, as Angela Zucconi reminisces<sup>272</sup> – is a constant presence in the recollections on Bazlen's Roman years.

From the accounts of those who frequented him in this period, Bazlen comes out as carefree and often euphoric, in spite of his constant precarious economic situation. Montale recollects that Bazlen was “as poor as a church mouse [*povero in canna*], and with no desire of making any money”<sup>273</sup>. Saba, who visited him in March 1945, in a letter to his wife nevertheless describes him as “in a state of perfect third-degree euphoria”<sup>274</sup>. From Bazlen's letters we gather that economic insecurity seemed in fact to exhilarate him. In this regard, see how he asks Foà to help him selling the books of his own private library: “please try to sell some books as soon as possible. i have some problems, which i am decorously bearing and which, so far, have only amused me; but the people around me is not yet so good-natured”<sup>275</sup>; or see the letter to Rodocanachi of March 14<sup>th</sup> 1941, in which he informs her of having not worked or read anything in the previous month, for he had been too “damn busy” at having the time of his life<sup>276</sup>. From Bazlen's letters to Rodocanachi we also learn of his “great love for Rome”<sup>277</sup>, where he had found a cosmopolitan environment, and where he met and associated with a large amount of

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<sup>272</sup> Angela Zucconi, *Cinquant'anni nell'utopia, il resto nell'aldilà* (Napoli: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2000), 188.

<sup>273</sup> Montale, “Variazioni”, 1119.

<sup>274</sup> Letter of March 16<sup>th</sup> 1945, in Saba, *Atroce paese che amo*, 5.

<sup>275</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano Foà, 3 Mar. 1948. Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1948. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “vedi per favore di vendere al più presto un po' di libri. io ho difficoltà portate decorosamente e che finora non hanno fatto che divertirmi, ma le persone intorno a me non hanno ancora un così buon carattere”.

<sup>276</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 14 Mar. 1941. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “[...] sono stato maledettamente occupato a divertirmi un mondo e mezzo”.

<sup>277</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 11 Nov. 1941. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto.

people. His frequentations and the nature of his relationships are only partially reconstructible from his letters and through the accounts of some of his friends and acquaintances. Among the artists and intellectuals that Bazlen used to see in those years, we find Alberto Savinio, Elsa Morante, Alberto Moravia, Angela Zucconi, Gabriella Bemporad, Bianca Garufi, Ernesto Buonaiuti<sup>278</sup>, Elena Croce, Leone Traverso, Lanza del Vasto, Enzo Turolla<sup>279</sup>, Natalia Ginzburg, Leonor Fini, Federico Fellini<sup>280</sup>, Walter Pedullà<sup>281</sup>, Roberto Calasso<sup>282</sup>, Pier Paolo Pasolini<sup>283</sup>. From Bazlen's letters we learn that he was also in good relations with Ferdinand Lion<sup>284</sup>, Fabrizio Onofri<sup>285</sup>, Tommaso Landolfi<sup>286</sup>, Giulio Carlo Argan<sup>287</sup>, Sandro Penna<sup>288</sup>.

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<sup>278</sup> Foà recollects that Bazlen, during the Second World War, used to often see Buonaiuti, and greatly respected him (see Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 135).

<sup>279</sup> We owe this information to professor Rolando Damiani.

<sup>280</sup> Antonio Debenedetti (*Giacomino*, 138-139) recollects that when, in 1992, he met Fellini and asked him about Bazlen, the director was initially moved, but afterwards grew laconic and distant – “come se avessi sfiorato un argomento molto particolare, comunque inopportuno considerando che mi conosceva ancora poco”.

<sup>281</sup> “Ho incontrato più volte Bazlen nella sua stanza resa impraticabile dai mucchi di libri sparsi per terra, o sul letto. Si parlava un po' di tutto, umile e sublime la sua conversazione” (Pedullà, *Il Novecento segreto*, 140).

<sup>282</sup> Calasso remembers that he met Bazlen in 1960, thanks to Elémire Zolla and Cristina Campo: “Cominciai a vederlo molto spesso. Per lo più da solo, ma a volte anche in compagnia di certi suoi amici. Tutti rigorosamente estranei alla cosiddetta società letteraria. [...] Nostra meta abituale erano delle bettole dove si beveva del vino francamente non memorabile” (Marcoaldi, “L'uomo che sapeva troppo”, 35).

<sup>283</sup> Amelia Rosselli recollects “[Bazlen] ha molto rispettato anche Pasolini, lontano da lui tanti anni luce” (Renato Minore, “Il dolore in una stanza”, *Il Messaggero*, February 2, 1984, 5).

<sup>284</sup> A letter from Bazlen to Lion was published in Roberto Bazlen, “Tre lettere”, in *Adelphi* (Milano: Adelphi, 1971), 193-200.

<sup>285</sup> See the letter to Voghera of July 18<sup>th</sup> 1963 (in *Tracce del sapiente*, 53), in which Bazlen suggests to his friend, who was looking for work, to contact Onofri, at the time editor of *Tempi moderni*: “scrivi senz'altro direttamente al direttore, molto mio amico (sul serio, non sub specie italiana), a mio nome, se c'è roba per te, te la dà senz'altro”.

<sup>286</sup> We do not know much about Bazlen relationship with Landolfi, except that they knew and used to see each other at least from 1938. From a letter to Lucia Rodocanachi of December 26<sup>th</sup> 1939 we learn that Bazlen spent the Christmas of 1939 at Landolfi's in Pico (the letter is conserved in Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto). Rebay (“I diàspori di Montale”, 36) also informs us of a postcard sent to Bazlen by Montale and Landolfi from Pico on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1939 (signed by “Eusebius” and “Tom Landolfi”).

<sup>287</sup> See the letter to Lucia Rodocanachi of August 16<sup>th</sup> 1942, in which Bazlen suggests her to contact the art critic for help: “dati i nostri attuali rapporti sicuramente non mi rifiuta nulla” (Archivio del Novecento

The traces left by these encounters and frequentations are numerous, and of different nature. Pedullà, in line with other portraits, recalls that Bazlen “enjoyed the reputation of being a magician”<sup>289</sup>. Zolla remembers him as a “perfectly free man”, and as a most valuable interlocutor<sup>290</sup>. Besides the usual accounts on his fame, on his culture, on his extravagant interests<sup>291</sup>, and on his “pedagogical” work (which we will address in the following chapter), in some instances Bazlen's traces are recognizable also in the writings of his friends and acquaintances. Cristina Campo (with whom, according to Pieracci Harwell, he shared a deep bond of friendship<sup>292</sup>) in 1954 dedicated to Bazlen (“a B.B.”) the brief poem “Il maestro d'arco”<sup>293</sup>. Antonio Pizzuto (who found in Bazlen an early reader of his work and that also thanks to him succeeded in publishing *Signorina Rosina*) in his 1956 novel caricatures Bazlen and Debenedetti intent on providing him feedback regarding his previous work (*Così*) under the fictional characters of Chthés and

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in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>288</sup> “di penna sono molto amico”, Bazlen writes to Lucia Rodocanachi on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1940 (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>289</sup> Pedullà, *Il Novecento segreto*, 139.

<sup>290</sup> See Mezzena Lona, “Elémire Zolla”, 27: “Era un personaggio da frequentare, assolutamente. Aveva estratto l'essenza da quel turbine di incontri e di scontri che poteva essere la società triestina. [...] Era perfettamente libero. E quindi valeva la pena ogni tanto andarlo a visitare, sentire di quali letture parlava, quali accostamenti inediti poteva evocare”.

<sup>291</sup> In this regard, see Cristina Campo's letter to Traverso of October 12<sup>th</sup> 1955, in Cristina Campo, *Caro Bul. Lettere a Leone Traverso (1953-1967)* (Milano: Adelphi, 2007), 28: “Tra poco verrà Bobi, a spiegarmi ceti numeri che m'inquietano oltre misura. Bobi è un gran mandorlato, siamo d'accordo, ma sotto mi sembra che ci sia del gran buono”. In her letter Campo might be referring to Bazlen's interest in Esotericism, which is also testified by Bazlen's letters to Lucia Rodocanachi of September 29<sup>th</sup> 1956 (in which we read about the outcome of a séance) and November 27<sup>th</sup> 1956 (in which he alludes at a “shocking adventure with the irrational, related with psychic forces, sorcery, and so on”) (both letters are conserved in Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>292</sup> See Margherita Pieracci Harwell, “Nota al testo”, in Cristina Campo, *Lettere a Mita* (Milano: Adelphi, 1999), 301.

<sup>293</sup> Now in Cristina Campo, *La tigre assente* (Milano: Adelphi, 1991), 32: “Tu, Assente che bisogna amare... / termine che ci sfuggi e che c'inseguì / come ombra d'uccello sul sentiero: / io non ti voglio più cercare. / Vibrerò senza quasi mirare la mia freccia, / se la corda del cuore non sia tesa: / il maestro d'arco zen così m'insegna / che da tremila anni Ti vede”. For the identification of “B.B.” as Bazlen, see Cristina De Stefano, *Belinda e il mostro. Vita segreta di Cristina Campo* (Milano: Adelphi, 2002), 66.

Tumò<sup>294</sup>. Giusi Montali argues that Amelia Rosselli's 1955 French poetic prose “Le Chinois à Rome”<sup>295</sup> importantly draws from the symbolism and themes of Bazlen's unfinished novel, and from the notes that would have been later published in *Note senza testo*, which Rosselli probably read during her frequentation of Bazlen<sup>296</sup>.

His vast network of relationships, paired with his discretion, also left room for suggestive, but at times unprovable or even preposterous conjectures<sup>297</sup>. The fascination surrounding Bazlen's figure in his Roman years, and the consequent legend which from that took shape, are so described by writer and translator Lucia Drudi Demby, who first met him in 1948: “To talk about Bobi Bazlen is always somehow a problem, because of this elusiveness of his which has become a legend. One obviously tries to oppose to this

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<sup>294</sup> See Antonio Pizzuto, *Signorina Rosina* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2004), 33: “Questa volta giunse l'annuncio che Chthés stava per passare il libro a Tumò. In autunno era nelle mani di Tumò; a Natale don Zazzi, che evidentemente andava e veniva da uno all'altro, fu in grado di leggergli un appunto definitivo, scritto sotto dettatura di entrambi. Diceva su per giù così: 'Chthés a Tumò: “Bel lavoro, denso e sostanzioso. Ma la forma. La forma. Lo vorrei più aereo. Terminerei a pagina 7”’. Tumò a Chthés: “Nulla da eccepire quanto alla forma. Però io lo vorrei più concreto. Potrebbe condensarsi in breve elegia”. Chthés e Tumò ringraziano il loro reverendo amico per gli ottimi asparagi”. Antonio Pane, in his notes to Pizzuto's novel *Così* (written between 1949 and 1952, and posthumously published in 1989 for Edizioni Polistampa) quotes a typewritten note (entitled “Giudizi su 'Così” and dated “Roma 24 Febbraio 1954”) discovered in the papers left by Pizzuto. The note reports Bazlen's and Debenedetti's impressions and suggestions on the novel (the intermediary between Pizzuto and the two intellectuals was Maria Teresa Pintacuda Pieraccini), of which the above-quoted passage from *Signorina Rosina* appears a clear parody: “Bazlen: riserve di lingua / scandalizzato per fiaba / disapprovazione del finale tragico / certa monotonia in alcuni episodi / sveltire in qualche singolo punto / lo trova simpatico – denso – pieno di fantasia e di impegno. Giacomino (de Benedetti [*sic*]): molto più tecnico di Bazlen / nessuna riserva di lingua / non ha letto la fiaba per proibizione di B. / Propone: / fare finire il libro a pag. 124 [...] / tagliare episodio pagg. 79-92 [...] per eccesso di monotonia nella ripetizione del motivo [...]” (Antonio Pizzuto, *Così* [Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 1998], 143).

<sup>295</sup> Now in *L'opera poetica*, ed. Stefano Giovanuzzi (Milano: Mondadori, 2012), 557-567.

<sup>296</sup> See Giusi Montali, “*Le Chinois à Rome*: psicoanalisi, esoterismo e discipline orientali nell'opera poetica di Amelia Rosselli”, *Poetiche* 14.36 (2012): 139: “È come se Amelia Rosselli attingesse al romanzo di Bazlen per trarne alcune immagini simboliche e le rielaborasse scomponendole e assemblandole in altro modo con libertà assoluta”.

<sup>297</sup> Renzo Cigoi, for instance, insists on claiming a frequentation and an intellectual complicity between Bazlen and Ezra Pound, and does so in spite of the account of Mary de Rachewiltz (Pound's daughter and Bazlen's friend), who, asked by Cigoi, asserted the groundlessness of his hypothesis (see Cigoi's introduction to *Tracce del sapiente*, 8-11). Lilla Cepak conjectures a deep influence of Bazlen towards Pasolini, grounding her hypothesis only on an (unlikely) affinity of the thought of the two intellectuals (see Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 63-65).



legend, to look for definitions – which he evades [...], as he wanted to evade any definition”<sup>298</sup>. It is curious how, despite her lucid analysis of the problematic nature of Bazlen's representations, she too finally delivers a description that employs categories which eventually become functional to the growth of his legend: “He appeared to me as a *magicien*. [...] He was a sort of herald of news, of tales... This created an extreme fascination, to which I yielded quite gladly”<sup>299</sup>.

A most crucial encounter that Bazlen made in his first Roman years, was the one with Jungian psychoanalyst Ernst Bernhard<sup>300</sup>. Bazlen met him in 1939, and started with him a long and rich personal and professional relationship. Between the Forties and the

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<sup>298</sup> In Grasso, *Tuttilibri*.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Besides introducing to Italy Analytical psychology, Bernhard was actually one of the very few thanks to which psychoanalysis *tout court* was introduced to Italy (see Enzo Siciliano, “Uno psicoanalista amico degli astri”, *La Stampa*, January 4, 1970). Claudio Modigliani recalls: “[Bernhard] conosceva bene la teoria e la tecnica freudiana, seguiva Jung e pensava con la testa propria. [...] Era uno spirito religioso, ma di una religiosità eclettica e filtrata da un senso umano fuori dal comune” (Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 69-70). Bernhard, who was of Jewish descent, moved to Rome in 1936, escaping from the Nazi Berlin. Among the patients that regularly visited his practice, we find future analysts such as Gianfranco Draghi, Silvana Radogna, and Claudio Modigliani, and many intellectuals and artists such as Amelia Rosselli, Giacomo Debenedetti, Giorgio Manganelli, Adriano Olivetti, Cristina Campo, Federico Fellini, and Natalia Ginzburg (Ginzburg's experience with Bernhard is described in the chapter “La mia psicanalisi” of her book *Mai devi domandarmi* [Milano: Garzanti, 1970], on pages 58-66). An idea of the influence he had on many of them can be inferred by the case of Fellini. After a first experience with Freudian therapy (from 1960 to 1965), the director underwent therapy with Bernhard, who, according to Tullio Kezich, became for him a sort of mentor (see “SOMNII EXPLANATIO ovvero IN QUEL REGNO DOVE TUTTO È POSSIBILE”, in Federico Fellini. *Il libro dei sogni*. [Milano: Rizzoli, 2007]). Mirisola so describes the relationship between Bernhard and Fellini and the influence of the German analyst on the director's life and work: “Nel 1960 [...] il regista de *La dolce vita* inizia a frequentare il suo studio e, poiché da subito si stabilì tra i due un rapporto spontaneo e cordiale, sovente il lavoro analitico e lo scavo del materiale onirico proseguivano nella pizzeria sotto casa dello psicologo. In breve tempo Bernhard diviene un punto di riferimento fondamentale per il regista, che inizia a leggere l'opera di Jung, ad interessarsi della filosofia sottesa all'*I Ching*, e che, su suggerimento esplicito di Bernhard, comincia a redigere quello che è da poco stato pubblicato come il suo *Libro dei sogni*, monumentale celebrazione dell'inconscio e della creatività felliniana. I colloqui con Bernhard spingono Fellini a cimentarsi in nuove frontiere della regia, consentendo all'inconscio di irrompere così nel mondo di celluloidi” (“La critica come processo d'individuazione”, 75). According to Mirisola, *Otto e mezzo* (1963) especially reflects the effects of the analytical sessions of this period (see *ibid.*, 14, note 23).

Fifties he in fact became the fundamental intermediary between the German analyst and the Italian intellectual and editorial world, introducing and recommending him to many of his acquaintances and friends<sup>301</sup>, and starting with him in 1947 the collection “Psiche e Coscienza” for the publishing house Astrolabio (in regard to this collaboration, in 1969 Zolla argued that “the better part of the good readings of the last twenty years, [had been] supplied to Italians by Bernhard and Bazlen”<sup>302</sup>). According to Carotenuto, Bernhard was for Bazlen like “an hurricane”<sup>303</sup>. La Ferla argues that Bernhard was “the one who more than anyone else [had] a crucial influence on his existence”, and that in many aspects the two intellectuals appeared “as the specular image one of the other”<sup>304</sup>: they shared the same interest not only in Jungian theories and Eastern philosophies, but also a common enthusiasm for astrology and chiology, the same faith and attention to coincidences, the same consideration for the idea of destiny – and also the same reluctance to publication<sup>305</sup>. Thanks to Bernhard's teaching, Bazlen's multiple and centrifugal interests found what La Ferla describes as “a consecration to unitary language”<sup>306</sup>.

When he met Bernhard, Bazlen already had a solid psychoanalytical culture, and

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<sup>301</sup> Among them Amelia Rosselli, Angela Zucconi, Cristina Campo and Luciano Foà (who would have not though undergone any therapy with Bernhard), but also Bianca Garufi and Silvana Radogna, who would have become Bernhard's pupils, and, in 1962, would have been among the founders of AIPA, the Italian Association of Analytical Psychology (in this regard see La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 54, and de Savognani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 71).

<sup>302</sup> Zolla, “L'arcaico dottor Ernst Bernhard”.

<sup>303</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 127.

<sup>304</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 52-53.

<sup>305</sup> Bernhard's only published book (*Mitobiografia*, ed. Hélène Erba-Tissot, Milano: Adelphi, 1969) came out posthumously. Addressing Bernhard's reluctance to writing and publication, Erba-Tissot argues: “Non era solo la mancanza di tempo che gli impediva di pubblicare. Lo scrivere gli riusciva difficile. [...] Nello scrivere [...] la sua ricerca di esattezza scientifica e di sistematicità gli era piuttosto d'impedimento [...] Ritornava sempre a elaborare e a formulare più chiaramente, più sistematicamente lo stesso pensiero. [...] Più di ogni altra cosa lo tratteneva dal pubblicare la coscienza di quanto di inconsueto e di sgradito, per certi ambienti, poteva esserci nei suoi convincimenti più profondi e più cari” (introduction to Bernhard, *Mitobiografia*, xiii-xiv).

<sup>306</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 53.

had already turned from Freudian psychoanalysis to Jungian Analytical psychology<sup>307</sup>. Voghera recalls that Bazlen, although distancing himself from “the fanatical admirer of Freud and Weiss”, already in his Triestine years was deeply interested in psychoanalysis<sup>308</sup>. This early and deep enthusiasm is eloquently confirmed by Bazlen himself in a 1959 letter to Foà, in which he recalls the effect of the first time he heard about psychoanalysis, in 1917, and he confesses that it was one of the “three or four

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<sup>307</sup> Regarding Bazlen's psychoanalytical formation, Carotenuto takes for granted that Bazlen was up to date with most of the German published works by Freud and Jung (see *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 123), and that in the middle of the thirties he had already embraced Jungian theories (see *ibid.*, 71). The reasons of Bazlen's estrangement from Freudian theory are partially expressed in “Freud” (the piece of prose, published for the first time in 1970 in *Note senza testo* and now in *Scritti* [259-261], was arguably written in 1947 or 1948 for *Omnibus*, in occasion of the publication of Bazlen's translation of Freud's *Introduzione allo studio della psicoanalisi*). In the brief article, Bazlen acknowledges the father of Psychoanalysis as the discoverer within Western culture of a new dimension of man, and maintains that the many grounded reservations that one could make on his work cannot undermine the importance of his discoveries. He nevertheless denounces the inevitable unilaterality and partiality of Freud's theories, and argues that his fundamental examinations, findings, and experiments were limited to the positivistic and bourgeois environment in which he lived – which was “small, replete, satisfied” (*Note senza testo*, 259-260): “Freud, curvo sul suo microscopio, scopre i bacilli dell'anima. E scopre l'anima. Ma è uno scienziato del diciannovesimo secolo, e crede che l'enigma dell'anima si risolve vedendone solo i bacilli. È uno scienziato, rifiuta di essere considerato un filosofo, ma nonpertanto dalla sua opera, nata in quel clima, deriva implicita una filosofia, una visione di vita, un programma, un ideale umano: dell'Uomo dall'Anima Pasteurizzata, il quale, in un mondo senza più simboli, e in virtù della sua sessualità normalizzata, ha libera la libido necessaria per far finalmente carriera” (*ibid.*, 260). Bazlen continues affirming that, for the ones of his own generation, the magnitude and importance of Freud's discoveries are testified by the fact that they have become quickly “natural” and obvious premises of their culture, and that for this reason “the mechanicalness of [Freud's] applications is irritating”, and “his deductions have become plane and narrow” (*ibid.*); the task of coordinating, correcting and integrating his pioneering discoveries, rests on his successors (see *ibid.*, 259) (in this regard see also Bazlen's aphorism: “Il maestro scopre il problema, gli allievi inventano le risposte” [*ibid.*, 229]). Bazlen closes his piece: “questo scienziato del diciannovesimo secolo, che di tutti i miti che hanno mosso la storia del mondo ha veduto e sezionato soltanto il mito patriarcale, è l'ultimo grande patriarca” (*ibid.*, 261). Arguably in relation to the above-quoted passage, Carotenuto speculates that Bazlen had to recognize in Freud “the omnipotent patriarch, and in Jung the rebellious son desperately looking for his own path” (*Jung e la cultura italiana*, 125). Certainly Analytical psychology had to result to Bazlen as more modern and also as more congenial to his own outlook and disposition; furthermore, it welcomed thematics and realities excluded by Freudian theory (see in this regard Bazlen's letter of July 14<sup>th</sup> 1960 to Foà: “sai che escludo se possa fare della psicologia plausibile fino a che la psicologia non avrà assorbito anche la parapsicologia” [*Lettere editoriali*, 301]). As for the case of Freud, also with Jung Bazlen would have anyhow remained to a certain extent critical. Nevertheless, Analytical psychology represented for Bazlen (who always displayed deep skepticism towards any theoretical framework and avoided embracing any cultural doctrine) a fundamental and privileged point of reference.

<sup>308</sup> Voghera, *Gli anni della psicoanalisi*, 24-25.

things that [...] determined [him] thoroughly”<sup>309</sup>. Stuparich states (“maybe too categorically, but with substantial truthfulness”<sup>310</sup>) that the first signals of Freudian doctrine in Italy started from Trieste with Bazlen, together with Weiss, as one of its most incisive advocates<sup>311</sup>. Regarding Bazlen's personal experience with psychoanalytical therapy: according to Pellegrini, Bazlen underwent his first and only Freudian psychoanalytical treatment in Milan (“you need to live in your own hell”, he confessed to his friend<sup>312</sup>), hypothesis sustained by Musatti as well, who also insists on a trauma generated from an improperly conducted therapy<sup>313</sup>. The therapy with Bernhard<sup>314</sup>, on the other hand, as we can assume by the solicitude with which Bazlen recommended him to his acquaintances and by the high opinion he had of the German therapist, had to leave him enthusiastic.

Bernhard's psychotherapeutic praxis was founded on Jungian individuation process<sup>315</sup> (to the point that he preferred using for Jungian psychology the definition of

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<sup>309</sup> The full passage of Bazlen's editorial letter (concerning Georges Ohsawa's books *La Guide Pratique de la Médecine d'Extreme Orient* and *Préparation des plats diététiques et macrobiotiques*): “[...] Quando ne ho saputo ho avuto quello stesso Prickeln [brivido] che, nel '17, mi è venuto addosso quando ho inteso per la prima volta la parola psicoanalisi (senza immaginare minimamente cosa possa essere) e le altre tre o quattro volte che ho sbattuto contro le cose che, in seguito, mi hanno determinato fino in fondo” (Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano Foà, 22 Aug. 1959. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>310</sup> David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, 405.

<sup>311</sup> See Stuparich, *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, 18.

<sup>312</sup> Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 59: “bisogna abitare nel proprio inferno”. As we will see, analogous observations can be found in Bazlen's private notes.

<sup>313</sup> See La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 24, note 49. Voghera (foreword to *Tracce del sapiente*, 23) and Carotenuto (*Jung e la cultura italiana*, 123-124) maintain that Bazlen underwent his first therapeutic experience already in Trieste with Freudian analyst Edoardo Weiss, but their conjecture is convincingly dismissed by La Ferla (*Diritto al silenzio*, 23-24), who avails herself of the accounts of Dorfles, Pellegrini, and Musatti.

<sup>314</sup> Foà argues that Bazlen's therapy with Bernhard, as inferable by his diaries and drawings, had to begin in 1944 and to end in the first years of the postwar period (see Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 133).

<sup>315</sup> In “Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation” (1939), Jung describes the individuation process as “the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole'” (Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the collective unconscious*, translated by R.F.C.

“Psychology of the individuation process”, rather than “Analytical psychology”<sup>316</sup>), and on his interpretation of it as a “great confrontation between the individual and the collective values”, as a tendency to the differentiation of the individual within a common tradition to which the individual does not renounce though to participate; as therefore a “distinction between collective destiny and individual one” that becomes virtuous only once man, realized as much as possible in his own individuality, can find his real, true place within society – place which “no one will be able to fit as perfectly as him”<sup>317</sup>. Bernhard grounded his therapy on the idea of personal destiny, and as La Ferla suggests, it is exactly in this abandon to destiny and in the virtual independence from the collective dimension that “is concealed one of the most authentic interpretation of Bazlen's entire existence”<sup>318</sup>. Zolla actually argues that Bazlen “gave the impression of having been 'evoked' by Bernhard in order to illustrate with an example what he meant when he spoke of absolute independence from 'collectivity', from 'sociality', and of religious abandon to

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Hull [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968], 275); as the process by which the unconscious (which is “a reality *in potentia*”, an “unknown in us” which sooner or later presents itself to consciousness [ibid., 279]) is not swallowed by the ego-consciousness, but harmonized with the conscious, while being with it “in open conflict and open collaboration at once” (ibid., 288). The individuation process is thus “an irrational life-process” that allows the “rounding out of the personality into a whole”, which Jung recognizes as “the goal of any psychotherapy that claims to be more than a mere cure of symptoms” (ibid.). The harmonization of conscious and unconscious is like “the old game of hammer and anvil: between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an 'individual’” (ibid.). As we learn from *Psychological Types* (1921), individuation is not though to be confused with individualism, but it is rather a process of differentiation: it concerns “the development of the psychological *individual* as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology”, since “a levelling down to collective standards is injurious to the vital activity of the individual” (Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types*, translated by H. G. Baynes and R. F. C. Hull [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976], 448); but Jung also argues that, “as the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation” (ibid.).

<sup>316</sup> See Erba-Tissot's introduction to Bernhard, *Mitobiografia*, xi.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>318</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 54.

one's own destiny”<sup>319</sup>.

Bernhard's influence might indeed help to understand some of the peculiarities of Bazlen's intellectual work – especially his elusion of the *volumina*, his reluctance to artistic creativity, and also the perception of his choice of life over art. According to Carotenuto, for Bernhard “the only true creativity of man [was] the realization of his own existence in the direction of the individuation, and the only true work of art which man [was] destined to create [was] to make of his own life and of himself his own individual destiny, within the boundaries accorded by providence”<sup>320</sup>. The same ideas are expressed by Bazlen in a private letter to Rodocanachi: “The only truly creative work of art in this world, the only one that allows the world to go on, is to do what it's right for us, without compromise, and against what is right for anyone else – living and (extremely dangerous) dead ones”<sup>321</sup>. Bazlen's conduct and way of life (with his refusal to take up any job, to adhere to any ideological or cultural position, and his desire of anonymousness<sup>322</sup>) in fact radicalized after meeting Bernhard. Fabrizio Onofri, in Bazlen's depiction as Ans in *Manoscritto*, portrays his friend as an “experimenter”<sup>323</sup> whose research aimed at the peace with himself (“He called it wisdom”<sup>324</sup>). Voghera describes his spontaneity, his at

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<sup>319</sup> Zolla, “L'arcaico dottor Ernst Bernhard”.

<sup>320</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 85-86.

<sup>321</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 3 Sep. 1955. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “l'unica opera veramente creativa a questo mondo, l'unica per cui il mondo va avanti, è di fare quello che è giusto per noi, fino in fondo, contro il giusto degli altri, vivi e (pericolosissimi) morti”.

<sup>322</sup> Regarding this last point, Pieracci Harwell writes: “Bazlen era, se possibile, ancor più convinto di Bernhard, che la 'decenza' – come amava chiamare tutto quello di cui non negava il valore, compresi il buon gusto e la buona educazione quando non riducibili a ipocrisia – Bazlen era ancor più convinto, dicevo, che la 'decenza' imponesse di rendersi invisibili” (“Ernst Bernhard”).

<sup>323</sup> Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 205.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 245: “lui la chiamava saggezza”. Onofri's novel is set in Rome at the time of the German occupation, and we know that Bazlen started his therapy with Bernhard exactly in 1944.

the same time extremely learned and childish nature<sup>325</sup>, and the same does Pellegrini when he addresses his “ingenuousness” (“I would say a sort of candor, which was striking [...] because it was combined with an extremely rich life experience”<sup>326</sup>). From the accounts of the friends and acquaintances of those years, Bazlen's research seems indeed to be aimed towards the emancipation from social expectations, from definitions and preconstituted roles – and this at a time when he had to be particularly aware of the fascination and ascendancy he exerted towards others<sup>327</sup>.

Starting from the middle of the fifties, in Bazlen's letters we read frequent complaints about Rome (“città ex-eterna”<sup>328</sup>) and the Italian cultural and social situation. From the letters of this period we also learn of his plans of definitively moving away from Italy as soon as possible (“i am thinking of a definitive emigration, before 1960”, he writes to Rodocanachi in 1955, “god willing, i will watch the third world war from a more comfortable perspective”<sup>329</sup>). His impatience had to be aggravated by health problems and by one of his cyclical periods of nervous weariness, from which he

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<sup>325</sup> See Voghera, *Gli anni della psicanalisi*, 171: “Non era inquadrabile in alcuna categoria né cercava di appartenere ad alcun gruppo, non imitava nessuno e non si poneva alcuno a modello; era se stesso con una spontaneità, un'autenticità che ben di rado si trovano nelle persone adulte: piuttosto nei bambini e negli animali. [...] Uomo di immensa cultura, di grande originalità e profondità di pensiero, profondamente saggio a modo suo, Bobi era rimasto sempre bambino”.

<sup>326</sup> Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 64.

<sup>327</sup> As we have seen, only between 1948 and 1950, Bazlen himself or some transparent novelistic transpositions of his figure were featured – much to his dismay (see *Tracce del sapiente*, 29; Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 273; La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 94) – in Stuparich's *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, Onofri's *Manoscritto*, and Levi's *L'orologio*.

<sup>328</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 2 Feb. 1958. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto.

<sup>329</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 11 Apr. 1955. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “medito emigrazione definitiva, prima del '60: la terza guerra mondiale, se dio vuole, me la guardo da una prospettiva più comoda”. In the same letter he confesses to be “furious with Italians”.

believed he could recover only by leaving the country<sup>330</sup>. He writes to Erich Linder in January 1956: “I have slept exhaustively for one year and a half [...]. I am considering [...] leaving possibly soon [...] this Vaterland which, when I woke up, I found more aggravating than ever. The program is taking shape slowly, but very clearly”<sup>331</sup>. And again, few weeks later: “Dear Erich, I believe that trying to leave this Vaterland means this time to try to move to Paris. Anyways, wherever I will go, it won't be for uncertain periods, but with the intention of never coming back to these parts, of which I have had enough”<sup>332</sup>.

Despite his plans, Bazlen would have not definitively moved to any of the possible destinations he had planned. He would have nevertheless spent the best part of the last ten years of his life away from Rome, in several Italian localities (among them Milan, Pesaro, Spoleto, Venice, Florence, Cagliari, Tremiti Islands, Merano) and European ones (among the ones of which we are aware of: Manchester and London, with Ljuba<sup>333</sup>, but also Paris, Stuttgart, and the small Swiss town of Rietbad)<sup>334</sup>. Roberto

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<sup>330</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1956, apologizing to Lucia Rodocanachi for not having written for a long time, Bazlen confesses: “per star bene, devo andarmene definitivamente da roma, e non stando bene, non ho la forza di andarmene definitivamente da roma [...]; e il mio termine per la partenza [...], si sta allontanando minacciosamente verso la primavera dell'anno prossimo” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>331</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Erich Linder, 29 Jan. 1956. Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1956. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “Io ho dormito esaurientemente per un anno e mezzo [...] medito [...] di lasciare possibilmente presto [...] questo Vaterland che, al mio risveglio, ho trovato più scoccante che mai. Il programma si forma lentamente, ma molto eindeutig [chiaramente]”.

<sup>332</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Erich Linder, 28 Feb. 1956. Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1956. File: Bazlen, Roberto: “Mio caro Erich, tentare di lasciare questo Vaterland, vuol dire questa volta, mi pare, tentare di stabilirmi a Parigi. Comunque, in qualsiasi luogo vada, non andrei per periodi 'ungewiss' [incerti], ma con l'intenzione di non venire mai più da queste parti, delle quali ho genug [abbastanza]”.

<sup>333</sup> As we learn from Bazlen letters to Foà, Bazlen was particularly at ease in London, where in those years he spent long periods while keeping working and reading especially for Einaudi: “Ljuba bene, io bene, Londra extremely casa, molto più di Roma, – senza crisi di acclimazione, e come se ci fossi nato (del resto, la città e la vita più vicina alla Trieste di fifty years ago)” (Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano



Bazlen died in Milan on July 27<sup>th</sup> 1965<sup>335</sup>, after a period during which, despite the non merely professional satisfactions connected to the birth of Adelphi in 1962, he had been afflicted by physical issues and, as many accounts suggest, by a state of psychological prostration. He suffered of a heart condition, and, at the end of 1964, he had been evicted from his house in via Margutta – fact that, according to Foà, particularly destabilized him<sup>336</sup>. Friend Ignazio Weiss remembers that, few days before dying, Bazlen confessed to him that he did not care about anything anymore, not even Adelphi<sup>337</sup>. The account by Ljuba Blumenthal reported in *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* also addresses the deep crisis of this period: “In the last months he was... someone who had lost his path. He did not love anyone anymore, he did not care about anything anymore”<sup>338</sup>. On July 26<sup>th</sup> 1965, the day

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Foà, 27 Aug. 1958. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>334</sup> Bazlen writes to Livio Corsi on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1955: “Mi pare che il signor Iddio abbia voglia, prima della terza guerra mondiale, di farmi girare sistematicamente tutta quell'Europa che non conosco ancora, e che non si vedrà più” (the unpublished letter is quoted in La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 80). Regarding Bazlen's partially unknown wanderings of those years, see La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 80-81, and de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 96-99.

<sup>335</sup> Regarding the circumstances of Bazlen's death, see Foà's letter to Rodocanachi: “Era andato all'albergo a riposare al pomeriggio, come faceva sempre, e l'ho rivisto morto la mattina dopo, quando mi hanno chiamato dall'albergo. [...] Ci ha lasciato così all'improvviso, dopo essere stato per mesi sulla soglia della morte, in attesa di un segno, senza che noi ce ne rendessimo pienamente conto” (Foà, Luciano. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 23. Aug. 1965. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Foà, Luciano).

<sup>336</sup> Foà makes this observation in relation to Bazlen's diary: “È da notare che il diario, dopo gli anni di analisi, riprende nel dicembre del '64, cioè quando Bobi venne sfrattato, dopo 27 anni, da via Margutta, ciò che fu per lui, già sofferente di cuore, causa di grande turbamento. Egli datò il diario in base ai giorni che mancavano allo sfratto: cento giorni prima, novantanove giorni prima...” (Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 134). Ignazio Weiss recollects that, after his eviction, Bazlen rented a new apartment in Rome, in which though he did not sleep for even a night (see Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen”, 6). Regarding the inquietude of his last days, see also Bianca Zevi's letter to Rodocanachi: “Come saprà da parecchio tempo stava molto male di cuore (coronaric) ma non sembrava certo in pericolo imminente; forse però lui lo sapeva perché negli ultimi tempi non voleva decidersi a prendere una casa o far piani precisi per il futuro” (Zevi, Bianca. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 31 Jul. 1965. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Zevi, Bianca).

<sup>337</sup> See Weiss and Voghera, “Roberto Bazlen”, 8.

<sup>338</sup> Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 97: “Gli ultimi mesi era... uno che ha perso la strada. Non amava più nessuno, non gli importava più di niente”.

before he died, he wrote to Ljuba: “It is strange, but today is the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of my father's death”<sup>339</sup>. Foà recollects:

During the last months of Bazlen's life, Quarantotti Gambini (dear and long-standing friend) and Bernhard died. Bobi didn't hide of having been deeply impressed by the death of the former; but he seemed to me not particularly struck by Bernhard's death (which happened approximately one month before his own), like he had expected it. I was next to him [...] when he received the telephone call which informed him of Bernhard's death, and I had the feeling that the news almost did not upset him. Still, Ljuba afterwards told me that Bobi, the day after, wrote her that he could not sleep a wink for the whole night, something that had never happened to him in his entire life. In those days Bobi was already quite ill, and very concerned about his immediate future. He astrologically knew that something was going to happen to him; he had established that with a dear friend of his, a very capable astrologist of Bernhard's circle. I remember that Bobi used to say: “If I survive this crisis, I will reach eighty”.<sup>340</sup>

## 6. The (Alleged) Writer Who (Allegedly) Did Not Write

After Bazlen's death, many friends and intellectuals offered their recollections on his figure, and their accounts, often of personal and affective nature, at times delivered some quite discrepant portraits<sup>341</sup>. Adelphi received the legacy of Bazlen's editorial work,

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<sup>339</sup> The unpublished letter is quoted in Pittoni, “La città di Bobi”, 93: “È strano, ma oggi è il 62° anniversario della morte di mio padre”.

<sup>340</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 135-136.

<sup>341</sup> See hereunder some examples of the mentioned discrepant or inconsistent representations. On Bazlen's character and life experience: “Il senso che derivammo dai nostri unici incontri con Bazlen fu quello di un uomo molto buono a cui la troppa intelligenza e l'assoluto disprezzo per le cose materiali avevano reso la vita molto difficile e carica di sofferenze” (Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 127); “[Bazlen] era sempre in gran fretta, poiché il divertimento di vivere una cosa dietro l'altra non gli dava quasi respiro” (Zolla “L'arcaio dottor Ernst Bernhard”). On his outlook on life and death: “[Bazlen] non credeva che la materia e il corpo stesso dell'uomo avessero una reale esistenza. Pensava che la morte fosse una parola senza senso” (Montale, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2729); “[...] o era Bobi Bazlen a essere tanto ossessionato dalla morte da vederla dappertutto?” (Pedullà, *Il novecento segreto*, 140-141). Even when dealing with his physical features we at times find ourselves in front of quite different portrayals: see for instance how Zampa (who met him in 1965, only few days before his death),

on which it founded an important part of its catalogue. The publishing house also undertook the publication of most of Bazlen's until today published writings, and, especially through Calasso's and Foa's accounts, had a fundamental role in defining the representation and perception of his figure<sup>342</sup>. A particular attention to Bazlen was also accorded by some intellectuals of the Triestine circles, who though have often been inclined to attribute what seems an excessively central role to Bazlen's "Triestinity", flattening his profile on their recollections of his years in the city. A clear example of this "posthumous appropriation"<sup>343</sup> by the cultural environment of Trieste is offered by Anita Pittoni, who, a few months after Bazlen's death, claimed an "intimate identification"<sup>344</sup> between him and his hometown – with which, as we have seen, Bazlen actually had a very problematic relation, and which, after leaving it, basically avoided for the rest of his life.

There is no doubt that in Bazlen's work and intellectual temperament are recognizable some of the distinctive traits of the cultural and literary environment of his hometown. From the range and nature of his cultural choices, interests, and tastes, to his existential and "anti-literary" conception of literature<sup>345</sup>, he surely can be seen as an

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remembers him as "a vigorous man, with strong arms" ("Lo sconosciuto disse"), while Gianfranco Draghi so recollects the impression he had when he met him in 1952: "Vidi arrivare un signore che mi sembrò un signore anziano, [...] vestito come un poveretto, mi sembrava claudicante, con un bastoncino, capelli non tanti e grigi" (Pieracci Harwell, "Ernst Bernhard").

<sup>342</sup> We may also point out that many of the accounts we have mentioned in the previous pages come from intellectuals who are, to different extent, connected to Adelphi (Cacciari, Mattioni, Drudi Demby, and Solmi are or have been published by Adelphi, and even many of the writers we have seen as connected to Bazlen – Gadda, Landolfi, Campo, Savinio, Zolla – were or posthumously became Adelphi's authors).

<sup>343</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 85.

<sup>344</sup> Pittoni, "La città di Bobi", 92.

<sup>345</sup> In this regard, see Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 15-16: "L'anti-letterarietà' dei triestini, di cui si è tanto parlato, è l'atteggiamento di uomini che chiedono allo scrivere non bellezza ma verità, perché per essi scrivere vuol dire acquistare un'identità, non solo come individui ma come gruppo. In dichiarazioni

emblematic figure of the intelligentsia of the Trieste of the first decades of the century. As Magris argues, Bazlen's "regal unproductiveness stands [...] as a symbol of that anarchic, restless, and neglected creativity of which a great part of Triestinity and its vocation to crisis consist of"<sup>346</sup>. At the same time, he cannot be considered an exemplary or paradigmatic exponent of such literary environment, for, if it is true that for his cultural identity and formation an intellectual such as Bazlen "could have not been born but in Trieste"<sup>347</sup>, he still represents both for his biography and his interests a peculiar and eccentric case even within the Triestine panorama (as Guagnini points out, the very case of a German-Italian bilingual intellectual and writer such as Bazlen, especially within his own generation, was not such a common case in postwar Trieste<sup>348</sup>). Addressing the Trieste of the first decades of the century, David speaks of "a paradoxical case of avant-garde provincialism"<sup>349</sup>; in a 1932 letter to Carocci, Quarantotti Gambini describes the cultural environment of the city as way more narrow than what it appeared to many coeval Italian intellectuals ("When it comes to culture, Trieste is an immaculate America [...]. Often people refers to Trieste as an avant-garde city. Avant-garde are actually two or three individuals. The rest of the city has tastes that in Italy are already outdated"<sup>350</sup>).

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famose, gli scrittori triestini rifiutano la letteratura quale 'menzogna' [Saba], quale cosa 'ridicola e dannosa' [Svevo], quale 'triste e secco mestiere' [Slataper]. In tali posizioni echeggia certamente la passione per una poesia rivolta all'esistenza anziché al gioco formale, sull'esempio della letteratura d'oltralpe e in polemica, spesso faziosa, con quella italiana. Ma non si tratta soltanto di una poesia che deve guardare alla vita, bensì di una poesia che deve fondare la vita: di una triestinità che pretende sincerità assoluta dalle carte della letteratura, perché senza di esse non esisterebbe. L'antiletterarietà si trasformerà facilmente in un *topos* letteratissimo, in una convenzione stilistica e comportamentale alla quale gli scrittori successivi, nei decenni seguenti, chiederanno la legittimazione e la premessa del loro lavoro letterario".

<sup>346</sup> Claudio Magris, "Sull'orlo del mito" *Corriere della Sera*, December 5, 1968, 11.

<sup>347</sup> Pittoni, "La città di Bobi", 91.

<sup>348</sup> Guagnini, "La cultura. Una fisionomia difficile", 281-282.

<sup>349</sup> David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, 379.

<sup>350</sup> Quarantotti Gambini to Carocci, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1932, in Manacorda, *Lettere a Solaria*, 399-400: "In

Within this panorama, as Magris writes, Bazlen has been “one of those few great antennae of the soul that at the beginning of the Twentieth century made Trieste an actual outpost of international culture”<sup>351</sup>. His “Triestinity” and his Mittel-European background hence represented an essential premise of his intellectual work, but cannot explain and exhaust its peculiarity.

Among the works that contributed the most to Bazlen's (circumscribed) popularity, a central role is covered by *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, in which precisely Trieste is chosen as the place in which to investigate Bazlen's “legend”, and more specifically the roots of his alleged refusal to write. We will here accord particular attention to Del Giudice's novel, not only because of its importance in the general perception of the figure of Bazlen<sup>352</sup> – especially with regards to his representation as a failed or missed writer (as “the writer who does not write”, as Tavazzi entitles her article on Del Giudice's novel). Among the literary transpositions we have mentioned, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* is the one in which Bazlen's figure is more central, and at the same time the one in which the instrumentality of his representation is more clear and declared. A brief analysis of the novel might thus be explicative of the treatment reserved to Bazlen also within other novelistic thematizations.

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fatto di cultura Trieste è una candida America [...]. Le dico questo perché spesso si parla di Trieste come di una città all'avanguardia. All'avanguardia invece sono due o tre persone: il resto della città ha gusti che in Italia son ormai sorpassati”.

<sup>351</sup> Magris, “Sull'orlo del mito”.

<sup>352</sup> The current “myth” of Bazlen concerns in fact more his figure than his editorial activity and his writings, and Del Giudice's portrait has been fundamental in popularizing it and in defining its characteristics at a time when no thorough studies on him existed yet. *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* encountered vast success in Italy and also abroad (it was translated in French in 1985, in Spanish and German in 1986, in Dutch and Portuguese in 1987, in Croatian in 1998, and in Serbian in 2000) and was also adapted to screen in 2001 by Mathieu Almaric (*Le Stade de Wimbledon*). The eventual editions of Bazlen's books in the mentioned languages were all published only years after the respective translations of Del Giudice's novel.

Tavazzi so describes the state of the scholarship on Bazlen at the moment in which *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* was published (1983):

Almost twenty years after his death in 1965, many accounts on Bazlen existed, which, not yet supported by thorough researches, were based on some fundamental strengths: his enormous culture, the importance he attributed to originality, his predilection for *bon viveur* attitudes which translated in a resolute choice of “life” over writing, as if they were perceived as antithetical [...]. But otherwise, as soon as one moved beyond the few certain elements to enter the area of interpretation, in the words of friends and colleagues, claims on the impossibility of describing him or even of understanding in depth what he thought followed one another; claims accompanied by the witness' tendency to divert the conversation talking about himself.<sup>353</sup>

Del Giudice's novel had therefore to feed on a meditated reading of Bazlen's published writings, on the suggestions of the writings on him, and on the many interviews he conducted for his book. If we are led to believe that the author's research had to involve a larger pool of data and sources than the ones presented in the novel, the investigation conducted by the main character and narrator of *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* nevertheless focuses almost exclusively on the two extremes of Bazlen's life: his youth, whose source are his early Triestine friends interviewed by the narrator, and his last years as recollected by Ljuba Blumenthal. The two poles of the research are hence Trieste and London (where Ljuba resided, and where Bazlen spent significant time during his last years), leaving outside the years of the maturity and of his richest intellectual and editorial activity. The centrality accorded to Trieste, Tavazzi correctly argues, is “indicative of a definite position, absolutely not neutral” for the investigation of the novelist and of his main character: it represents first of all the result of a literary suggestion connected with Saba and Svevo, and it allows to deal with Bazlen's “myth” in the place that has fueled it the

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<sup>353</sup> Tavazzi, “Lo scrittore che non scrive”, 272-273.

most<sup>354</sup>. At the same time it also backdates Bazlen's renunciation of writing and publishing to his youth, interpreting it not as “a *post factum* alternative”, but rather as “an existential predisposition already present, at least in embryo, in the Triestine years”<sup>355</sup>. Finally, the very choice of the “gorgeous and unlivable” Trieste<sup>356</sup> (depicted as a provincial and hostile city<sup>357</sup>, and, according to the stereotype, as a city abounding with elderly and crazy people<sup>358</sup>) as the frame in which investigate Bazlen's human and intellectual experience, contributes to permeate this very experience with a sense of failure and loss.

At the center of *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* there is the quest of the narrator whom, in the first part of the book, we find visiting several times Trieste in search of information and documentation on Bazlen. Doing so, the young, unnamed intellectual visits bookstores and libraries, walks the city, recognizing the places in which Bazlen grew up (refusing though to visit the street where Bazlen lived: “Go to Via Cecilia Rittmeyer? Out of question, this is not a pilgrimage”<sup>359</sup>), and he meets and talks to the surviving, mostly unnamed friends that Bazlen had in Trieste (in whom we recognize Anita Pittoni, Giorgio Voghera, Franca Malabotta, Gerti Frankl Tolazzi, and Livio Corsi). In the middle of the novel we find a sum of the collected accounts, a sort of collective recollection:

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<sup>354</sup> See *ibid.*, 274.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>356</sup> Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 41.

<sup>357</sup> See *ibid.*, 11: “Sul marciapiede opposto passano due negri. Un vecchio triestino, con la moglie, commenta la loro negritudine. Io, tra me e me, commento la triestinità del triestino”.

<sup>358</sup> See *ibid.*, 47: “Torno dalla donna del negozio. Adesso lei vuole più informazioni, dice: 'Non sarà uno di quei matti che hanno rimesso fuori, vero?' Ho risposto: 'Penso di no'. Lei ha fatto una lunga tirata sui manicomi; ha descritto una ragazza che gira per il quartiere togliendosi dalle scarpe del terriccio che non c'è. Poi ha parlato dei saponi e dei solventi, io non riesco a rispondere, né a fermarla. Ha gli occhi enormi, come dipinti sul retro degli occhiali, e pulisce col mignolo il bancone. A me non sembra sporco”.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 10: “Andare in Via Cecilia Rittmeyer? Escluso, questo non è un pellegrinaggio”.

Some of us were his characters. He got rid of us leaving this city; but he lost us, and this was one of his countless losses [...]. The people who wrote, here, used to listen to him a lot, but he especially cared about us, because, ultimately, he had always been bored by the people who wrote, as if he expected something more from them, on a different level. [...] But, for him, everything had to be used to know how to live: too essentially, too authentically, and too directly to be able *also* to write. [...] So many letters! The writer of letters does not risk in the form, because the form of the letter is not in what you write, but lies in a life relation. [...] He used to write poems as presents for his female friends [...]. He left us as an old and unbearable thing.<sup>360</sup>

We know very little of the narrator; we actually only know what he is looking for: the reason why Bazlen did not write<sup>361</sup>, a question which will be elaborated in the final and crucial encounter with Ljuba: “What I am interested in is a point in which maybe the ability to be and the ability to write intersect. Anyone who writes has his own idea of it. For him, in that point, there has been an exclusion, a renunciation, a silence. I would like to know why”<sup>362</sup>. What seemed to have started as an investigation on a mysterious figure of Italian twentieth-century culture, soon thus reveals itself as “a personal and painful investigation on the possibility of writing”<sup>363</sup>. As Tavazzi argues, Bazlen is in fact for Del Giudice's first novel “the symbol of a crisis”<sup>364</sup>: he is a writer who deliberately decided not to write, and finding the answer to the question of why he made that choice represents

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 68-70: “Alcuni di noi furono dei suoi personaggi. Lui se ne liberò lasciando questa città; però li perse, e fu una delle sue innumerevoli perdite [...]. La gente che scriveva, qui, lo ascoltava parecchio, ma lui si interessava soprattutto a noi, perché alla fine si è sempre annoiato delle persone che scrivevano, come se da loro si aspettasse qualcosa di più, su un altro piano. [...] Ma per lui tutto doveva servire a saper vivere: troppo essenzialmente, troppo autenticamente e troppo direttamente perché potesse *anche* scrivere. [...] Quante lettere! Lo scrittore di lettere non si mette a repentaglio nella forma, dato che la forma della lettera non è in quello che c'è scritto, ma in una relazione di vita. [...] Scriveva poesie come regali per le sue amiche [...]. Ci ha lasciati come una cosa vecchia e insopportabile”.

<sup>361</sup> See *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 97: “Quello che a me interessa è un punto in cui forse si intersecano il saper essere e il saper scrivere. Chiunque scrive se l'immagina in un certo modo. Con lui, invece, in quel punto c'è stata un'esclusione, una rinuncia, un silenzio. Io vorrei capire perché”.

<sup>363</sup> Tavazzi, “Lo scrittore che non scrive”, 278.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.



for the narrator (and for Del Giudice as well<sup>365</sup>) a crucial step of his personal quest on his own possibility to write<sup>366</sup>.

The reason of Bazlen's refusal of writing, according to the accounts collected by the narrator, is to be recognized in his choice of life over writing ("his life has been his Work"<sup>367</sup>), and, as Ljuba suggests, in the priority by him assigned to personal relationships: "He did not try to understand how a person was, he *was that person*. And when he realized that this was his place in life, he could not write anymore. He realized where his strength resided, and it resided in people"<sup>368</sup>. These answers seem though not to satisfy the narrator, whose sense of failure mirrors Bazlen's described failure – his intellectual one (as expressed by the disappointment of Bazlen's Triestine friends for the distance between what he turned out to be and what, according to them, he should have

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<sup>365</sup> Bazlen's ghost, Del Giudice argues, "is that part of yourself that you need to overcome every time to be able to write" (interview to Daniele Del Giudice, *Il Piccolo*, May 26, 1983, qtd. in Tavazzi, "Lo scrittore che non scrive", 278).

<sup>366</sup> The instrumentality of the figure of Bazlen within *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* is openly declared already by the blurb of the first edition of the book written by Italo Calvino (in Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 127): "Questo romanzo racconta di un giovane che si interroga su un certo personaggio, a una quindicina d'anni dalla sua morte; e va a ricercare gli amici e le amiche di gioventù, ora molto anziani. Chi fosse questo personaggio – una figura originale nella vita letteraria italiana, amico di poeti e scrittori – non importa: perché nel romanzo il suo ricordo affiora solo indirettamente e in lontananza, e soprattutto perché si direbbe non importi nemmeno al giovane che pur sta seguendo le tracce della sua leggenda".

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 50: "la sua opera è stata la sua vita". Regarding Bazlen's relationship with writing, other characters interviewed by the narrator recollect: Voghera: "Faceva vedere che non gli interessava. Tante volte diceva: scrittori mediocri è meglio che non ce ne siano, e forse lui stesso sentiva che non sarebbe stato uno scrittore di primissima fila [...], forse lui scriveva per sé [...]. Però ci aspettavamo tutti che da lui uscisse qualcosa di molto buono [...]. Non deve credere che lui avesse un rigore eccessivo o un'ansia di perfezionismo, che fosse scontento e riscrisse sempre" (ibid., 28-31); Gerti: "Del suo non poter scrivere? Lui la buttava più in burla, come una cosa che non vale la pena" (ibid., 61); Ljuba: "Lui sapeva quanta suggestione esercitava sugli altri [...]. Se avesse scritto qualcosa che magari non era di grande valore, sarebbe stato terribile per loro... Il suo timore era... come si dice *disappoint?*" (ibid., 102).

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.: "Lui non cercava di immaginare come fosse una persona, lui *lo era*. E quando ha scoperto che questo era il suo posto nella vita, non ha potuto più scrivere. Aveva capito dove stava la sua forza, e stava nelle persone".

been<sup>369</sup>) and his existential one (the bitterness of his last days as reported by Ljuba).

Del Giudice's research concerns the solution for the distance his narrator perceives between life and literature, the path that goes from literature to life (“il percorso che va dalla carta all'esistenza”<sup>370</sup>). “Bazlen's literary aphasia”<sup>371</sup> in this direction represents an ideal object of research, and Trieste a most fitting setting. The entire narration is actually readable as a meta-literary investigation: the places the main character visits are suggestive literary charged places (such as Saba's antiquarian bookshop); among the characters he meets, the only ones presented with a name are Ljuba and Gerti (both brought to literature by Montale); the sources of the information he collects are at times not precisely identifiable, as we assist to continuous, non declared transitions between (non specified but clearly identifiable) written sources and oral ones. In a fairy-tail like path, the true nature of Bazlen's “work” reveals itself to the narrator only once he realizes that he is not interested anymore in discovering it. Before his second and last encounter with Ljuba, he has in fact already made up his mind: he will write. Thanks to the epiphany triggered by his reflection on the Mercator map, he has now gained faith in the possibility of literature of representing reality: “The Mercator Map is not a geometric projection, it is invented with a precise calculus, and with almost perfect mathematics. Its second name is Representation”<sup>372</sup>. With this epiphany, the overlapping of the

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<sup>369</sup> They in fact recollect that in the city Bazlen was surrounded by admiration, and that everyone had great expectations for him. See Voghera's account: “Una volta sono andato a trovarlo a Roma. [...] Aveva una faccia completamente cambiata [...]. Mi ha fatto un'impressione forte, dolorosa, perché gli volevo molto bene e non gliela riconoscevo una faccia così” (ibid., 27); see also Gerti's words: “Può darsi che si sia accorto di essere un fallito [...]. Però era un fallito da sempre. [...] L'unica cosa che resta di lui sono gli amici che gli hanno voluto bene, e nei quali lui esiste ancora, come in me” (ibid., 58-59).

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>371</sup> Pizzi, *A City in Search of an Author*, 42.

<sup>372</sup> Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 82: “la carta di Mercatore non è una proiezione geometrica, è

narrator's figure with Bazlen's one fades away; and only at this point, when he is no longer interested in discovering why Bazlen did not write, he also finds the answer to his initial question. Bazlen's vocation was not writing, but helping others to change, to make crucial choices, without others even realizing it. According to Ljuba, this is what happened to the narrator as well<sup>373</sup>.

Del Giudice, in his reading of Bazlen as a maieutic figure, captures and revives the core of most of the accounts and representations of Bazlen: he was the man who spoke through others, the man who helped others to change, a figure mostly read and interpreted through and in connection to their own existence. Still, his portrait of Bazlen remains (legitimately, since we are dealing not with a biography but with a fictional work in which, moreover, the Triestine intellectual is not the lead) partial and inaccurate – not for the facts and accounts reported, but rather for its exclusions and general interpretation. The very question “why did he not write?” is instrumental to the personal one: “why should I write?”, or “how could I write?”, and it hazardously and possibly improperly projects on Bazlen a dilemma of the narrator.

Bazlen's reluctance to “write” (or rather: to publish) was already recognized as one of his prominent features in the 1925 above-mentioned article by Grande, and

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inventata con un calcolo preciso, e con una matematica quasi perfetta. Il suo secondo nome è Rappresentazione”. As Lucia Quaquarelli points out, the Mercator projection is certainly invented, but is “the result of an abstraction so effective that it can serve as an empirical model utilizable in life, as a real guide for the movement of men on the surface of the earth”; without taking the place of reality, it allows you to orient yourself in reality, “to act in it” (“La carta della memoria. *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* di Daniele del Giudice”, in *La forma del passato. Questioni di identità in opere letterarie e cinematografiche italiane a partire dagli anni Ottanta*, eds. Sabina Gola and Laura Rorato [Brussels: P.I.E Peter Lang, 2007], 97). Del Giudice actually wanted to entitle his novel “La carta di Mercatore”, but the title was considered not suitable by the publisher (see *ibid.*, 97, note 9).

<sup>373</sup> See Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 116-117.

denounced by Quarantotti Gambini few years later in a letter to Carocci: “I believe it will be impossible to have something from Bazlen. It's a shame, but we need to accept that. Neither I, nor Saba, nor anyone else has ever found out if he writes”<sup>374</sup>. Already in his youth Bazlen himself denounced his ambivalent and problematic relationship with writing: “As you know, I am terribly scared of the written word”, he writes on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1927 to Gerti, “because, once written down, everything becomes something different; and the most horrible thing is that it actually was different”<sup>375</sup>. In the following years, as we learn from a 1947 letter to Foà, this relationship would have not become easier: “I was even willing to 'write' – and you know how hard it is for me [...]. But I have nevertheless benefitted from it: that is, I have learned that – with a lot of distress, and spending much more time than anyone else – I can put together an article which is not worse than any other one”<sup>376</sup>. In 1961, replying to a letter from Voghera who very cautiously had asked him if it was true that he was going to soon publish a book, Bazlen

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<sup>374</sup> Letter of December 18<sup>th</sup> 1932, in Manacorda, *Lettere a Solaria*, 397: “Da Bazlen credo che sarà impossibile ottenere qualcosa. È un peccato, ma bisogna rassegnarsi. Né io, né Saba, né alcun altro ha mai capito s'egli scrive”.

<sup>375</sup> The unpublished letter is quoted in translation in Fischer, “Il viaggio di Gerti”, 10: “Ho una paura pazzesca della parola scritta, Lei lo sa, perché, messo per iscritto, tutto diventa un'altra cosa e il fatto più orrendo è che era veramente diverso”.

<sup>376</sup> Letter of October 14<sup>th</sup> 1947, quoted in *Note senza testo*, 256, note 1: “Ero perfino disposto a 'scrivere' – e sai quanto mi pesi [...]. Ma ci ho guadagnato lo stesso: cioè ho visto che, soffrendo moltissimo, e perdendo infinito più tempo degli altri, un articolo non più brutto di qualsiasi altro lo metto insieme”. Bazlen alludes here to the articles he wrote for *Omnibus*, none of which was published in the periodical and which appeared only posthumously; two of these articles (“Leo Longanesi. Parliamo dell'elefante” and “Freud”) were later published in *Note senza testo*. With analogous tone, in 1948 Bazlen informs Foà of some articles (among them one on Svevo) he is writing: “miei articoli: per qualche giorno ho ancora da fare, devo mettere a posto tutte quelle moltissime faccende che sono stato costretto a trascurare in queste ultime quattro settimane, poi vedo se mi riuscirà nuovamente di ledere il mio pudore, e di trascrivere e correggere quegli abbozzi che ti ho mostrato qui a roma” (Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano Foà, 11 Mar. 1948. Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1948. File: Bazlen, Roberto). See also the letter of March 27<sup>th</sup> 1946 to Foà regarding a column for Olivetti's *Comunità*: “Ho scritto tre risposte (lunghe) per la rivista di Adriano (però non dire a nessuno che sono io a farle). Ad Adriano sono piaciute, ma ora ha il dubbio se fare o non fare quella rubrica. Probabilmente non ne farà nulla, e Dio mi avrà aiutato a morire senza essere passato per il giornalismo” (*Note senza testo*, 262, note 1).

would have not even addressed the topic<sup>377</sup>.

Once dealing with Bazlen's writings we will more thoroughly investigate the issue, but for now we can just point out that many different readings of his reluctance to writing and publication have been made, and that many of them simply maintains that he did not write because, fundamentally, he was not a writer. According to Onofri, for instance, “Bobi was not a writer, nor a poet, and he would have never been one”<sup>378</sup>. Cesare Cases basically agrees, arguing that he maybe “got paralyzed by his own profession”, that “he recognized not to have the gift of writing, like many publishers do”<sup>379</sup>. His posthumous papers nevertheless reveal that, in different moments, he tried to write his own “work” (as *Il capitano di lungo corso* and his letters written during the composition of the novel show, with particular efforts between 1944 and the beginning of the Fifties<sup>380</sup>), and that his renunciation to the *volumina* is thus certainly not ascribable to the Triestine years. It is though unsurprising that a man of letters who lived most of his life surrounded by writers and immersed in books, tried, at different times, to write (in his case actually without great determination and conviction). Amelia Rosselli probably hits the mark attributing Bazlen's refusal to publish (at least in his Roman years) to his fear of

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<sup>377</sup> See Voghera's letter of July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1961, in *Tracce del sapiente*, 41: “Non vorrei fare un accenno che ti potrebbe essere sgradito, ma mi hanno raccontato che alla Radio è stata annunciata l'uscita di un libro tuo. O si tratta di un malinteso?”. Bazlen's reply of August 30<sup>th</sup> 1961 can be found in *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>378</sup> Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 128.

<sup>379</sup> Paolo Di Stefano, “Non poteva capire lo schermo. Amava troppo la parola scritta”, *Corriere della Sera*, April 6, 1994, 25.

<sup>380</sup> In this regard see “Notizie sui manoscritti”, in *Scritti*, 393, and the account of Luciano Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 16-17; see also Bazlen's letter to Rodocanachi of March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1951: “poiché non mi interessano più i libri degli altri, mi sono messo a scrivere libri per conto mio” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto); and the letter to Foà of December 16<sup>th</sup> 1952: “io invece, verso la fine di gennaio, andrò per qualche giorno in campagna a finire una brevissima fiaba con la quale mi sono divertito un mondo e mezzo” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

“publicity and consequent self-satisfaction”<sup>381</sup>. Foà argues that what Bazlen wrote had to face his own high critical sense, and could never be finished, “maybe because nothing in him could be finished until he was alive”<sup>382</sup>. With reference to the idea of shipwreck (so central in Bazlen's unfinished novel), Foà suggests that “everything [Bazlen] wrote in the myriad of notes, letters, proses, and poems, is nothing but a vast logbook always waiting for new and healthy shipwrecks”<sup>383</sup>. Compared to Del Giudice's, the perspective here is overturned: Bazlen, rather than being a writer who refused to write, would be a non-writer who left traces of his thought in the only way his intellectual path could be expressed, namely in an unfinished and unfinishable posthumous work.

## 7. Some Final Notes on the Representations and Interpretations of Bazlen's Figure

Enrique Vila-Matas' *Bartleby y compañía*'s interpretation of Bazlen's figure is importantly indebted to Del Giudice's novel (which, together with Calasso's “Da un punto vuoto”, seems to be the author's main source on the Triestine intellectual). This is evident by the very introduction of Bazlen as “a jew from Trieste who had read every book in every language and who, while possessing a very demanding literary conscience (or perhaps precisely because of this), instead of writing preferred to intervene directly in people's lives”<sup>384</sup>. *Bartleby y compañía* is an investigation on “the literature of the No,

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<sup>381</sup> Amelia Rosselli, “Scrittore di nascosto”, *L'Unità*, April 2, 1969, 8.

<sup>382</sup> Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 22.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Enrique Vila-Matas, *Bartleby & Co.*, trans. Jonathan Dunne (New York: New Directions, 2004), 23.

that of *Bartleby & Co.*<sup>385</sup>, thus on the literature of the writers of refusal such as Rimbaud, Musil, Hofmannsthal, Salinger – “beings inhabited by a profound denial of the world”<sup>386</sup> whose stance towards writing echoes Melville's scrivener's enigmatic, anti-heroical, but categorical “I would prefer not to”. If in Vila-Matas' book Bazlen is only briefly featured, the narrator's choice of writing “a book of footnotes commenting on an invisible text”<sup>387</sup> seems from its premises to refer to Bazlen's most famous aphorism: “I believe it is no longer possible to write books / Therefore I don't write books – / Almost all books are footnotes swollen into volumes (*volumina*). I only write footnotes”<sup>388</sup>. Nonetheless, in the pages dedicated to Bazlen, Vila-Matas mostly addresses his figure in relation to *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, and more precisely in connection to its main character's paralysis in front of writing. Vila-Matas individuates the problem: “Del Giudice [...] understands the written text to be founded on nothingness; a text, if it wishes to be valid, must open up new paths and try to say what has not yet been said”<sup>389</sup>. Del Giudice's search is hence an “ethical” one: his struggle towards the creation of “new forms” is moved by his “will to tell the truth” and by his refusal of using language “simply for effect”, which Vila-Matas considers a paradoxically “immoral act”<sup>390</sup>. In this framework, Bazlen's figure represents the ideal obstacle to overcome. Bazlen is in fact for Vila-Matas “a kind of black sun of the crisis in the West [...]”; his very existence seems to signal the true end of literature, of the absence of output, the death of the author: a writer

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> *Note senza testo*, 203: “Io credo che non si possa più scrivere libri. / Perciò non scrivo libri – / Quasi tutti i libri sono note a piè di pagina gonfiate in volumi (*volumina*). Io scrivo solo note a piè di pagina”.

<sup>389</sup> Vila-Matas, *Bartleby & Co.*, 25.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

without books and therefore books without authors”<sup>391</sup>. Here also, the assumption is that Bazlen was a writer, and one who refused to or could not write.

For Vila-Matas, Bazlen's radical nihilism and the puzzling nature of his figure make him an exemplary Bartleby. Herman Melville so introduces the character in his short story: “I believe that no material exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss for literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and, in his case, those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I know of him”<sup>392</sup>. Bartleby's “point-blank” refusals<sup>393</sup> urge his interlocutors to interrogate themselves not only on the reasons of his silence: declining to express his motivations, he unintentionally forces them to question themselves. His silence acts on his astonished and bewildered interlocutors and set their actions in motion. As Gilles Deleuze points out in “Bartleby; or, The Formula”, Melville's scrivener is Kafka's Bachelor, is the ancestor of Musil's Man without qualities, is the modern-day Ulysses: “Bartleby is the man without references, without possessions, without properties, without qualities, without particularities: he is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him”<sup>394</sup>. Bartleby's presence forces the unnamed narrator of Melville's short story to an identification with him, but, rather than one in which the subject tries to conform to an image, one in which the two terms reach “the point immediately preceding their respective differentiation: not a similitude, but a slippage, an extreme proximity, an absolute contiguity; not a natural

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>392</sup> Herman Melville, “Bartleby”, in *Billy Budd and Other Tales* (New York: Signet Classics, 2009), 124.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>394</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Bartleby; or, The Formula”, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 74.



filiation, but an unnatural alliance”<sup>395</sup>. According to Deleuze, the above-described process of identification is a fundamental ingredient of the bildungsroman or “reference novel”<sup>396</sup>.

We think that Vila-Matas' inclusion of Bazlen in his gallery of Bartlebies is particularly felicitous, for it is explicative of the role that the character Bazlen wields within the economy of most of the fictional works which features him. This role is especially evident in Onofri's *Manoscritto* (which does not dedicate much space to Ans' cultural interests and work, but rather focuses on the description of his conversations with the narrator, and on their sentimental adventures and tormented inner lives). In the novel, the main character actually describes Ans as his own mirror, to which he resorts to look at himself, to discover himself:

I am starting to believe that women and Ans are my distractions, and that distractions are what allows me to understand maybe the distance, the perspective. This surely happens with Ans. I used to speak with myself, now I rather do it with someone else; there is more hazard, as well as perspective, and furthermore there is a voice, there are eyes and hands, everything in the flesh. With Ans, there are also his spectacles, and, at worst, I can look at my reflection there, and immediately, beyond the mirror, I can find a sharp eye looking at me; this, at worst.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>396</sup> See *ibid.*, 76-77: “Is there a relation of identification between the attorney and Bartleby? But what is this relation? In what direction does it move? Most often, an identification seems to bring into play three elements, which are able to interchange or permutate: a form, image, or representation, [...] a subject, [...] and the subject's efforts to assume a form, to appropriate the image, to adapt itself to this image and the image to itself. It is a complex operation [...]. A 'mimetic rivalry', as it is sometimes called. It mobilizes a paternal function in general: an image of the father par excellence, and thus the subject is a son, even if the determinations are interchangeable. The bildungsroman [*roman de formation*], or one could just as easily say the reference novel [*roman de reference*], provides numerous examples”.

<sup>397</sup> Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 136: “io comincio a credere che donne e Ans per me siano sempre le mie distrazioni, e che le distrazioni siano quello che mi fa capire, forse la distanza, la prospettiva. Con Ans questo accade di certo. Io prima parlavo tra me, adesso preferisco farlo con un altro, c'è più azzardo oltre che prospettiva, e poi c'è una voce, ci sono occhi e mani, tutto in carne e ossa. Con Ans ci sono anche gli occhiali e, nel peggiore dei casi, mi posso specchiare lì dentro, e subito, dietro lo specchio, trovare un occhio vivo che mi sta guardando; questo nel peggiore dei casi”.

Ans' presence answers to a need expressed by Sebastiano early in the novel: "A man need a friend to able to look at himself"<sup>398</sup>. Certainly Ans is an extremely talkative and inquisitive kind of Bartleby (Ans' silence concerns in case the assumptions behind his words and actions: "I never think", he points out at a certain point while discussing with Sebastiano<sup>399</sup>). Nonetheless, looking at himself and discovering himself means for the narrator to identify himself with Ans ("I thought that I was talking about myself, rather than about him"<sup>400</sup>), to let him investigate his history and feelings ("I let him dig inside of me, I let him do it, so that I could understand myself"<sup>401</sup>), to be understood and invented by him ("but I felt somehow fluttered that he had said 'we'. And I felt a strong desire [...] of being invented as if I was a character"<sup>402</sup>).

Ans' portrait draws from Onofri's familiarity with Bazlen, and the influence and the role of Ans towards Sebastiano, as other accounts by Onofri prove, find their counterpart in their actual relationship. All the fictional works we have mentioned (with the exception of *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* and *Bartleby y compañía*) were written by authors who actually knew Bazlen, and in all of them, even when hidden under a fictional name, his figure is clearly recognizable. All these novels (with the exception of Pizzuto's) are narrated in the first person, and are presented by the narrators as confessions or diaries (Onofri's and Vila-Matas<sup>403</sup>), or are readable as transpositions of real life experiences (Del Giudice's and Levi's). The novels in which Bazlen occupies a more

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 38: "Un uomo ha bisogno di un'amico in cui potersi guardare".

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 230: "Io non penso mai".

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 198: "Pensavo che parlavo di me, più che di lui".

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 256: "lasciai che scavasse in profondo dentro a me, lo lasciai fare, per potermi capire".

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 206: "ma mi sentivo in qualche modo lusingato che lui avesse detto noi. E provai una gran voglia [...] di sentirmi inventare come fossi un personaggio".

<sup>403</sup> See Vila-Matas, *Bartleby & Co*, 1: "on this day 8 July 1999, I have begun this diary [...]".

central role (Del Giudice's, Debenedetti's, and Onofri's) are describable as bildungsromans, within which the novelistic transpositions of Bazlen represent a model with which the narrators to different extents identify themselves. But also in the other fictional depictions of Bazlen we observe a centrality of the personal matter, within which he covers a key role especially in relation to crucial passages of crisis (as in *Lo stadio di Wimbledon* and *Bartleby y compañía* regarding the possibility of writing, in *L'orologio* in connection with the political disenchantment of the narrator) or growth (as in *Manoscritto* and *La fine di un addio*). If the reason behind the choice of transposing Bazlen within their novels seems to primarily derive from the “picturesque” qualities of the model, the authors of the mentioned books eventually use Bazlen's transpositions as a term of comparison for the definition of the identity of their narrators – either for affinity (Onofri, Vila-Matas, and Debenedetti<sup>404</sup>) or contrast (Levi and Del Giudice). We thus argue that what La Ferla suggests as a characteristic of Antonio Debenedetti's representation of Bazlen in *La fine di un addio* – namely that in the novel he is used as an “external referent to which compare [the narrator's] own experience”<sup>405</sup> – is at the core of most fictional representations of Bazlen (in the case of *La fine di un addio*, this instrumentality is actually declared by Debenedetti himself, who would have years later admitted of having “used” Bazlen in his own novel to “make him say” what he himself “was not able to say”<sup>406</sup>).

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<sup>404</sup> See Debenedetti, *La fine di un addio*, 142: “Appartengo, allo stesso modo di Umberto o di Bobi Bazlen, a una generazione che si è voluta riconoscere nell'intelligenza. Aldilà dei destini individuali, senza dubbio diversi, abbiamo compiuto una scelta comune: abbiamo puntato – non a caso tutti e tre romanzieri e tutti e tre incapaci di scrivere il nostro romanzo – sull'intelligenza anziché sul melodramma, sull'intelligenza anziché sul sesto senso o la creatività per la creatività”.

<sup>405</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 87.

<sup>406</sup> Antonio Debenedetti, “Debenedetti e Montale: storia di un'amicizia”, *Chroniques italiennes* 62.2

We might probably extend the consideration of the instrumentality of the depictions and recourse to Bazlen's figure also to many non-fictional writings. Unsurprisingly, given the very nature of his understated intellectual activity as advisor, editor, and consultant, the first references to Bazlen's name within critical or academic studies are to be found within works dedicated to other authors or themes (see David's 1966 *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, Rebay's 1969 "I diàspori di Montale" and 1984 "Un cestello di Montale: le gambe di Dora Markus e una lettera di Roberto Bazlen", and Carotenuto's 1977 *Jung e la cultura italiana*). The influence and incisiveness of Bazlen's cultural work, paired with the fact that he did not leave his own "work", have had the maybe obvious result that the references to his figure are often functional to the understanding or the treatment of third themes. An amused example of this instrumentality can be found in Umberto Eco's brief prose "Shakespeare era per caso Shakespeare?", in which Bazlen's character, in his "Adelphian" variant, is briefly brought in, within a farcical short essay on the Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy, to arguably mock Adelphi and Calasso (as well as their reverence to Bazlen's figure):

Almost in the same period, Roberto Calasso, drawing on a voluminous eight-hundred-page manuscript by Roberto Bazlen, demonstrated that neither Shakespeare nor Bacon had ever written anything (the first one because he had been murdered in his young age in the Capuchin Crypt in Vienna; the latter because – after reading the complete works of Emanuele Severino – he decided in the Jewish cemetery of Prague that, if the error of the West is the error of the West, it was then better not to say a word). Therefore Adelphi announced the unprecedented publication of the entire critical edition of the works of Shakespeare and Bacon, edited by Mazzino Colli, in-folio, on Fabriano paper, bound in human leather.<sup>407</sup>

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(2000): 113.

<sup>407</sup> Umberto Eco, "Shakespeare era per caso Shakespeare?", in *La memoria vegetale e altri scritti di bibliofilia* (Milano: Edizioni Rovello, 2006), 267: "Quasi nello stesso periodo Roberto Calasso,

Finally, we would like to suggest that even in many recollections and critical contributions that directly address and interpret Bazlen's figure and legacy is appreciable that maieutic nature which we have observed in connection to his fictional representations. That is to say that even within these works Bazlen often represents a term of comparison through which or against which prove, test, or express the positions of the ones who dialogue with him or try to interpret him. As a case positive identification, we might consider the case of Calasso, whose intellectual positions, as evident by his publishing choices and writings, are clearly and declaredly akin to Bazlen's. The cases in which a distancing is observable are though more revealing of the dialectical relationship often established with his figure. In this regard, it is exemplary the case of Voghera, who expresses a sense of disappointment towards the sterility of his friend's work, and doing so interprets Bazlen through his own cultural positions and aspirations, and describes what might have been the result of a deliberate choice or of a followed personal disposition as a failure or a shortcoming: “maybe, if he had abandoned himself more humbly to his pain, if he had looked for the important things rather than for the interesting and the original ones, [...] Bobi, with his intelligence, his sensitivity, his culture, [...] could have given us something magnificent, not only extremely

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rifacendosi a un voluminoso manoscritto di ottocento pagine dovuto alla penna di Roberto Bazlen, dimostrava che né Shakespeare né Bacone avevano mai scritto nulla (il primo essendo stato assassinato in giovane età nella Cripta dei Cappuccini a Vienna, e il secondo avendo deciso nel cimitero ebraico di Praga, dopo aver letto l'opera omnia di Emanuele Severino, che se l'errore dell'Occidente è l'errore dell'Occidente, allora tanto valeva starsene zitto). Pertanto Adelphi annunciava la pubblicazione inedita, in edizione critica, di tutte le opere di Shakespeare e di Bacone, a cura di Mazzino Colli, in-folio su carta Fabriano, rilegate in pelle umana”. Eco's piece was originally published in *Bibliofantasie di una estrosa équipe di scanzonati favolatori*, Milano: Ravello, 2003.

noteworthy”<sup>408</sup>. Voghera actually interprets Bazlen's personal life choices too as a deviation from the norm, or even as the result of a disorder, within a set of values that seems to reveal first of all his own petit bourgeois mindset, and that does not acknowledge or admit a possible value to Bazlen's nonconformist or extravagant choices<sup>409</sup>. Another example of distancing is provided by Ara and Magris' already mentioned criticism towards Bazlen's non engaged cultural stance; criticism that seems first of all to be motivated by their own conception of the duties of the intellectual, which Bazlen plainly dismissed.

The mentioned cases are representative of a characteristic of most of the recollections and contributions on Bazlen, which, when dealing directly with his figure or work, often importantly reflect or reveal the cultural and personal positions of the authors, which come to the foreground at the expense of the object with which they dialogue. If the superimposition of one own categories and ideas is to a certain extent unavoidable in any interpretation, in our case this superimposition seems to often become permeating. Proceeding with the parallelism with *Bartleby* suggested by Vila-Matas, we may argue that this happens because of the elusiveness of Bazlen, whose traces were from the start heavily mediated, and whose positions, even when more directly expressed (as in his letters or in his most complete writings), do not support univocal interpretations. As Calasso argues, Bazlen in fact “used to leave what in his thought was

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<sup>408</sup> Voghera, *Gli anni della psicanalisi*, 188-189.

<sup>409</sup> Voghera, for instance, reads Bazlen's choice of not getting married and his eventful sentimental life as an “incapacity of finding a companion”, and suggests a correlation between his sentimental “inconstancy” and some alleged psychological sexual disorders (see foreword to *Tracce del sapiente*, 24).

most essential always implied, unexpressed”<sup>410</sup>. As one of the above-described Bartlebys, his silence lacks even the pathos of negation<sup>411</sup>. Bazlen's unuttered or hidden assumptions reveal thus themselves as a sort of blank canvas which leaves vast space for conjectures and interpretations, as a mirror that exposes to confessions and declarations of stances.

The characteristics that lead to the above-mentioned accusations of sterility, are the same ones that urge other critics to underline the modernity of Bazlen's work and the originality of his thought. Thus Cacciari includes him in his gallery of Nietzschean *Posthumous People*<sup>412</sup>, and Calasso describes him as a “post-historical man”, as “the still inexperienced inhabitant of an [...] ensuing world”<sup>413</sup>. Within this frame, Bazlen is interpreted as an extreme figure of radical but non pessimistic nihilism, and his writings, as we will see, actually encourage this interpretation.

Massimo Rizzante, addressing Bazlen's elusion of the work and his research of anonymity in relation to his posthumous fame and to the evasiveness of his figure, argues that “in the epoch of the end of the Work [*fin de l'oeuvre*], Bazlen has shaken off any pursuer with a sublime mystifying gesture. He foresaw well beforehand that, in the epoch of the end of the Work, the only thing that would have survived would have been the caricatural immortality of the biography of the authors”<sup>414</sup>. We actually do not believe

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<sup>410</sup> Marcoaldi, “L'uomo che sapeva troppo”, 35.

<sup>411</sup> This is observed by Giorgio Agamben in regard to Melville's scrivener's formula “I would prefer not”: “Bartleby does not consent, but neither does he simply refuse to do what is asked for; nothing is farther from him than the heroic pathos of negation” (“Bartleby, or On Contingency”, in *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy* [Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999], 256).

<sup>412</sup> See Cacciari, “A Dark Alley in the Old City”, in *Posthumous People*, 170-174.

<sup>413</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 15-16.

<sup>414</sup> Massimo Rizzante, “Bobi Bazlen et la critique à l'époque de la fin de l'oeuvre”, in Christia Leggeri and

that Bazlen managed to avoid that, nor that his discretion and research of anonymity aimed to that. We are actually led to interpret them as the result of the non-moralistic “sense of decency” we already described, thus as the manifestation of an inner discipline which has not to be mistaken with mere modesty. Bazlen writes in his notes: “Against modesty... and the ones who are contented: the best that can happen to them is to take pleasure”<sup>415</sup>. And again, within an article for Olivetti's *Comunità*:

A great man is a man who creates a great work, or a work beneficial to many. The person who invented the light bulb; the one who managed to publish an essential scream which was ripped out of his chest during his fight against some god; the one who, by his hand, slaughtered one hundred enemies in half an hour. But a man might also be great because he realizes a new type, because he creates a new kind of human relationship, maybe also because he simply was able to resolve in the best way the petty troubles of everyday life. His greatness may reside in renunciation, his greatness may reside in his silence.<sup>416</sup>

Bazlen's desire of leaving no traces seems thus not motivated by humility, nor by concern for his eventual legacy. What he thought of any bequest, posthumous image or representation, is clearly expressed in one of his *footnotes*: “To be applied in its deepest meaning (with no paradoxicalness): *De mortuis nil nisi male*”. That is to say: “Spit on the martyrs' corpses while they are still warm”<sup>417</sup>.

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Armando Zimolo, eds., *Trieste, espèces d'espaces: littérature, géographie politique: actes du colloque international organisé par l'Association Italiques* (Trieste: Editoriale Generali, 2004), 117-118.

<sup>415</sup> *Note senza testo*, 232: “Contro la modestia... e chi si contenta, il massimo che gli possa succedere è di godere”.

<sup>416</sup> “Vi sono grandi uomini viventi in Germania”, in *ibid.*, 262-263: “Un grande uomo è un uomo che crea una grande opera, o un'opera utile a molti. Chi ha inventato la lampadina elettrica, chi ha portato alle stampe un urlo essenziale che gli è stato strappato dal petto nella sua lotta contro qualsiasi dio, chi da solo ha sgozzato in mezz'ora cento nemici; ma un uomo può essere anche grande in quanto realizza un tipo nuovo, in quanto crea un nuovo rapporto umano, forse anche unicamente in quanto ha risolto nel modo più giusto i piccoli pasticci della vita quotidiana. La sua grandezza può stare nella rinuncia, la sua grandezza può stare nel silenzio”. The brief prose was probably written in 1946 (see *ibid.*, 262, note 1).

<sup>417</sup> *Note senza testo*, 229: “Applicare nel senso più profondo (senza paradossalità): *De mortuis nil nisi male*. (Sputare sui cadaveri dei martiri fin che son caldi)”.



## Chapter II

## Bobi's Books

Vow. – I intend never again to read an author of whom it is apparent that he wanted to produce a book: but only those whose thoughts unintentionally became a book.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

## 1. The Cultural Operator, the Secret Editor, the Unwilling Pedagogue

## 1.1. The “Svevo Bomb”

“Friends and enemies lamented Bazlen's continuous elusion of the work”<sup>418</sup>, at times with regret (see Voghera<sup>419</sup>), at times with fascinated appreciation (see Magris' appraisal of Bazlen's “regal unproductiveness”<sup>420</sup>). These kind of evaluations tend to emphasize Bazlen's avoidance of literary production, and to cast on his intellectual work an aura of sterility which is though disproved by the vastness and incisiveness of his activity as publisher and cultural operator. Activity which, if difficult to precisely and exhaustively reconstruct (or, because of its characteristics, even to accurately term<sup>421</sup>),

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<sup>418</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 17-18.

<sup>419</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 112-113.

<sup>420</sup> Magris, “Sull'orlo del mito”.

<sup>421</sup> In regard to the difficulties one encounters in defining Bazlen's intellectual activity and profile, see Italo Calvino's account in Introduction, p. 3; see also Calasso (“Giardino Bazlen”), who, commenting on the choice of words for the plaque dedicated to Bazlen in the homonymous public garden in Milan, writes: “nelle targhe, accanto al nome e alla data di nascita e di morte, in Italia si usa mettere una qualifica. Ma per Bazlen, l'uomo che meno di ogni altro si lasciava definire? 'Scrittore' avrebbe avuto un suono strano, se si considera che Bazlen non volle pubblicare mai un libro in vita – e con ogni probabilità distrusse molte delle sue carte. E allora? Poteva balenare anche la possibilità funesta di ricorrere al termine 'intellettuale'. Nulla sarebbe stato più alieno da Bazlen. Come disse una volta Jules Renard, 'intellettuale'”

has nevertheless been decisive in relation to some of the most prominent figures and editorial adventures of Italian twentieth-century literature.

The most documented case of a central role covered by Bazlen in relation to a major cultural operation (and, in a way, his understated debut in the Italian literary scene) is the one concerning the discovery and revaluation of the work of Italo Svevo. The novelist's reappraisal, as it is well known, commenced in the winter of 1925-1926, thanks to two concomitant and loosely connected occurrences: the publication of two articles on Svevo by Eugenio Montale<sup>422</sup>, and the vast space and attention dedicated to the Triestine writer by the February 1926 issue of the French journal *La Navire d'Argent*<sup>423</sup>. In 1929, Giacomo Debenedetti so described the deflagration of the “Svevo case”:

It was yesterday (1925) that the very *à la page* friend from Trieste slipped into our hands *La coscienza di Zeno*, and invited us, with a Freemason “brother” complicity – obscure, confidential, and evasive: “Read it; of course, it takes some patience; one need to stand the weight of the *fatras* and of the hodgepodge. But Joyce, who by chance met Svevo here in Trieste, admires him, and Larbaud, to whom Joyce introduced Svevo, is going to pay homage to him”. So, *teste Joyce cum Larbaud*, we read *Zeno*. [...] The Triestine friend maybe did not suspect of having spread into the air of some windy afternoon, between a bookstore and a café, the seed of an audacious literary claim. But – credit where credit is due – it was Eugenio Montale who wanted and was able to push himself beyond a first taste; and he explored also Svevo's other two books, and proposed the unknown novelist to the so wandering and idle attention of Italian readers and men of letters.<sup>424</sup>

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può essere soltanto un aggettivo. Poi venni a sapere che era sta scelta la definizione 'editore'. E mi suonò subito giusta. Anche se – anzi appunto perché – paradossale. Bazlen, che io sappia, è l'unico vero e grande editore che non abbia mai assunto cariche direttive”.

<sup>422</sup> “Omaggio a Italo Svevo”, *L'esame* IV (November-December 1925): 71-82; “Presentazione di Italo Svevo”, *Il Quindicinale* I.2 (January 30<sup>th</sup> 1926).

<sup>423</sup> The issue of *Navire d'Argent* of February 1<sup>st</sup> 1926 featured an essay by Benjamin Crémiaux, his translation of the first three chapters of *La coscienza di Zeno*, and some passages from *Senilità* translated by Valery Larbaud.

<sup>424</sup> Giacomo Debenedetti, *Personaggi e destino. La metamorfosi del romanzo contemporaneo*, Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1977, 49-50. The essay “Svevo e Schmitz” originally appeared in *Il Convegno* X (January-February 1929).

Maybe Bazlen was initially indeed not aware of the importance of his literary claim, but, as his correspondence reveals, he soon realized it, and subsequently became far more involved in the cultural operation than what may be inferred from Debenedetti's account.

Bazlen had probably introduced Svevo's work to Montale during his stay in Genoa<sup>425</sup>, and in the following months he sent to the poet Svevo's novels and invited him to write about them. The first reference to Svevo's books within the published correspondence between Bazlen and Montale can be found in the letter of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1925, in which Bazlen informs his friend of having received from Svevo *Una vita* (1892) and *Senilità* (1898):

The second book: "Senilità" is a real *masterpiece*, and the only modern novel Italy has (it was published in 1898!). The style is horrible! I will write to you more about it once you have read it. I will send a copy also to Solmi, and one to Pellegrini. Did you read "la coscienza di Zeno"? You have to pass the first 200 pages, which are rather boring.<sup>426</sup>

Bazlen, at that time, had actually read only *Senilità*<sup>427</sup>, and would have finished reading *Zeno's Conscience* only weeks later<sup>428</sup>. Up to that point, Bazlen seemed primarily

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<sup>425</sup> In this regard, Giorgio Zampa claims: "L'ipotesi è probabile, ma ipotesi rimane" (introduction to Svevo and Montale, *Carteggio*, ix). Montale's words actually strongly suggest this hypothesis: see his account in "Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen", 2728: "Mi parlò di Svevo, facendomi poi pervenire i tre romanzi dell'autore stesso"; see also his letter to Svevo of June 20<sup>th</sup> 1927: "E Bobi? Purtroppo mi ha completamente dimenticato, tutto intento com'è ad amoreggiare con le mogli degli amici. Ma io lo ricordo lo stesso, e con molto affetto. Debbo a lui l'incontro con Italo Svevo" (Italo Svevo, *Carteggio con James Joyce, Valery Larbaud, Benjamin Crémieux, Marie Anne Comnène, Eugenio Montale, Valerio Jahier* [Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1965], 217).

<sup>426</sup> *Lettere a Montale*, 359-360: "Il secondo libro: 'Senilità' è un vero *capolavoro*, e l'unico romanzo moderno che abbia l'Italia (pubblicato nel 1898!). Stile tremendo! Te ne scriverò, più a lungo, quando l'avrai letto. Ne manderò una copia anche a Solmi, ed una a Pellegrini. Hai letto 'la coscienza di Zeno'? Devi superare le prime 200 pagine, che sono piuttosto noiose".

<sup>427</sup> In a letter to Montale of September 10<sup>th</sup> 1925 in fact, asking Montale's opinion on *Senilità*, Bazlen confesses of not having read *Una vita* yet (see *ibid.*, 362).

<sup>428</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Montale of November 16<sup>th</sup> 1925, in *ibid.*, 363 "[*La coscienza di Zeno*] mi è sembrata infinitamente superiore a *Senilità*; ti avverto che *non* è autobiografico che in piccola parte, e ti consiglio di guardarla, p.es., *sub specie bovarismi*. Più a lungo un'altra volta".

concerned with introducing Svevo to some of his intellectual friends, but in December, concurrently with Montale's first article on the novelist, the matter underwent a sharp acceleration:

I today asked Svevo the permission to publish in the new review an extract from *Senilità* with your second piece. He of course granted it. In Paris, they introduced his books to Prezzolini, who really liked them, and who will take care of the translations and the diffusion abroad. – I believe that the next issue of “*Navire d'Argent*” will feature an essay on Svevo by Larbaud, and a translated chapter of *Senilità*. – I would like to trigger off the Svevo bomb with a great roar; tell me if you think I should send the 2 books to Cecchi, Gargiulo, etc. In case, you should warm them up with a letter, and send me the addresses.<sup>429</sup>

In concomitance with the French discovery of Svevo propitiated by James Joyce, Montale and Bazlen – the first through his writings<sup>430</sup>, and the latter as behind the scenes coordinator – were thus already working towards the explosion of “the Svevo bomb”.

The priority of the discovery of Svevo has been abundantly discussed, and has been subject to different reconstructions<sup>431</sup>. Here we will confine ourselves to a brief

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<sup>429</sup> Bazlen to Montale, December 13<sup>th</sup> 1925, in *ibid.*, 365: “Ho chiesto oggi il permesso, a Svevo, di pubblicare nella nuova rivista un pezzo di *Senilità* colla tua, seconda, critica. L'ha accordata senz'altro. Hanno fatto conoscere, a Parigi, i suoi libri a Prezzolini, cui sono molto piaciuti, e che se ne occuperà per le traduzioni e la diffusione all'estero. – Credo che nel prossimo numero del '*Navire d'Argent*' uscirà un saggio su Svevo, di Larbaud, e la traduzione di un capitolo di *Senilità*. – Vorrei far scoppiare la bomba Svevo con molto fracasso, dimmi se è il caso di mandare i 2 libri a Cecchi, Gargiulo ecc. Al caso dovresti prepararli con una lettera e mandarmi gli indirizzi”.

<sup>430</sup> Besides the two above-mentioned pieces, Montale's third article on Svevo was published on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1936 (“*Profili: Italo Svevo*”, in *L'Italia che scrive IX*).

<sup>431</sup> It is a well known fact that Joyce, after receiving *Zeno's Conscience*, already in January 1924 committed himself with Svevo to introducing the novel to Larbaud, Crémiaux, Eliot, and Madox Ford (see his letter to Svevo of January 30<sup>th</sup> 1924, in Italo Svevo, *Carteggio*, 29-30). In the following months Joyce also introduced Svevo's work to some of his literary acquaintances in Italy (see his letter of November 20<sup>th</sup> 1924 [in *ibid.*, 31], in which he suggested Svevo to send the novel to the critic Lauro de Bosis and to the director of *Il Convegno* Enzo Ferrieri). In a letter of April 1<sup>st</sup> 1924, Joyce informed Svevo that Larbaud, who had greatly appreciated *Zeno's Conscience*, was going to write a review of it, and that he had already written himself to Italian writer Sibilla Aleramo about his book (see *ibid.*, 33). In a letter of June 10<sup>th</sup> 1924, Svevo though complained with Joyce of the scarce attention that his novel was receiving in Italy, even by the recipients suggested by the Irish writer: “I letterati hanno in genere una cattiva nursery (almeno gli italiani) e non usano rispondere. Di quei tre romanzi che mandai ultimamente pare che nessuno sia giunto a destinazione” (*ibid.*, 34). On November 11<sup>th</sup> 1925 Joyce

description of the nature and range of Bazlen's involvement in the fortune of the novelist within Italian borders. Bazlen, as we have seen, sent Svevo's novels to some of the most prominent Italian critics and men of letters (Emilio Cecchi, Alfredo Gargiuolo, Giacomo Debenedetti, Sergio Solmi, Adriano Grande) and solicited their attention. At a certain point he was in charge (we do not know precisely to what degree) of the contacts with the

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nevertheless assured Svevo that the January-February issue of *Navire d'Argent* would have published an extract from *Zeno* with a presentation by Crémieux (see *ibid.*, 36). Svevo had been in contact with Larbaud since the beginning of the year, as demonstrated by a letter from January 1<sup>st</sup> 1925 in which the French critic expressed his high praises for *Zeno* and affirmed of being engaged in promoting his book (“Propaganda solamente orale, ma efficace, come Lei vedrà” [*ibid.*, 47]). On February 20<sup>th</sup> 1925 Larbaud informed Svevo of his project of starting a campaign in his favor (see *ibid.*, 52). The efforts of promoting his work within the Italian journals were though not as successful, at least until Bazlen and Montale's intervention, which was parallel but independent from the French operation. Bazlen, as we have seen, was arguably informed by Svevo of the attention he was receiving in France, and evidently turned to good account the propitious moment. If the special issue of *Navire d'Argent* had the merit of providing to Svevo international attention and some credit to Montale and Bazlen's operation, the two Italian intellectuals had thus the merit of his discovery and promotion in Italy. However, even this point has been object of different reconstructions. Giovanni Palmieri, in his notes to Svevo's correspondence with Enzo Ferrieri, attributes the priority of the Italian discovery of Svevo to Prezzolini and to the intellectuals of *Il Convegno*. Using as source Carlo Linati's account (“Italo Svevo, romanziere”, published on *Nuova Antologia* on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1928), Palmieri claims that Montale asked Svevo's books to Bazlen after hearing about the novelist in summer 1925 at a meeting in the office of *Convegno*, during which Prezzolini referred the words of James Joyce: “Ma voi altri italiani avete un grande prosatore e forse neanche lo sapete. 'Quale?' 'Italo Svevo, triestino” (Linati, “Italo Svevo, romanziere”, 328). According to Palmieri, Montale would have finally been the first one to write about Svevo: “aveva già vinto la 'caccia', assicurandosi, perlomeno in apparenza, il primato sulla scoperta di Svevo. Primato poi difeso accanitamente anche a costo di qualche lieve e opportuna 'revisione' di dati, date e persone. A noi, in questa sede, corre l'obbligo di sottolineare che il 'caso Svevo' [...] era stato trapiantato in Italia per merito di Prezzolini proprio grazie al circolo del 'Convegno' di Enzo Ferrieri” (in Italo Svevo, “*Faccio meglio di restare nell'ombra*”. *Carteggio inedito con Ferrieri e conferenza su Joyce*, ed. Giovanni Palmieri [Milano-Lecce: Lupetti/Piero Manni, 1995], 15). Giuseppe Antonio Camerino convincingly dismisses Palmieri's reconstruction, proving that Montale was not actually present at the mentioned meeting, but appeared at the office of *Convegno* months later (see *Italo Svevo e la crisi della Mitteleuropa* [Milano: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1997], 270-271). Palmieri in fact reports unfaithfully Linati's account (“Tra le persone che ascoltavano il resoconto di Prezzolini – è sempre Linati a ricordarlo – c'era anche Eugenio Montale” [Svevo, “*Faccio meglio di restare nell'ombra*”, 13]), which actually states that Montale appeared after Linati himself had looked for months but in vain for Svevo's novels: “Ed ecco che finalmente, passato qualche mese, un altro giovane capitò al *Club* con una copia sgualcita di *Senilità* sotto il braccio, da lui ottenuta in prestito, dopo grandi difficoltà, da un suo amico studioso di Trieste. Ora la copia c'era ma non c'era nel giovine la buona volontà di di farcela leggere. Geloso come tutti gli scrittori di rarità e fiutando la prelibata rivelazione, egli s'era tenuta la copia per sé, e poi aveva scritto intorno allo Svevo un articolo sull'“Esame” di Somaré” (Linati, “Italo Svevo, romanziere”, 328). Camerino thus ascribe Palmieri's “sly and false” reconstruction to his will of attributing, through Prezzolini and Linati, “a 'Lombard' primogeniture to the fortune of the author of *Zeno*” (*Italo Svevo*, 271-272), and maintains that the first Italian “discoverer” of Svevo was indeed Bazlen (see *ibid.*, 270).

publishers for the republication of Svevo's two first novels<sup>432</sup>. He presumably also had a decisive role in the choice of Piero Rismondo as translator for the German edition of *Zeno's Conscience*<sup>433</sup>. Furthermore, after Svevo's death in 1928, he became the “principal mediator” between the “Svevian” environment of Trieste and *Solaria*<sup>434</sup>, for which he also selected the materials for the special issue dedicated to the late novelist<sup>435</sup>. Bazlen nevertheless refused to collaborate to the number with an article (“Thank you for inviting me to collaborate to Your special issue: but I have no time, and I am not able to write in Italian”<sup>436</sup>), and asked for his involvement and his responsibilities within the literary case to remain concealed (“Do me a favor: turn down all the articles addressing the priority of the discovery of Svevo; the issue is becoming rather indecorous”<sup>437</sup>).

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<sup>432</sup> So we learn from Bazlen's letters to Svevo of January 24<sup>th</sup> and February 17<sup>th</sup> 1926, in which Bazlen refers of his contacts with publisher Enrico Somarè, interested in the republication of Svevo's first two novels (see *Lettere a Italo Svevo. Diario di Elio Schmitz* [Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1973], 108-109).

<sup>433</sup> Italo Svevo, *Zeno Cosini. Roman*, trans. Piero Rismondo, Basel: Rhein-Verlag, 1928. Camerino, who met and interviewed Rismondo in 1985, informs us that the drama and literary critic from Trieste, who later moved to Vienna, attended Bazlen's high school, and with him was tied by “an unforgettable comradely relationship” (*Italo Svevo*, 250). Three years younger than Bazlen, he owed him his “first rudiments of contemporary German literature [...], and, naturally, also the discovery of Svevo's work” (*ibid.*). Camerino also informs us that Svevo entrusted to the young Rismondo the translation of *La coscienza di Zeno* in spite of his family, which would have preferred as translator “a certain count Ressegnier” (*ibid.*).

<sup>434</sup> See Giuliano Manacorda, foreword to *Lettere a Solaria*, xxiii.

<sup>435</sup> “Omaggio a Italo Svevo” (*Solaria* IV 3-4 [1929]), featured writings by Angioletti, Brion, Boulanger, Chabas, Consiglio, Crémieux, Debenedetti, Ehrenburg, Ferrata, Ferrero, Franchi, Gadda, Goll, Hellens, Joyce, Larbaud, Lodovici, Michel, Monnier, Montale, Palazzeschi, Raimondi, Rossi, Saba, Schwenk, Solmi, Soupault, Stuparich, Tecchi, Van Schendel, Thérive. For the special issue Bazlen choose an excerpt from *Il vecchione*, which was eventually published with some other fragments by Svevo. Besides the selection of the writings, Bazlen also composed the bibliography, initially assigned to Giulio Cesari. In this regard, see Bazlen's letters to Carocci of October 28<sup>th</sup> (in Manacorda, *Lettere a Solaria*, 87-89) and December 30<sup>th</sup> 1928 (in *ibid.*, 103-104), in which Bazlen informs the director of *Solaria*: “Mi avverta prima di andare in macchina: farò il possibile di mandarLe la lista degli articoli su S. fino all'ultimo momento. A Giulio Cesari (cui non ho fatto i suoi ringraziamenti perché per fortuna non l'ho visto, ed ho preferito di non andare in cerca di disgrazie), scriva, per favore, presso *Il Popolo di Trieste*, Trieste”.

<sup>436</sup> Bazlen to Carocci, October 28<sup>th</sup> 1928, in *ibid.*, 89: “Grazie per l'invito di collaborare al Suo numero unico: ma non ho tempo, e in italiano non so scrivere”.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*: “Mi faccia un favore: rifiuti tutti gli articoli dove si parla della priorità della scoperta di Svevo: il problema sta diventando un po' troppo indecoroso”.

Finally, Bazlen would have been for a while in charge of the publication of the posthumous works of Svevo, notwithstanding the conflicts and disagreements with the novelist's heirs. Already in 1928 he had in fact written to Montale: "I will try to be entrusted with the whole posthumous works, and to prevent the publication of the complete works. It would be terrible. I believe that there is nothing worth publishing. But I will have a look, and – if possible – I will send you the manuscripts"<sup>438</sup>. At a certain point Bazlen was in possession of some of Svevo's manuscripts, and had "the power of choosing, as any curator, to which critics the introductory writings of the works to be published had to be assigned"<sup>439</sup>. Svevo's daughter Letizia actually recollects that Bazlen (who was "the true family friend"<sup>440</sup>) was initially supposed to be the curator of the complete works of his father<sup>441</sup>, but the project failed because of the incomprehension with the novelist's family. In 1929 Bazlen was in fact already complaining with Montale about the way Svevo's literary legacy was being handled:

There is no way to make the people of Villa Veneziani [Svevo's family] understand that it would be possible to tend to the "posthumous glory" of S. with great decorum, and that there is no need to make room for him elbowing their way forward, fragment after fragment, in all the literary magazines. God willing, they will eventually publish also his correspondence, the cultural and philosophical fragments, and all his completely idiotic fairy tales.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Bazlen to Montale, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1928, in *Lettere a Montale*, 381: "Tenterò di farmi dare in mano tutta l'opera postuma, e di evitare la pubblicazione dell'opera omnia. Sarebbe un disastro. Credo non ci sia nulla di pubblicabile. Ma darò un'occhiata, e – se sarà possibile – Ti manderò i manoscritti".

<sup>439</sup> Giovanni Palmieri, "Il giallo dei fogli mancanti. Ancora sull'edizione critica della sveviana 'Novella del buon vecchio e della bella fanciulla'", *Filologia italiana* 9 (2012): 222.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> See *ibid.* The complete works of Svevo would have been eventually assigned to Bruno Maier (Italo Svevo, *Opera omnia*, ed. Bruno Maier, Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1966-1969).

<sup>442</sup> Bazlen to Montale, September 9<sup>th</sup> 1929, in *Lettere a Montale*, 386: "Non c'è verso di far capire a Villa Veneziani che si potrebbe soigner la 'gloria postuma' di S. molto decorosamente, e che non c'è nessun bisogno di fargli posto a piccoli colpi di gomito, e frammento per frammento, su tutte le riviste letterarie. Se Dio vuole, pubblicheranno col tempo anche la corrispondenza, i frammenti filosofici e culturali, e tutte le sue favole completamente idiote".

On the opposite side, Svevo's heirs felt offended by “the mean things” that Bazlen had written to Montale on the late novelist<sup>443</sup>. At any rate, in 1928 Bazlen was already meditating his retirement from the Svevo case. As he wrote to Carocci: “If You need anything else in connection to Svevo, please write me immediately: the several Ferdinando Pasini have already begun to hang around Villa Veneziani, and it is time for me to back off”<sup>444</sup>.

In *Note senza testo* we find the drafts of two essays on Svevo<sup>445</sup>, in which Bazlen argues that the reason why his novels encountered such a scarce attention when they first were published lies first of all in the unusual nature of his figure, which does not fit with “the cliché of the Italian man of letters”<sup>446</sup>. The distance between Svevo's works and coeval Italian ones is to be recognized, on the one hand, in the premises from which “Svevo's formal formlessness” springs, and, on the other, in “the excessive – and anti-natural – formal completeness” of Italian literature<sup>447</sup>. This, according to Bazlen, also

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<sup>443</sup> See Letizia Svevo's account as reported by Palmieri in “Il giallo dei fogli mancanti”, 222.

<sup>444</sup> Bazlen to Carocci, October 28<sup>th</sup> 1928, in Manacorda, *Lettere a Solaria*, 89. “Se ha bisogno di ancora qualcosa riguardo a Svevo, mi scriva, per favore, immediatamente: i Ferdinandi Pasini hanno già cominciato a ronzare intorno a Villa Veneziani, ed è tempo che io mi ritiri”. Bazlen refers here to the critic and professor Ferdinando Pasini (1876-1955) (see *Lettere a Montale*, 382, note 1).

<sup>445</sup> The earliest one, “Introduzione a Svevo” (in *Note senza testo*, 237-239), is dated November 15<sup>th</sup> 1934 and consists of a sketchy draft and some notes. The second, “Prefazione a Svevo” (in *ibid.*, 240-241), was according to the curator written in the years following the Second World War, and consists in the incipit (two pages) of what should have arguably become a longer essay. It is probably to “Prefazione a Svevo” that Bazlen refers to in his letters to Foà of February 4<sup>th</sup> 1948 (in which Svevo's name is made) and of March 11<sup>th</sup> of the same year, in which we read: “miei articoli: per qualche giorno ho ancora da fare, [...] poi vedo se mi riuscirà nuovamente di ledere il mio pudore, e di trascrivere e correggere quegli abbozzi che ti ho mostrato qui a roma” (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale [ALI] – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1948. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>446</sup> “Prefazione a Svevo”, in *Note senza testo*, 240.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*



explains the late interest and revaluation of Svevo's novels<sup>448</sup>.

Bazlen claims that Prewar Italy was the European country with the most solidified culture:

after Dante, the language has not changed; thus a culture of utmost form. Form that rises from a wonderfully merged unity of the background, from an a priori realized synthesis – and in which thus, as logical consequence, any drive towards expression becomes play, search of an ever new and always more refined balance, which is distanced by a nuance [...] – and underneath which – with all due respect for all the exceptions to the rule – you will unlikely see the overheated struggle of the genius who attempts to unite what is not unitable, to uniform what is not uniformable, to reconcile the unconciliated.<sup>449</sup>

In this polished and solidified culture, there is no place for anything else but an “almost completely combinatory game: pouring, in different combinations, old sentiments in old forms, and keeping polishing, honing, refining a word and a cadence which has been already excessively refined by the filter of dozens generations”<sup>450</sup>. In this culture which represents “the triumph of the specialists”, there is no place for “adventurers and pioneers of culture”, and hence for “that huge amateur which the novelist is”: “lack of that friction, of that rift from which insecurity and doubt rises: insecurity and doubt from which observation and introspection spring; first step and only condition for the 'psychological'

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<sup>448</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-241: “da Dante in poi, per restare nella lingua, la lingua non ha mutato; la cultura, dunque, di massima forma. Forma che nasce da una mirabilmente fusa unità di sfondo, da una sintesi realizzata a priori, in cui dunque, e per logica conseguenza, ogni bisogno di espressione diventa gioco, ricerca di un nuovo, sempre più raffinato equilibrio, distanziato l'uno dall'altro da una nuance [...] – e sotto la quale – con l'immenso rispetto per tutte le eccezioni della regola – difficilmente si sentirà lo sforzo surriscaldato del genio nel suo tentativo di unire l'inunibile, di uniformare l'inuniformabile, di conciliare l'inconciliato”.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 241: “un gioco quasi completamente combinatorio, versare, in combinazioni differenti, vecchi sentimenti in vecchie forme, e continuare a polire, levigare, affinare una parola e una cadenza già troppo affinata attraverso il filtro di dozzine di generazioni”.

interest”<sup>451</sup>. Bazlen's interest lies thus in the psychological dimension of Svevo's work, which is to be put in relation with the background from which the novelist comes from. The premises of Italian literature and, “let us call it, Triestine literature”, are in fact different, and the work of Svevo is possible exactly because of the “non 'formed' environment” of Trieste<sup>452</sup>: “It is symptomatic that psychology rises only where the necessity of an exam rises, either in non completely 'solidified' cultures or at the point of contrast of two different cultures – see the 'psychological' Jew”<sup>453</sup>. The research of the “amateur” Svevo is hence possible thanks to the characteristics of the culture of his city. Pietro Pancrazi writes about the Triestine authors of this period: “these writers of mixed language, mixed culture and, often, mixed blood, are intent on discovering themselves, on defining themselves, on searching their own anchorage – but almost with the assumption of the impossibility of finding it, as someone who conceives research not as the means, but rather as the end of his own quest”<sup>454</sup>.

Bazlen's admiration for Svevo's work (as we have seen in his remarks about the novelist's style, language, and syntax) was all but blind, and so was his estimation of the man Schmitz. In a renowned and infamous letter to Montale (which, according to Letizia Svevo, costed Bazlen the chance to be the curator of her father's complete works<sup>455</sup>), we read:

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid.: “mancanza di quello screzio, di quella incrinatura, da cui sorgono la malsicurezza e il dubbio, padri dell'osservazione, dell'introspezione, primo passo, unica premessa per l'interesse 'psicologico”.

<sup>452</sup> “Introduzione a Svevo”, in *Note senza testo*, 237-238.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 237: “È sintomatico che la psicologia sorga soltanto dove sorge la necessità di un esame, sia in culture non completamente 'solidificate', sia al punto di contrasto tra due culture diverse, vedi l'ebreo 'psicologico”.

<sup>454</sup> Pietro Pancrazi, *Scrittori d'oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1946), 104.

<sup>455</sup> See Palmieri, “Il giallo dei fogli mancanti”, 222: “In seguito, com'è noto, quando la famiglia di Svevo venne a sapere che Bobi 'aveva scritto tutte quelle cose cattive su papà' (sono parole di Letizia), Livia [Veneziani] decise di affidare la curatela dell'opera completa a Umbro Apollonio”.

Schmitz's death saddened me greatly. And, like everyone else, I miss him very much. I looked through your article on S. in *Fiera Letteraria* (I don't buy it on principle, like I have never bought any newspaper). I fear your article might be misinterpreted, and might foster the legend of an intelligent, cultivated, sympathetic Svevo; good critic, psychologist, clairvoyant in life, etc. He had nothing but his genius: nothing else. He was otherwise stupid, selfish, opportunist, gauche, calculating, indiscreet. He had nothing but his genius, and this is what makes his memory so fascinating to me. If you can, and if you will have another chance of writing about Schmitz, fix it the best you can: the legend of the "noble life" (entirely devoted, with the exception of the three novels, to making money) is too pitiful, and too despicable. – Malgré tout, I really loved him, like I loved only few people.<sup>456</sup>

The at times misinterpreted letter, in which Bazlen expresses his reservation on the man while at the same time reasserting his affection towards him and his estimation of his literary genius, first of all allows us to observe a characteristic of the nature of Bazlen's literary inclinations and judgments, free from moralistic concerns and allergic to rhetorical celebrations. Secondly, it might help to illustrate the influence that in the same years Bazlen had towards Montale, who, in the above-quoted letter is criticized for the portrait he had given of Svevo in his piece on the late novelist ("Ultimo addio"<sup>457</sup>). Montale replied to Bazlen the following year in "Leggenda e verità di Svevo"<sup>458</sup>, in which he would have anonymously but faithfully and at times literally reported his

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<sup>456</sup> Bazlen to Montale, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1928, in *Lettere a Montale*, 380-381: "Sono stato molto addolorato per la morte di Schmitz. E sento molto – la sentono tutti – la sua mancanza. – Scorso in libreria il Tuo articolo su S. sulla *Fiera Letteraria* (Non la compero per principio, come non ho mai comperato un giornale): ho paura che il Tuo articolo si presti troppo ad essere interpretato male, ed a far sorgere la leggenda d'uno Svevo borghese intelligente, colto, comprensivo, buon critico, psicologo chiaroveggente nella vita, ecc. Non aveva che genio: nient'altro. Del resto era stupido, egoista, opportunist, gauche, calcolatore, senza tatto. Non aveva che genio, ed è questo che mi rende più affascinante il suo ricordo. Se puoi, e se avrai occasione di scrivere ancora di Schmitz, metti a posto più possibile: la leggenda della 'nobile esistenza' (dedicata unicamente – ad eccezione dei tre romanzi – a far soldi) è troppo penosa, e troppo ignobile. – Gli ho voluto – malgré tout – molto bene, come non ne ho voluto che a poche persone".

<sup>457</sup> Montale's article was published on September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1928 in *Fiera Letteraria*.

<sup>458</sup> In *Solaria*, IV 3-4 (1929): 56-58, and now in Svevo and Montale, *Carteggio*, 99-100.

remarks<sup>459</sup>.

## 1.2. The First Reader of Montale and Quarantotti Gambini

We have in the previous chapter already mentioned the strong ascendancy that Bazlen had towards Montale, who, not only in the case of Svevo, was particularly solicitous in following Bazlen's literary indications (see for instance the case of Ivan Cankar's *Il servo Bortolo ed il suo diritto*, translated from Slovenian and published by Parnaso in 1925, signaled by Bazlen – “I would like to read a critical piece from you on a decent journal”<sup>460</sup> – and by Montale promptly and favorably reviewed<sup>461</sup>). The tenor of their published correspondence (in which, as Zampa writes, Bazlen “gladly poses as *enfant terrible*, dispenses suggestions with imperious tone, and is prodigal of paradoxes”<sup>462</sup>) confirms that their relationship had to be first of all one of deep

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<sup>459</sup> See *ibid.*, 99-100: “Due ritratti di Italo Svevo mi sembrano egualmente parziali: quello di chi non l'ha conosciuto affatto e quello di chi l'ha conosciuto *troppo* e troppo da vicino. Nel settembre 1928 un ignoto, dopo aver letto il mio necrologio dello scrittore pubblicato sulla *Fiera Letteraria*, mi scrisse per espormi il suo dissenso. Quel mio articolo – scriveva in sostanza l'ignoto – poteva portare pericolose conferme alla 'indecente' leggenda del 'nobile spirito' eccetera, il quale avrebbe 'atteso per trent'anni' eccetera; alla leggenda dell'uomo raffinatissimo, buon critico di sé e buon conoscitore degli altri eccetera; alla favola del perfetto europeo perfettamente consapevole di – eccetera eccetera. A questo ritratto, che può interessare soltanto le *bas bleu* e i sentimentali, l'ignoto contrapponeva uno Svevo *en pantoufles* più che suggestivo. 'Italo Svevo fu un uomo geniale – e basta. Quanto al resto, dedicò tutta la vita ai propri affari, fu abbastanza vanitoso, punto critico e cattivo conoscitore degli uomini. *Non ebbe che genio, e questo rende più affascinante la sua memoria*. Lasciamo ad altri, ai mediocri, l'aureola del 'nobile spirito', della 'vigilia', eccetera. Svevo può farne a meno'. Questa lettera mi lasciò pensoso. Quattro anni di amicizia con lo Svevo m'erano sufficienti ad apprezzare quanta parte di verità era contenuta, se non nelle espressioni, almeno nelle intenzioni dell'ignoto. [...] Ha dunque ragione l'ignoto? Probabilmente sì; ma ha ragione per quanto nega più che per quanto afferma. [...] Perciò non mi persuado a credere a uno Svevo 'mediocre' in qualche parte di sé o dell'arte sua, né mi riesce di vedere se non un epigramma nella favola dell'uomo d'affari che scrisse quasi per caso i suoi tre romanzi. Certo, neppure l'ignoto pensava questo dello Svevo; la sua proposta di un taglio netto nella personalità sveviana tendeva, s'è visto, a isolare e a porre più in alto l'artista”.

<sup>460</sup> Bazlen to Montale, May 5<sup>th</sup> 1925, in *Lettere a Montale*, 358: “Vorrei leggere una tua critica in una rivista decente”.

<sup>461</sup> “Un servo padrone”, *Il Baretti* II.15 (1925).

<sup>462</sup> Giorgio Zampa, introduction to Svevo and Montale, *Carteggio*, viii.

friendship, within which even the incitements that would have brought to the creation of some of Montale's most famous literary figures at times originated from their complicity. Such is the case of Montale's "Dora Markus"<sup>463</sup>, which was almost commissioned by Bazlen ("GERTI AND CARLO: Fine. In Trieste, their guest, a friend of Gerti, with *wonderful legs. Write her a poem. Her name is DORA MARKUS*"<sup>464</sup>). Something analogous might be observed for "Carnevale di Gerti"<sup>465</sup>, which has at its center the figure of Gerti Frankl Tolazzi, close friend of Bazlen who had introduced her to Montale. We have also already signaled Bazlen's presence as character or dedicatee of some of Montale's proses and poems.

If the above-mentioned writings directly or indirectly show the influence of Bazlen (who, as Marcenaro argues, in the first years of their friendship represented indeed for the poet an "authentic artistic and vital point of reference"<sup>466</sup>), in connection to some of Montale's later poems we discover an actual work of editing by the Triestine intellectual. As La Ferla and Rebay have demonstrated<sup>467</sup>, Montale's letters to Bazlen of the late thirties show that for a certain period he regularly submitted to the Triestine friend his poems, and that some of the pieces that would have been collected in *Le occasioni* (1939) found in Bazlen their first reader and a fundamental advisor. We

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<sup>463</sup> First published in *Il Meridiano di Roma* of January 10<sup>th</sup> 1937, and then in *Le occasioni* (1939); now in *Tutte le poesie*, 130-132.

<sup>464</sup> Bazlen to Montale, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1928, in *Lettere a Montale*, 381: "GERTI e CARLO: Bene. A Trieste, loro ospite, un'amica di Gerti, con delle gambe meravigliose. Falle una poesia. Si chiama DORA MARKUS".

<sup>465</sup> First published in *Il Convegno* of January 25<sup>th</sup> 1928, and subsequently in *Le occasioni*; now in *Tutte le poesie*, 124-126.

<sup>466</sup> Marcenaro, *Eugenio Montale*, 79.

<sup>467</sup> See La Ferla, *Diritto al Silenzio*, 40-48, and Rebay's already mentioned "Un cestello di Montale: le gambe di Dora Markus e una lettera di Roberto Bazlen" and "I diàspori di Montale".

actually do not possess Bazlen's letter of those years<sup>468</sup>, but Montale's ones testify that Bazlen's role was in this period more intense and crucial than the one in regard to the poems of *Ossi di seppia*, in which Bazlen's involvement was limited to encouragements and notes and criticism of a more general nature.

Pieces of poetry such as “Notizie dall'Amiata”, “Elegia di Pico Farnese”, “Nuove stanze”, and the poems of “Mottetti” are in fact at the center of an intense epistolary exchange, in which Montale asks Bazlen's opinions, modifies the poems after having pondered his suggestions, and keeps sending them back to him with new variants, at times insisting in exchanges protracted for several letters and weeks. As an example, see the letters concerning “Elegia di Pico Farnese”, the first draft of which Montale sends to Bazlen on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1939, soliciting his opinion and asking him to show it to Hans Leifhelm<sup>469</sup>, Austrian poet and translator and friend of Bazlen who wanted to translate in German some of Montale's poems<sup>470</sup>. From Montale's letter of May 1<sup>st</sup> we deduce that Bazlen's reply was immediate, and that it contained precise and straightforward notes, as usual highly valued by Montale:

Dear Bobi, thanks; I feared worse. But as usual, when it comes to details, I miss their objective value (especially with you). I don't know the precise extent to which the different perception of some nuances is due to my shortcomings or to your physiologically different ear. Does it make sense? I don't know to what extent we similarly feel the current value of my verbal mixture; I don't know to what extent you can realize what in it is necessary and what is arbitrary. [...] In the copy I am sending you, I have indicated more clearly the caesuras. I apologize, I know you don't need them. Please send it back with some questions and marginal notes. I will try to change it where I can. Mark the excessively prosaic or classicist

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<sup>468</sup> See Chapter I, note 187.

<sup>469</sup> The passage of Montale's letter as reported in Rebay, “I diàspori di Montale”, 37: “Scrivimi *subito* cosa ne pensi dell'*Elegia*. Forse a un pubblico *tedesco* è più adatta delle *Notizie*”.

<sup>470</sup> See *ibid.*, 37-38.

lines. [...] In short, you have to help me improve this elegy as far as possible: I am in a hurry. [...] Send the elegy as soon as you can, with few but good and very clear notes.<sup>471</sup>

Bazlen had to reply immediately also to this letter (which also included the proposal of some variants<sup>472</sup>), since Montale, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, already writes to him: “Dear Bobi, I have deeply revised the elegy, and not with a cold attitude. I am now asking your exequatur. Don't mind if a single line has gained or lost something. The changes have been beneficial to the poem as whole”<sup>473</sup>. Instead of giving him his approval, Bazlen had to send him new notes, since on May 10<sup>th</sup> Montale sent him another letter defending some of his choices and asking again for advice<sup>474</sup>. Finally, from a letter of June 9<sup>th</sup>, we learn that Bazlen, assisting Leifhelm in the translation of “Elegia”, took the role of intermediary between the translator and the poet, forwarding to Montale Leifhelm's

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 38-39: “Caro Bobi, grazie; temevo di peggio. Ma al solito, quando si va nei dettagli, mi sfugge (specie con te) il valore obiettivo dei medesimi. Non so fino a che punto la diversa percezione di certe nuances sia dovuta ai miei difetti obiettivi o a un tuo fisiologicamente diverso orecchio. Mi spiego? Non so fino a che punto noi sentiamo allo stesso modo l'attuale valore del mio impasto verbale, non so fino a che punto tu senta quello che c'è di necessario e quello che ci può essere di arbitrario. [...] Nella copia che ti mando ho segnato le cesure più chiare. Scusami, so che non ne hai bisogno. Ti prego rimandarmela con qualche interrogativo e commento marginale. Vedrò di mutare dove posso. Segna i versi troppo prosastici o troppo classicistici. [...] Insomma devi aiutarmi a migliorare fin dov'è possibile questa elegia: ho molta fretta. [...] Manda presto l'Elegia con poche ma buone note, chiarissime”.

<sup>472</sup> In the above-quoted excerpt we have omitted the passages with the more specific requests by Montale and the proposed variants, which testify of the technicality and specificity of the exchange between the two: “[...] Ciò a parte altre difficoltà nelle quali il torto (?) può esser tutto mio, e delle quali ti do un esempio: nel distico 'è l'Amore... messaggera imperiosa' (che per me sarebbe il centro della poesia, la massima elevazione di tono) ci sono elementi che per me, soggettivamente, erano vitalissimi e non suscettibili di interpretazione neo classica: la frangia che tu hai già visto nella fotografia di [...], qui frangia d'ali, ma insomma anticipazione dell'incredibile 'piumaggio' attribuito alla fronte senza errore, cioè la vera frangetta. 'Imperiosa' mi pare insostituibile, 'messaggera' idem. Credi che eliminando i 'bossi spartiti' (che a Pico esistono nel giardino di Tom) otterrei una riduzione dell'effetto deleterio che mi segnali? Rispondi con precisione su questo punto. Io qui volevo essere Blake-Rossetti, non Lipparini-Carducci. Fin dove avrò sbagliato io? Può bastare mutare il ritmo lasciando le parole?” (ibid., 38).

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 39: “Caro Bobi, ho molto ritoccato l'Elegia, e non a freddo. Ora ti chiederei l'exequatur. Non pensare a questo o quel verso che può aver guadagnato o perduto. I ritocchi hanno giovato all'insieme della poesia”.

<sup>474</sup> See ibid., 40.

doubts and questions<sup>475</sup>.

Thanks to Rebay, the collaboration on “Elegia di Pico Farnese” is the piece of poem on which we have more information on the nature of Bazlen's interventions. However, La Ferla (who also was able to study Montale's letters of this period) signals that the poet submitted to Bazlen other pieces of poems, such as the prosecution of “Dora Markus”, of which he sent revisions and variants<sup>476</sup>, and “A Liuba che parte”, for which he also asked for his friend's advice<sup>477</sup>. In some instances, as for the case of “Nuove Stanze”, Bazlen's presumable objections had to win Montale's own preferences regarding some passages of his poems<sup>478</sup>. La Ferla also signals that, approaching the publication of *Le occasioni* (1939), the role of Bazlen as “first reader” and critic of Montale's poems intensified<sup>479</sup>.

The last largely documented instance of an important – and in this case also constant – involvement of Bazlen with the work of a prominent Italian writer, is the one concerning Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, with whom, as Daniela Picamus writes in his monograph dedicated to the novelist, Bazlen shared a long-life and intimate friendship, based on “mutual appreciation”, and started from the sharing of the same

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<sup>475</sup> See Montale's notes in *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>476</sup> See the excerpts of Montale's letters of May 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> 1939 in La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 45-46.

<sup>477</sup> See the letter of May 11<sup>th</sup> 1939, in *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>478</sup> See *ibid.* From a letter of May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1939, we learn that Bazlen objected that the later removed variant “bizzarri” tasted like “polenta” (“Caro Bobi, *Bizzarri* come pezzo di polenta *non* lo sento”). In this regard see also Rebay (“Montale, Clizia e l'America”, 193, note 16), who, thanks to the consultation of an early draft of the poem sent to Gianfranco Contini, informs that “bizzarri” occupied the spot that in the definitive version of the poem would have been assigned to “mobili” (line 7).

<sup>479</sup> The letters regarding “Palio” and “Mottetti” (especially in the case of the latter) seem in fact to testify of the crucial role covered by Bazlen in the revision of the poems (see La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 47). See Montale's letter of May 31<sup>st</sup> 1939 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 47, note 132): “Caro Bobi, ti mando i 'Mottetti' [...]. Se nel frattempo mi venisse fatto ancora un Mottetto o due chiederei a te consigli circa il punto d'intersezione. [...] Dei Mottetti non darmi giudizi dei dettagli altrimenti brucio tutto”.



Triestine background<sup>480</sup>. Picamus, thanks to an in-depth archival research, has confirmed the crucial role covered by Bazlen within the writer's production: “Silent advisor and first reader of all his works, he continuously intervened to correct, to signal the strengths and weaknesses of the novels, to suggest alternative solutions”<sup>481</sup>.

An idea of the weight that Bazlen's opinions wielded towards the novelist can be inferred by his notes on the manuscript of *L'onda dell'incrociatore*<sup>482</sup>. In a letter in which he scrupulously identifies what according to him are the shortcomings of the novel, Bazlen finally advises his friend: “it seems to me that this is the least convincing thing you have written so far [...]. if you want to publish this work, i believe you have to rewrite it”<sup>483</sup>. After receiving the letter, Quarantotti Gambini, asked back the manuscript already sent to Einaudi<sup>484</sup> (in spite of the enthusiastic appreciation of Giulio Einaudi himself<sup>485</sup>), and was even tempted to throw away the work, but was dissuaded from doing that by Bazlen, who promised to help him (“it is not about throwing away the work, absolutely, you have only to revise it. it has all flaws of a first draft [...], but you can turn it into something beautiful. i will read it again, and i will mark the passages in which the dialogues are stiff, as you asked me”<sup>486</sup>). Subsequently Bazlen reread the novel, sent to

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<sup>480</sup> Daniela Picamus, *Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini. Lo scrittore e i suoi editori* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2012), 11.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1947.

<sup>483</sup> Bazlen to Quarantotti Gambini, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1943, qtd. in Picamus, *Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini*, 45: “mi sembra la cosa meno felice che tu abbia scritto finora [...]. è un lavoro che, a mia impressione, se vuoi pubblicarlo, va rifatto”.

<sup>484</sup> See *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>485</sup> See Giulio Einaudi's letter of May 24<sup>th</sup> 1943 to Quarantotti Gambini, qtd. in *ibid.*, 47: “Il Suo romanzo è bellissimo, certo la cosa migliore che ha fatto sinora, e io sono lieto e orgoglioso di pubblicarlo nei 'Narratori'”.

<sup>486</sup> Bazlen to Quarantotti Gambini, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1943, qtd. in *ibid.*, 46: “non si tratta a nessun costo di buttar via il lavoro, unicamente di rielaborarlo. ha tutti i difetti di una prima stesura [...], ma se ne può fare una cosa bellissima. lo rileggerò, e ti segnerò tutti i punti del dialogo che a mia impressione sono

Quarantotti Gambini more precise notes<sup>487</sup> and new words of encouragement (“i am telling you again that it is not only 'savable', but that it potentially is a beautiful work”<sup>488</sup>), and kept writing him about the book during the long process of rewriting and revision, which ended in July 1946, after the letter in which Bazlen declared: “i think it is finally fine. [...] i believe you can absolutely send it to einaudi, as it is. [...] i really liked the novel” – while though also suggesting (“just to be certain”, and advancing as a reason for that his own “pathologic pedantry”) of checking again some parts of the novel<sup>489</sup>.

If in the case of Montale we possess only the poet's letters, and thus Bazlen's notes and suggestions are only partially inferable (and, with the exception of few cases, more in their weight than in their specificity), in the case of Quarantotti Gambini we can assess more precisely the nature and specificity of Bazlen's interventions. His notes show that, besides general observations on structure, organicity, and balance, he often gave his opinion on specific episodes and passages, lexical points, and characters' characterization. If his interventions mostly highlight the limits of particular aspects rather than proposing alternatives, there are times in which he offers detailed suggestions on the calibration of the dialogues, on the modifications that certain episodes needed, or on particular lexical variants<sup>490</sup>. Besides *L'onda dell'incrociatore*, Bazlen reserved similar attention to other

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legnosi, come lo desideri”.

<sup>487</sup> See the letter of May 27<sup>th</sup> 1943, qtd. in *ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>488</sup> Bazlen to Quarantotti Gambini, May 27<sup>th</sup> 1943, qtd. in *ibid.*, 46: “ti ripeto ancora che non soltanto si tratta di una cosa 'salvabile', ma d'una cosa potenzialmente molto bella”.

<sup>489</sup> Bazlen to Quarantotti Gambini, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1946, qtd. in *ibid.*, 50-51: “mi pare vada bene, definitivamente. [...] a parer mio, puoi mandarlo senz'altro, così com'è, ad einaudi. [...] come romanzo, m'è piaciuto moltissimo”.

<sup>490</sup> As an example of the range of Bazlen's notes, see the already mentioned letter to Quarantotti Gambini of May 27<sup>th</sup> 1943, qtd. in *ibid.*, 46-47.

works by Quarantotti Gambini: for *Primavera a Trieste*<sup>491</sup>, *La calda vita*<sup>492</sup>, “Le saline”<sup>493</sup>, and for the poems of *Racconto d'amore*<sup>494</sup>, Bazlen kept in fact representing for the Triestine writer a constant and most valued interlocutor<sup>495</sup> – and, as in the case of Montale, an extremely direct and candid one<sup>496</sup>.

### 1.3. Secret Literary History

In his already mentioned article on Bazlen, Calvino suggests that “Italian cultural history of our century should be rewritten in consideration of the influence wielded by people who always kept behind the scenes”<sup>497</sup>. Recognizing Bazlen's contribution to the poems of *Le occasioni*, and the fact that the notes to the critical edition of the collection so importantly draw from Bazlen and Montale's correspondence, Calvino also points out: “this fact also makes you think: that these lines which mark the peak of dedication to the evocative power of verbal music, had as first reader and critic this man for which the only criterion of value was always the inner truth beyond the word”<sup>498</sup>. The great language sensitivity suggested by Bazlen's inferable interventions and the value that Montale recognized to them, contributes indeed to add an aura of paradoxicalness to his

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<sup>491</sup> Milano: Mondadori, 1951.

<sup>492</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1958.

<sup>493</sup> The short story was featured in *I giochi di Norma*, Torino: Einaudi, 1964.

<sup>494</sup> Milano: Mondadori, 1965.

<sup>495</sup> Regarding Bazlen notes and suggestions on the mentioned works, see Picamus, *Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini*, 58-60, 68-69, 70-71, 199-200.

<sup>496</sup> The deep trust and familiarity between Quarantotti Gambini and Bazlen is testified by the always encouraging but also extremely direct tone of Bazlen's notes. In this regard, see for instance Bazlen's letter to Quarantotti Gambini of May 27<sup>th</sup> 1943 (qtd. in *ibid*, 46): “mi sono permesso, e scusami, di far dei segni rossi sul manoscritto, durante la lettura – ma tirate le somme vivo in condizioni piuttosto primitive, e non avevo un tavolo sufficientemente grande per permettermi da tener un foglio per gli appunti vicino a me”.

<sup>497</sup> Calvino, “La psiche e la pancia”.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid*.

intellectual experience. On the one hand, they allow to interpret Bazlen's remonstrances to write in Italian (of “not being able to write in Italian”) as at least in part specious (and this is confirmed by the reading of his letters, which clearly show that, if certainly not a stylist, Bazlen was capable of fine and sharp writing). On the other, they reveal how his high and widely recognized language sensitivity and sense of literature could not – for deliberate choice or inclination – display in the creative act. Bazlen used his competences and his critical insight not to create a work or engage in literary criticism, but rather to encourage and foster others' creations, and not within a professional context, but rather through a often hidden involvement with his closest writer-friends.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, it is integral part of Bazlen's legend that this man – who was so close to many pivotal literary figures of his time, so highly esteemed for his critical taste, and so well connected with publishing houses, writers, intellectuals, and, more generally, with the cultural industry – always refused the limelight, and (with few exceptions) always avoided the direct responsibility of the realization of cultural projects. Extremely incisive intellectual catalyst and cultural operator, he interpreted these roles mainly as an intermediary between artists or works and the institutions or figures which could allow them more visibility. Among the above-mentioned cases, the one concerning Svevo is in this regard the most self-evident, but we can also mention the role he covered as intermediary between Montale and Leifhelm for the German translations of “Arsenio”, “Notizie dall'Amiata”, and “Mediterraneo” (for the translation of which, as inferable by Montale's letters, Bazlen had also to a certain extent

to contribute)<sup>499</sup>. Quarantotti Gambini as well deeply trusted him also in non strictly literary issues, for instance following his suggestion to move from Einaudi to Mondadori for the publication of *Primavera a Trieste*<sup>500</sup>, or entrusting him in 1950 the negotiations of the rights of *L'onda dell'incrociatore* for its film adaptation (in which, though, he would have not succeeded)<sup>501</sup>; furthermore, in connection with the foreign editions of Quarantotti Gambini works, Picamus suggests that Bazlen acted for the writer as an actual literary agent<sup>502</sup>.

So prodigal within his personal relationship, Bazlen nevertheless always displayed great reticence when asked to collaborate directly, and with his own name, to any cultural project. Even his collaboration with *Solaria*, besides the realization of the special issue dedicated to Svevo and in spite of Carocci's efforts, bore no other fruit. Carocci in fact kept trying to involve him within the review, which, for its editorial line, could have found in the Triestine intellectual an ideal collaborator. Within the project of a series of special issues dedicated to foreign contemporary literatures (which eventually was not realized), in 1932 Carocci offered to Bazlen the direction of the number dedicated to German literature:

Dear Bazlen, [...] I would like [...] to ask you a favor, please don't refuse

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<sup>499</sup> La Ferla (*Diritto al silenzio*, 42, note 114) and Rebay (“I diàspori”, 49, note 16) conjectures that these translations were not actually published, but Ida Campeggiani informs us that the translation of “Mediterraneo” was promptly published in the German review *Das Innere Reich* in May 1939, and that the translations of “Arsenio” and “Notizie dall’Amiata”, although not published in review as initially planned, were included in Hans Leifhelm posthumous *Sämtliche Gedichte* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1955) (see Ida Campeggiani, “Montale e la letteratura tedesca di Leone Traverso”, *Studi novecenteschi. Rivista di storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea* 27.80 [2010]: 301-302 and 315, note 6). Regarding Bazlen's contribution to the translation of the poems, see Montale's letter to Leone Traverso of August 17<sup>th</sup> 1939, qtd. in *ibid.*, 309: “Hans e Bobi stanno ora traducendo per Corona Arsenio e Notizie dall’Amiata”.

<sup>500</sup> See Picamus, *Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini*, 58.

<sup>501</sup> See *ibid.*, 72-74.

<sup>502</sup> See *ibid.*, 60.

it. In 1932 I would like to dedicate some special issues of *Solaria* to different contemporary foreign literatures. It goes without saying that these special issues should have a tendentious character, just as *Solaria* is tendentious in comparison with Italian literature. For the German literature issue I have thought of you. Do not tell me you have no time. Since the issue will feature only few authors, the effort of planning it should not be excessive. [...] Furthermore, I cannot ask Peterich or Tecchi, with whom we would inevitably end up with the usual Man [sic], or Wassermann, or Doblin [sic], etc. etc. And it would be thus perfectly pointless to put together the issue. Can I count on you? I would really appreciate it.<sup>503</sup>

As we learn from a letter to Carocci sent in October of the same year, Bazlen considered the work (“German number: [...] as soon as I will have time, I will write you a long theoretical letter, and I am sure we will come to an agreement”<sup>504</sup>), and assigned some translations<sup>505</sup>; at the same time, he displayed some perplexities about the possibility of such a project<sup>506</sup>, and finally silently backed off from it. Giorgio Marchi however had already warned Carocci on May 1932: “Dear Alberto, you better give up on your German issue, for Bazlen is wavering. I kept an eye on him and I pushed him as much as I could, but I think it won't work. He seems extremely reluctant to put something down in black

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<sup>503</sup> Carocci to Bazlen, January 4<sup>th</sup> 1932, in Manacorda, *Lettere a Solaria*, 352: “Carissimo Bazlen, [...] volevo [...] chiederLe un piacere, non me lo rifiuti. Nel corso del 1932 vorrei dedicare alcuni numeri unici di *Solaria* alle varie letterature straniere contemporanee. Inutile dirLe che questi numeri unici dovrebbero avere un carattere tendenzioso, nel senso come è tendenziosa *Solaria* rispetto alla letteratura italiana. [...] Per fare un numero di letteratura tedesca avrei pensato a Lei. Non mi dica che non ha tempo. Dato che il numero dovrebbe contenere pochi nomi, la fatica di organizzarlo non dovrebbe essere eccessiva. [...] D'altra parte non potrei rivolgermi a Peterich o a Tecchi, con i quali si cascherebbe inevitabilmente sui soliti Man [sic], o Wassermann, o Doblin [sic], etc. etc. Nel qual caso sarebbe perfettamente inutile fare il numero. Posso contare su di lei? Ci terrei moltissimo”. Carocci reiterated his request in a letter of February 18<sup>th</sup> 1932 (in *ibid.*, 359).

<sup>504</sup> Bazlen to Carocci, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1932, in *ibid.*, 385: “*Numero tedesco*: [...] appena avrò più tempo, le scriverò una lunga lettera teorica, e vedrà che ci metteremo d'accordo”.

<sup>505</sup> See *ibid.*: “Ho fatto fare da Marchi, e da altri, parecchi tentativi di traduzione di scrittori tedeschi moderni. Per il momento quasi unicamente fallimenti”.

<sup>506</sup> Besides the already mentioned difficulties concerning the translations, see also Giorgio Marchi's letter to Carocci of January 29<sup>th</sup> 1932, in *ibid.* 355-356: “Caro Alberto, ti scrivo per conto di Bazlen [...]. Poi dice che: scritti panoramici nulla, essendo per definizione scrittori mancati; ma ti comporrebbe un numero con cinque fra prosatori e poeti [...] non *rappresentativi*, essendo ciò impossibile dato il carattere della letteratura tedesca [...], bensì scelti così, casualmente”.

and white”<sup>507</sup>.

As Gillo Dorfles writes, Bazlen has been destined to go down in history not as a sublime author, but as a “Great Intellectual”, as a catalyst of other's work, as a pollinator of literary personalities “maybe intellectually far inferior” to him, but provided with the quality that he lacked: “the direct and instinctive productive quality, not subjected to cerebral lucubrations, not based on critical and philosophical speculations, but resolutely bursting out of their souls as an unrestrainable vital drive”<sup>508</sup>. In the previous pages, through a brief outline of Bazlen's most documented collaborations, we have tried to isolate some of the characteristics of his activity. The most striking one is what we have described as a resistance to the realization or finalization of his own projects – either for his exigent parameters, for the indolence that at times seems to have accompanied him in the projects he did not feel with particular urgency, or for his anti-professional and anti-intellectual interpretation of his cultural work.

A second constitutional characteristic, intimately connected to the first one, is that Bazlen's intellectual activity (being his editorial one or his work as consultant or editor) was mostly practiced with or for people to different extents close to him, and often within an actual framework of friendship. The nature of the thirty-year-long collaboration with Foà and the tenor of the vast and rich correspondence exchanged with him and Erich Linder eloquently show how the dimensions of intellectual work and of personal relationships were for Bazlen tightly correlated, and often (because of the way he

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<sup>507</sup> Marchi to Carocci, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1932, in *ibid.*, 374: “Caro Alberto, dispera del tuo numero tedesco perché Bazlen vedo che stiracchia. Io gli sono stato dietro e l’ho spinto più che potevo ma mi pare che non vada. Deve avere una riluttanza grandissima per buttar giù nero su bianco”.

<sup>508</sup> Dorfles, “Quando l’intellettuale”.

interpreted his activity) indistinguishable. Similar observations can be made in regard to his collaborations with Montale and Quarantotti Gambini, which allow us to notice another characteristic that contributed to the singularity and mythicization of his figure: the fact that his interventions for a long time remained secret (or maybe, as revealed by the legend of the “secret editor”, were known only by his closest entourage), and were discovered only years later through the study of his correspondence. We have also seen that, such as in the case of Debenedetti and Sbarbaro, his opinion was highly regarded by many coeval writers and intellectuals. Given these premises, one might wonder if, and in case how, he might have contributed to the works of other writers, but with the exception of few cases, there is no documentation of his possible role as editor or reader of the other many writers and intellectuals he was associated with. In many cases in fact we find ourselves in front of vague attestations of his influence and of his fundamental pedagogical work (which sound almost paradoxical, considering his professed anti-pedagogical positions, so expressed in an aphorism: “Do not teach anything to people: they might be able to learn”<sup>509</sup>).

Amelia Rosselli, for instance, reviewing in 1969 Bazlen's recently published editorial letters, argued that their tone reminded the one he used with his friends, “to whom he was at times a precious guide of conscience – though without posing as such, nor pretending to do it”<sup>510</sup>. Rosselli continues: “Many were the youths that today are adults also thanks to Bazlen who recollects the intellectual fights they had in their conversations with him, and of how, in a completely positive sense, he guided and

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<sup>509</sup> *Scritti*, 231: “Non insegnare nulla alla gente: sono capaci di imparare”.

<sup>510</sup> Amelia Rosselli, “Scrittore di nascosto”, *L'Unità*, April 2, 1969, 8.



supported their too solitary intelligences, with an absolutely exceptional dedication”<sup>511</sup>. Rosselli's assertion is based on her own experience with Bazlen, who influenced her both artistically and personally. Besides the already mentioned case of “Le Chinois à Rome”, Montali suggests that during her frequentation of Bazlen Rosselli probably transcribed some of Bazlen's notes, from which she subsequently drew some of the symbols that constitute a fundamental part of her entire poetic work<sup>512</sup>. On the personal level, Rosselli recalls that Bazlen's influence was crucial for her very possibility of writing: “Bobi Bazlen, who was a friend of mine, told me: 'You first of all need to solve your personal problems, then write'. He was right”<sup>513</sup>.

If Rosselli recognized in Bazlen “a guide and a point of reference, especially when she came to the decision of publishing”<sup>514</sup>, Foà so recalls his first meetings with him and their long and memorable literary discussions: “one can imagine what happened within me during those walks: it was as if a new continent revealed itself to me little by little”<sup>515</sup>. Lucia Drudi Demby recalls Bazlen's help and assistance when she decided to become a professional translator<sup>516</sup>. Critic and academician Walter Pedullà confesses: “Thanks to him I found myself looking at objects in a different way – both the artificial and the real ones. I understood how many real objects were artificial [*finti*], and how many artificial objects were real, or rather: true [*veri*]”<sup>517</sup>. We have already mentioned the case of Antonio Pizzuto, but also Stelio Mattioni admits Bazlen's “considerable influence

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> See Montali, “*Le Chinois à Rome*”, 139.

<sup>513</sup> Minore, “Il dolore in una stanza”, 5.

<sup>514</sup> Chiara Carpita, “Amelia Rosselli e il processo di individuazione. Alcuni inediti”, *Allegoria* 55 19.3 (2007): 155.

<sup>515</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 12.

<sup>516</sup> See Grasso, *Tuttilibri*.

<sup>517</sup> Pedullà, *Il Novecento segreto*, 141.

on [his] life”<sup>518</sup>, and declares of owing to him the opportunity of entering “the doors of the published fiction”<sup>519</sup>. Dorfles as well recollects that he owed to Bazlen the contacts that allowed him to publish his first writings<sup>520</sup>, and writer and theologian Sergio Quinzio recognizes in Bazlen (“at the time the greatest intellectual talent-scout in Italy”<sup>521</sup>) his own discoverer<sup>522</sup>. Elémire Zolla claims: “The best men of letters used to listen to him, with a humility which did them credit – poor things”<sup>523</sup>.

In spite of the general recognition of the incisiveness and compass of his influence, an exhaustive reconstruction of Bazlen's activity in connection with the works of other coeval writers is at the moment not feasible. If the rewriting of twentieth-century Italian cultural history centered on its hidden protagonists advocated by Calvino is in the case of Bazlen not possible, from the many accounts we nevertheless draw an idea of the weight of his presence within four decades of Italian literary culture. As Damiani writes:

guided by superlative taste and nerves, [Bazlen] invented [...] an attitude towards literature and a whole way of being that had no comparison in the Italy of back then. [...] He put into motion – hardly doing anything and leaving only few inevitable traces – an entire culture which finally revealed itself as a gold-bearing vein of Italian twentieth-century literature<sup>524</sup>.

This is particularly evident in his editorial activity, the part of his work that arguably had the greatest impact on Italian culture, or at least in which his legacy displays itself most evidently. As Damiani argues, Bazlen in fact found the “allies of his predispositions”

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<sup>518</sup> Mattioni in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 55.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>520</sup> See Dorfles, *Lacerti della memoria*, 16-17.

<sup>521</sup> Quinzio's account is reported in Michele Dzieduszycki, *Pagine sparse. Fatti e figure di fine secolo* (Empoli: Ibiskos Editrice Risolo, 2007), 118.

<sup>522</sup> See Gabriella Caramore, “Una conversazione con Sergio Quinzio”, *Bailamme. Rivista di spiritualità e politica* 20 (1996): 132.

<sup>523</sup> Zolla, “L'arcaico dottor Ernst Bernhard”.

<sup>524</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 73

exactly in the publishers, “for in their hands was now the key of literature itself”<sup>525</sup>.

## 2. The Publishing Work

### 2.1. Frassinelli, NEI, ALI, Astrolabio, Guanda, Bompiani, and Bocca

Bazlen's great reluctance “to put something down in black and white” seemed for once to be overcome when, in 1941, he became Adriano Olivetti's “first and fundamental advisor”<sup>526</sup> for the creation of Nuove Edizioni Ivrea (from now on: NEI), which, according to Foà, planned to publish “things that were, for the great part, [his] discoveries”<sup>527</sup>. “It was a magnificent project”, Foà recalls: “a publishing house that, after the fall of Fascism, would have brought to Italians not only the works ostracized by Fascism, but also the ones neglected or decidedly opposed by the cultural context of our Country”: psychoanalysis, religious studies, foreign literary vanguards, the great foreign writers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century still ignored in Italy, anthropology, studies on ancient civilizations, theoretical works of philosophy, economics, and politics<sup>528</sup>. Bazlen at that time already acted as a consultant for some publishers, but his ideas were often feared by them because of their “untimeliness”<sup>529</sup>.

The consideration that already in the Thirties Bazlen enjoyed as a connoisseur of

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>526</sup> Foà in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 132.

<sup>527</sup> We quote Foà's words from an interview with Domenico Porzio held in Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori (Collection: Porzio, Domenico, audio section, sine data). From now we will refer to this document as: Foà and Porzio, Interview.

<sup>528</sup> Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 13-14.

<sup>529</sup> See Foà and Porzio, Interview.

foreign literatures (thanks also to his perfect proficiency in German, English, and French), is testified by his collaboration, starting from 1937, with Frassinelli, the Milanese publishing house which in those years, availing itself of collaborators such as Cesare Pavese and Leone Ginzburg, started “Biblioteca Europea”, a collection devoted to the publication of contemporary foreign works. Given the lack of documentation, Valeria Riboli argues that only conjectures are possible on the nature of Bazlen's collaboration with Frassinelli; among them, the likely hypothesis of his fundamental role in connection with the 1935 publication of Anita Rho's translation of Franz Kafka's short stories collected in *Il messaggio dell'imperatore*<sup>530</sup> (which though took place before the beginning of Bazlen's stable collaboration with Frassinelli, and which would be primarily ascribable to his friendship with the editorial director of the publishing house Franco Antonicelli)<sup>531</sup>. Publisher Vanni Scheiwiller in fact suggests that Kafka was indicated to Antonicelli by Bazlen<sup>532</sup>, and his account seems to reinforce the supposition (which is claimed as a fact by many of Bazlen's acquaintances<sup>533</sup>) that the Czech writer was for the

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<sup>530</sup> Torino: Frassinelli, 1935. The title of the volume is taken from one of Kafka's short stories included in the book, “Eine kaiserliche Botschaft”.

<sup>531</sup> See Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 55-56.

<sup>532</sup> “Un altro grosso avvenimento, ma tutta la collana è straordinaria, sono il n. 7 e il n. 8, ben due titoli di Franz Kafka: *Il Processo* [1933] [...] e *Il messaggio dell'imperatore*, nella traduzione di Anita Rho, che è del '35. Anche qui, l'indicazione di Kafka è probabilmente venuta a Antonicelli attraverso quel raddomantico scopritore di ingegni che fu Bobi Bazlen, il quale [...] avrà dato una certa segnalazione al suo amico editore e tipografo” (Vanni Scheiwiller, “Un editore ideale”, in *Franco Antonicelli: dell'impegno culturale*”, ed. Angelo Stella, Pavia: Università degli Studi di Pavia, Centro di ricerca sulla tradizione manoscritta di Autori moderni e contemporanei, 1996, 48; qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 56).

<sup>533</sup> Among them, see Stuparich: “certamente Kafka fu una scoperta di Bobi per l'Italia” (*Trieste nei miei ricordi*, 18); Sergio Solmi: “è stato lui [Bazlen] il vero introduttore in Italia, di scrittori come Kafka, Svevo ecc.” (letter to Antonio Pizzuto of August 28<sup>th</sup> 1958, quoted in “Notizia”, in Pizzuto, *Signorina Rosina*, 127); Montale, as we have seen, also recollects of having been introduced to Kafka's work by Bazlen; Frandini (*Il teatro della memoria*, 46) argues that Bazlen used to talk to Giacomo Debenedetti of authors “yet to be discovered such as Kafka”. Bazlen's early familiarity and predilection for the Czech writer is also testified by a letter to Gerti Frankl Tolazzi of June 13<sup>th</sup> 1929: “Chieda al Suo libraio giovane di tentare di procurarmi le OSSERVAZIONI di Kafka!!!!!!”; and again, at the end of the same

Italian publishing world a discovery by Bazlen (in this regard, it is also significant that the first Italian translator of Kafka was his friend Giuseppe Menasse, whom, as we discover from a 1926 letter to Montale, he used to vouch for as translator and collaborator<sup>534</sup>). If the scope of Bazlen's collaboration with Frassinelli is difficult to estimate, it is however safe to presume that he had to be mainly employed as consultant for foreign literatures. It is in fact in this capacity that Foà met Bazlen at Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale, while the latter was searching for foreign novels for Frassinelli<sup>535</sup>.

As for NEI, the documentation and the accounts are more abundant. For the new publishing house, Olivetti (who was “inclined both to recruiting on an impulse and to think big”<sup>536</sup>) assembled an “heterogeneous gang”<sup>537</sup> which, besides Bazlen, included Foà as coordinator of the project, and, among the others, Erich Linder, Giorgio Fuà, Erika Rosenthal, Cesare Musatti, Carla Rapuzzi, Ada Della Torre, Leone Traverso, Mirto Doriguzzi, and Umberto Campagnolo; among the external collaborators of NEI we also find Alberto Carocci, Ernesto Buonaiuti, Leonardo Sinisgalli, and Hermann Keyserling<sup>538</sup>. “The editorial planning of Nuove Edizioni Ivrea [was] assigned mainly to

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letter: “Forse può mandare qualcuno da tutti gli antiquari di Graz, forse si trovano ancora le OSSERVAZIONI di Kafka” (Fischer, “Il viaggio di Gerti”, 9).

<sup>534</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Montale of July 4<sup>th</sup> 1926, in *Lettere a Montale*, 372: “Un mio amico, milionario, soldato a Torino, comprensivo e complesso, avendo *urgente* bisogno di soldi, mi chiede 'qualche lettera di presentazione per qualche persona che direttamente o indirettamente possa affidargli del lavoro di traduzione, riduzione o altro lavoro manuale di letteratura'. Sa bene il tedesco, scrive un italiano purissimo. Mandami una lettera per la casa editrice 'Baretti', ev. per altre. Si chiama *Giuseppe Menasse*”. Menasse's translation of excerpts from “Ein Landarzt” (“Un medico di campagna”) was published on August 25<sup>th</sup> 1928 in *Il Convegno*.

<sup>535</sup> See Foà's account in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 130.

<sup>536</sup> Dario Biagi, *Il dio di carta. Vita di Erich Linder* (Roma: Avagliano Editore, 2007), 42.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> See Valerio Ochetto, *Adriano Olivetti. La biografia* (Milano: Mondadori 1985), 104-105.

Bazlen<sup>539</sup>, who, as Dario Biagi maintains, was appointed with the ambitious task of “widening the narrow horizons imposed by fascist provincialism, to embrace 'a total culture in an ecumenical perspective’<sup>540</sup>. Foà recollects: “his activity [...] was astonishing. For the first time in his life he had found in Olivetti a most sensitive ear to his ideas and proposals”<sup>541</sup>.

The “team of Jewish intellectuals led by the Triestine Bazlen”<sup>542</sup> embarked thus in a restless work, which was though interrupted because of the events of 1943, when Olivetti was arrested and, after the armistice, forced to escape to Switzerland. Subsequently, the whole group had to disband. NEI would have at the end published only three books<sup>543</sup>, and its inheritance would have been only partially received by Olivetti's postwar new editorial project. As Musatti recollects: “At the end of the war, for Olivetti the socio-political interests prevailed on the more specifically cultural and scientific ones;

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<sup>539</sup> Beniamino de' Liguori Carino, *Adriano Olivetti e le Edizioni di Comunità (1946-1960)*, Quaderni della Fondazione Adriano Olivetti 57 (Roma: Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2008), 51. With regard to Bazlen's crucial position within the project, see also *ibid.*, 50: “Il primo gruppo di intellettuali e studiosi che si riunisce intorno ad Adriano Olivetti per preparare un programma editoriale si raccoglie intorno alla figura di Roberto (Bobi) Bazlen. [È] Lui, difatti, il primo a cui Adriano si rivolge per illustrargli le sue intenzioni e chiedere aiuto nella realizzazione del suo nuovo progetto”.

<sup>540</sup> Biagi, *Il dio di carta*, 43; the internal quotation is from Ochetto, *Adriano Olivetti*, 108, who, in turn, quotes a letter of April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1942 in which Olivetti describes NEI's mission and program to Hermann Keyserling: “Le Nuove Edizioni Ivrea sono nate con il programma di offrire à l'élite italiana una possibilità di cultura totale in un senso ecumenico. Si tratta di un'impresa complessa alla quale cooperano allo stesso tempo degli uomini di cultura e degli uomini d'azione e dove l'interesse per le cose materiali è intimamente legato alle necessità spirituali. Il programma iniziale sarà costituito da: a) la pubblicazione delle opere complete di Kierkegaard e del Cardinale Newman [...] e alcune tra le più importanti opere di Soloviov. b) La nostra casa si è assicurata i diritti esclusivi per l'Italia di Rudolf Kassner, Leo Frobenius, Ortega y Gasset, Ivanow. Pubblicheremo inoltre una vasta scelta delle lettere di Rilke e il *Byzantinische Christentum* di Ball. Stiamo anche studiando la possibilità di pubblicare Alfred Weber. c) Una collezione di psicologia [...] d) Una collezione artistica di saggi critici sull'architettura contemporanea ed una serie di opere sull'arte. (Woelfflin, Max Dvorak, Worringer, Brandi, Argan, etc.)” (qtd. in de' Liguori Carino, *Adriano Olivetti*, 49).

<sup>541</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 14.

<sup>542</sup> Biagi, *Il dio di carta*, 38.

<sup>543</sup> NEI published in 1943 *Studi e proposte preliminari per il Piano Regolatore della Valle d'Aosta* (edited by Olivetti) and Aldo Ferrabino's *La vocazione umana*, and, in 1945, Olivetti's *L'ordine politico delle Comunità*.

thus, in 1949, the original publishing house was replaced by Edizioni di Comunità, which was more closely tied to his particular political thought”<sup>544</sup>. In the following years, Bazlen's professional relationship with Olivetti weakened. His collaboration with the review *Comunità* seems to testify of Olivetti's lasting high consideration of Bazlen, but his involvement with Edizioni di Comunità would have been marginal, and probably limited to the role of reader and editor<sup>545</sup>. In Bazlen's letters of the late Forties is on the other hand recognizable a clear distance from Olivetti's interests, and also a certain condescending attitude towards his new editorial project<sup>546</sup>.

The work done for NEI did not though go astray. Bazlen alone had put together hundreds of titles, and composed hundreds of cards (according to Foà more than 2000<sup>547</sup>) with notes on works, copyrights, collaborators, and translators<sup>548</sup>. After the war, Foà recalls, these cards, “nobody knows how, volatilize”<sup>549</sup>. Nevertheless, the titles selected for NEI became “legendary in Italian publishing history”<sup>550</sup>, and, after the end of

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<sup>544</sup> Cesare Musatti, “Psicologi in fabbrica”, in Cesare Musatti et al., *Psicologi in fabbrica. La psicologia del lavoro negli stabilimenti Olivetti* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), 4.

<sup>545</sup> In this regard, see Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 99-102.

<sup>546</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1948 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 100): “proprio nelle cose che lo interessano lo posso aiutare molto poco, sia perché, più tempo passa, meno roba [...] decante da segnalare e da pubblicare ci sarà – non credo che possa nascere ancora un'opera letteraria di vera importanza, e quel tanto di positivo che si sta creando e verrà sempre di più creato in Europa, dalla fisica moderna alla psicologia, e di pensiero in genere, è troppo lontano dagli interessi di Adriano”. In the same letter, Bazlen so describes some of the residual books of the NEI fund: “tutti libri che, dopo la seconda guerra mondiale e prima della terza, sono diventati una scoccatura innocente e ben intenzionata, degna di essere pubblicata dalle 'Edizioni di Comunità’”.

<sup>547</sup> See Foà's accounts in *ibid.*, 60, and Biagi, *Il dio di carta*, 44.

<sup>548</sup> See Foà's account as reported in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 60: “Bazlen [...] mi tempestava di foglietti, ognuno dei quali era dedicato o a una nuova proposta di pubblicazione, o a un suo parere su un libro letto, o a una sua richiesta di testi da esaminare o alla notizia di un suo incontro con una persona come possibile nostro futuro autore o possibile traduttore [...]. La sua attività, in quei due anni scarsi che durarono le 'Nuove Edizioni Ivrea', superava ogni immaginazione”. The typewritten document here quoted by Riboli (“maybe the rough copy of an article” [*ibid.*, 56]) is dated 1994, and was exhibited to the scholar by publisher Gianni Antonini.

<sup>549</sup> Biagi, *Il dio di carta*, 44.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

the war, many of the publishers with which Bazlen and Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale collaborated (Rosa e Ballo, Cederna, Astrolabio, Einaudi, Adelphi) would have importantly drawn from “the mythical NEI fund”<sup>551</sup>.

In spite of the “volatilization” of the above mentioned cards, Riboli has been able to convincingly reconstruct NEI's editorial project, and to put together a partial list of the planned publications<sup>552</sup>. The program was divided in two parts: one that mirrored Olivetti's interests (concerning mostly works on “social and political life”), and one that mirrored Bazlen's ones (hence literature and – especially Jungian – psychoanalysis)<sup>553</sup>. Olivetti's part included the collections “Collana filosofia”, “Collana Humana Civilitas”, and “Collana Saggi”<sup>554</sup>. Within the first two collections we do not find titles mentioned by Bazlen in his future editorial proposals, while some of the titles of the third one might be ascribable to him (especially the ones concerning religious studies, anthropology, and psychoanalysis – thus works by Kerényi, Otto, Jung, and Frobenius). Bazlen's part involved a collection of epistolary and biographical writings (“Collana Mondi e

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid. On this topic see also Foà's account in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 14; Riboli (*Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 56-87) also extensively addresses the issue.

<sup>552</sup> After the end of the war the publishing house Rosa e Ballo bought the rights of some of the books planned for NEI. The documentation held in the archive of Rosa e Ballo (Fondazione Mondadori, Milan) contains a letter dated February 9<sup>th</sup> 1946 from the publishing house to Alessandro Pellegrini (who at the time was a collaborator of Olivetti) which includes a list of titles of the Olivetti fund which Rosa e Ballo intended to buy. An even more interesting and complete document is constituted by some typewritten pages (numbered but undated, and, according to Riboli, written in a period following September 1943 but preceding the end of the war) contained in a file named “fondo Olivetti” of the archive of Rosa e Ballo. In this document, arguably compiled by NEI for the potential purchasers, we find lists of titles of some of the works that NEI planned to publish. The mentioned pages contain notes on copyright situations, on the stage of realization of the books, on translators and curators, and information on the collections in which they were to be published and on the collections' curators (see Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 61-63).

<sup>553</sup> See *ibid.*, 64 and 67; Riboli here uses as source the above-mentioned typewritten pages by Foà (see note 548).

<sup>554</sup> The titles of the works planned for the three collections listed in the “fondo Olivetti” file are reported in *ibid.*, 64-67.



destini”<sup>555</sup>) and a literary collection (“Collana Letteraria”<sup>556</sup>). The titles included in the collections (with the privilege granted to the Mittel-European world, and to biographical, autobiographical, and epistolary writings) and the choice of collaborators (among them: Onofri, Montale, Penna, Zucconi, Weiss) clearly reveal the crucial role of the Triestine intellectual in the design of both.

If the documentation analyzed by Riboli reports an arguably very partial list of the publications prepared by NEI, it nevertheless shows that Bazlen's role in the publishing house was not merely the one of consultant. Besides proposing works, making contacts with authors, copyright owners, collaborators, and translators, he was in fact supposed to be in charge of two collections, and the editorial line of NEI itself owed importantly to him. In the following years, and until the birth of Adelphi, Bazlen involvement with the publishing houses with which he collaborated, if incisive and at times fundamental, would have not been as central and structured, nor valorized. He would have in fact been mostly employed as external collaborator, proposing books and collection projects, and mediating between publishers and collaborators. His long and intense relationship with

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<sup>555</sup> See *ibid.*, 71-72: “Collana Mondì e destini / (Scritti autobiografici – la collana era affidata a Roberto Bazlen) / Metternich - *Lettere* (traduzione al Dott. Alessandro Pellegrini) / Rilke - *Lettere dal Muzot* (traduzione prof. M. Doriguzzi e Leone Traverso) / Rilke - *Su Dio* (traduzione: Leone Traverso [...]) / Rilke - *Lettere a una giovane signora* ([...] Traduzione: come sopra) / Rilke - *Lettere a un giovane poeta* (traduzione: come sopra) / Santa Teresa D’Avila - *Autobiografia* (traduzione: Marcori e Weiss) / Vieuchange - *Smara* (traduzione: Fabrizio Onofri) / Goethe, Schiller - *Carteggio* [...] / Naropa Biografia [...] / Romola Nijnski [...] / Waln - *The House Of Exile* (tradotto da Fabrizio Onofri [...]) / Gosse - *Father and Son* [...] / Hudson - *Long Ago and Far Away* (affidata a Eugenio Montale [...]) / Lawrence – *Epistolario*”.

<sup>556</sup> See *ibid.*, 81-82: “Collana Letteraria / (a cura di Roberto Bazlen) / Hopkins - *Poesie* [...] / Hofmannsthal - *Saggi* (oppure Lettera a Lord Chandos ed altri saggi) (traduzione Leone Traverso) / Hofmannsthal - *Andreas* ([...] Traduzione: Gabriella Bemporad). / Rilke - *Elegie duinesi* (traduzione: Leone Traverso). / Claudel - *Presence et prophetie* (traduzione: Sandro Penna). / Mirò - *Figure della passione del signore* [...] / Kierkegaard - *La ripresa* (traduzione: Angela Zucconi). / Rilke - *Sonetti ad Orfeo* [...] / Alain - *Entretiens avec le sculpteur*. [...] / Ball - *Cristianesimo bizantino* [...] / Raby - *Poeti latini del trecento* [...] / Buber - *Storie chassidiche*”.

Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (from now on: ALI) is in this respect emblematic of the nature of his editorial work.

Bazlen's collaboration with the agency founded in 1898 by Augusto Foà started in the late Thirties and, as his correspondence shows, continued until the year of his death. Luciano Foà, who started working with his father in 1933 and later succeeded to him at the guide of the company, recalls that Bazlen, besides turning to ALI in search for books for the publishers with which he collaborated, already in the Thirties used to suggest to him, at the time not too familiar with contemporary Italian literature, Italian authors to publish abroad (writers such as Gadda, Vittorini, Quarantotti Gambini, Landolfi, and Pea)<sup>557</sup>. After the end of the war this collaboration intensified. Bazlen's letters show that he mainly used to propose works, publishers, and collaborators to ALI, and that he often acted as intermediary between the agency and the publishing houses with which he worked. At a certain point he also embarked in the unsuccessful enterprise of mediating between ALI and the film industry<sup>558</sup>. The correspondence with Foà and Linder (who joined ALI in 1947 and subsequently, after Foà moved to Einaudi, replaced him at the guide of the company) also reveals the tenor of this collaboration: the letters between Bazlen on one side, and Foà and Linder on the other, are always informal, often

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<sup>557</sup> See Foà in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 131.

<sup>558</sup> Within the correspondence between Bazlen and ALI, starting from 1947, we find several letters addressing the issue. See for instance Bazlen's letter to Linder of November 12<sup>th</sup> 1953: "Qui, nel cinematografo, c'è una vera e grossa crisi di soggetti. Tutti ne cercano, veramente, anche perché, per fortuna, rubata la bicicletta, rubato il cappotto, morto il commesso viaggiatore, il neorealismo dev'essersi esaurito. Se hai romanzi con buoni soggetti, segnala, potrei incanalarteli". The several attempts in this direction though all failed: already on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1949 Bazlen so expressed his frustration to Foà: "[...] per favore non arrabbiarti tu, che mi sono già arrabbiato io per tutta la famiglia, e paghiamo fino in fondo questa nostra ingenuità di aver voluto aver da fare col mondo del cinematografo – [...] scusami se ti ho messo in questi guai: del resto [...] ho capito che con quel mondo non devo aver nulla a che fare" (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1953 and 1949. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

amused, and never reveal conflicts or impatience; they often address also personal issues, or contains jokes or witticism, and clearly display the great complicity, trust, and generosity which would have always characterized their non merely professional relationship.

Bazlen's activity for the various publishing houses with which he collaborated was often connected with his privileged relationship with ALI. We have for instance little information on Bazlen's collaboration with Guanda (apart from the fact that he suggested and afterwards translated and edited Eckart von Sydow's *Dichtungen der Naturvölker. Religiöse, magische und profane Lyrik*<sup>559</sup>), but we know that he was responsible of introducing the publishing house to ALI<sup>560</sup>. Bazlen's work with Astrolabio was also connected with the activities of ALI, which, after the closure of NEI, continued handling and distributing some books of the Olivetti fund.

Astrolabio and its founder Mario Meschini Ubaldini had the merit, together with Einaudi, of introducing to Italy many pivotal psychoanalytical works. In 1947 Astrolabio started “Psiche e Coscienza” (“Collana di testi e documenti per lo studio della psicologia del profondo”), the collection of psychoanalytical works and psychoanalytical related texts directed by Ernst Bernhard. Bazlen, who introduced Bernhard to Ubaldini in 1945, in the ten years of his collaboration with Astrolabio constantly acted as intermediary between the publisher and Bernhard, and between Astrolabio and ALI. The publishing

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<sup>559</sup> Bazlen's translation, credited to “R.B.”, was published as *Poesia dei popoli primitivi. Lirica religiosa, magica e profana*, selection, introduction and notes by Eckart von Sydow, Parma: Guanda, 1951.

<sup>560</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1948, qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 102: “Guanda è stato a Roma: [...] Vuol fare unicamente libri di poesia ('la fenice'), libri sui musicisti, e libri per bambini. [...]. M'ha, indirettamente, [...] pregato di scriverti io. Fa' come meglio credi”.

house's new collection in fact welcomed some of the books selected or already prepared for NEI, which had planned to publish a vast psychological collection of Jungian orientation. Olivetti's Edizioni di Comunità initially intended to continue NEI's psychological program<sup>561</sup>, but most of the works programmed for it were eventually printed by other publishing houses<sup>562</sup>. We do not know the exact list of books that NEI planned to publish, but among them there certainly were many, if not all, of Jung's works<sup>563</sup>. Of the Swiss psychoanalyst, Edizioni di Comunità finally only published *Psicologia e religione* (1948). *L'Io e l'inconscio* and *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia* went to Einaudi (and were respectively published in 1947 and 1948). Astrolabio published *Sulla psicologia dell'inconscio* (1947), *Tipi psicologici* (1948) and *La realtà dell'anima* (1949), and, with Bazlen's translations, *Psicologia e educazione* (1947) and *Psicologia e alchimia* (1950)<sup>564</sup>.

Astrolabio's publications represented a fundamental moment for the diffusion of psychoanalytical theory in Italy, and in Bernhard and Bazlen's project is clearly

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<sup>561</sup> See Foa's letter to Bazlen of December 8<sup>th</sup> 1946, qtd. in *ibid.*, 89: "Jung nelle NEI: l'ultima parola di Adriano è che li vuole fare tutti lui".

<sup>562</sup> In this regard, see Cesare Musatti ("Psicologi in fabbrica", 4), who recollects that after the disbandment of NEI: "il programma delle pubblicazioni psicologiche fu abbandonato e vennero ceduti ad altri editori italiani i diritti di pubblicazione già acquistati e le stesse traduzioni allora portate a termine. In tal modo una certa parte della produzione psicologica straniera, che le varie case editrici italiane hanno stampato in questi trenta anni, risale proprio al blocco di opere messe a suo tempo insieme da Olivetti".

<sup>563</sup> See Olivetti's letter to Keyserling of April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1942 (in De' Liguori Carino, *Adriano Olivetti e le Edizioni di Comunità*, 49), in which Olivetti addresses the inclusion of a psychological collection within the initial program of NEI: "Una collezione di psicologia. Come voi forse saprete, molto poco è stato fatto in Italia in questo campo e le stesse opere fondamentali di psicanalisi non si possono trovare tradotte in italiano. Il primo libro di questa collezione sarà 'Psychologische Typen' di Jung. In seguito, pubblicheremo degli altri testi di Jung, di Kretschmer, di Heyer, etc.". Carotenuto claims that NEI actually planned to publish Jung's complete works (see *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 133).

<sup>564</sup> In the case of Cesare Musatti's version of Jung's *Psychologische Typen*, we know that the translation was already prepared for NEI (see Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 94); another book we certainly know came from NEI's fund is Lily Abegg's *Ostasien denkt anders. Versuch einer Analyse des west-östlichen Gegensatzes (In Asia si pensa diversamente)*, Roma: Astrolabio 1952), work asked by Bazlen to ALI in a letter of 1947 (see *ibid.*, 94).

recognizable the concern of making available to the public a complete picture of the discipline and of its perspectives. In spite of Bernhard's Jungian orientation and of Bazlen's contempt for Freudian praxis<sup>565</sup>, in both the cultural commitment in fact prevailed over personal predilections and inclinations. Within Astrolabio's collection *Psiche e Coscienza*, besides Jung, we thus find previously unpublished works by Freud (Bazlen himself was the author of the first Italian translations of Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*<sup>566</sup> and *The Interpretation of Dreams*<sup>567</sup>), Harding, Balint, Wickes, Adler, Jaspers, Fenichel, Baudouin. In the same collection, clearly revealing Bazlen's and Bernhard's Jungian orientation, were also published Eastern works and studies such as the translation of Richard Wilhelm's German version of the Chinese *Book of Changes*<sup>568</sup>, Giuseppe Tucci's *Teoria e pratica del mandala* (1950), and works by authors such as Kerényi<sup>569</sup> and de Caussade<sup>570</sup>. Bazlen's letters to ALI testify of his great efforts and of his enthusiasm for Astrolabio's program (*Psicologia e Alchimia* and *I King* are described by him as “the books of the century”, or as “maybe the only two really important books printed in Italy in many years”<sup>571</sup>), but also of the difficult relation with Ubaldini<sup>572</sup>,

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<sup>565</sup> In this regard, see for instance Cesare Musatti, “Preferiva Jung a Freud. Visionario che anticipava il futuro come dimostrò con i calcolatori”, *La Stampa*, May 25, 2016: “Bobi Bazlen aveva avuto un'esperienza psicanalitica negativa e ce l'aveva a morte con i freudiani, come me”. See also Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 124: “Negli anni seguenti Bazlen avrebbe parlato di Freud e di Weiss come il 'buon' Freud e il 'buon' Weiss dando all'aggettivo 'buon' il senso di chi ha molta buona volontà ma oltre certi limiti non può andare”.

<sup>566</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introduzione allo studio della psicoanalisi*, Roma: Astrolabio, 1947.

<sup>567</sup> Sigmund Freud, *L'interpretazione dei sogni*, Roma: Astrolabio, 1948.

<sup>568</sup> *I King*, Roma: Astrolabio, 1950.

<sup>569</sup> *La religione antica*, Roma: Astrolabio, 1951, and *La mitologia dei Greci*, Roma: Astrolabio, 1952.

<sup>570</sup> *L'abbandono alla provvidenza divina*, Roma: Astrolabio, 1951.

<sup>571</sup> See Bazlen's letters to Foà of May 21<sup>st</sup> 1949 (“[...] Condizione supplementare: una copia gratis dei libri del secolo: 'Psicologia e Alchimia' e 'I King'”) and of May 18<sup>th</sup> 1949 (“ora vanno in macchina due libri che sono forse i due soli libri veramente importanti che si stampino in Italia da molti anni, la 'psicologia ed alchimia' e particolarmente l' 'i King'”) (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1949. File: Bazlen,

which would have led to the end of his collaboration with Astrolabio in 1955.

Bazlen was at this point very active in the publishing and cultural world, and extremely well connected. During the war years he had probably already started his collaboration with publisher Valentino Bompiani, who so describes a meeting with him in a note of May 21<sup>st</sup> 1945:

Bobi Bazlen. Ready for a larger, even full collaboration: readings, indications, direction of a collection. He is extraordinary, he has button-memory. One would think that he has read everything. Without ever pausing? I say yes to him, straightaway, but he won't stop with me either; he starts smelling a regular remuneration; he wants a fixed sum for each book, then we will see. What is it that moves and calls him? He seems to contain within himself nothing but culture. But some signs suggest that this is not true: maybe he reads not to think about it. He tosses and turns on the chair, as if he had a tail.<sup>573</sup>

In spite of Bompiani initial enthusiasm, two years later this collaboration was already wearing out (Bazlen writes to Rodocanachi in 1947: “i almost do not read anymore: the reason i had not stopped yet reading was bompiani, but he came to a complete standstill in the things i am more interested in, and the few american novels he sends to me justify

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Roberto).

<sup>572</sup> In this regard, see for instance Bazlen's letter to Foà of December 11<sup>th</sup> 1948: “meschini [Mario Meschini Ubaldini] ha messo il mio nome su una traduzione del sogno [*L'interpretazione dei sogni*] [...] dopo avermi portato via la prima stesura, dettata, della traduzione, senza darmi il tempo di rivederla, e facendomi trovare a casa, di notte, 70 o 80 pagine fitte di bozze di stampa, che dovevano ritornare in tipografia la mattina dopo alle 11 [...] – roba da rovinare un traduttore vita natural durante”. In a letter to Foà of May 18<sup>th</sup> 1949 we read further complaints on Ubaldini, who, according to the content of the letter, did not always promptly comply to his financial obligations towards ALI (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1948 and 1949. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>573</sup> Valentino Bompiani, *Vita privata*, 238-239: “Bobi Bazlen. Disposto a una più vasta, anche totale collaborazione: letture, segnalazioni, dirigere una collana. È straordinario, ha la memoria a bottoni. Si direbbe che ha letto tutto. Senza fermarsi? Gli dico di sì, subito, ma non si fermerà neppure con me; comincia col fiutare un compenso fisso; vuole un tanto al libro, poi si vedrà. Cos'è che lo muove e lo chiama? È tutto cultura e si direbbe che non contenga altro dentro di sé. Ma qualche segno avverte che non è vero: forse legge per non pensarci. Si agita sulla sedia come se avesse la coda”.

the fact that i start throwing up half an hour after i have received them”<sup>574</sup>). From other letters to Rodocanachi we gather that at the beginning of the Forties Bazlen was in contact with Leo Longanesi, who at the time worked for Rizzoli<sup>575</sup>. In 1953 Bazlen also started his collaboration with the publishing house Bocca, for which he planned “a sort of insel-bücherei, but very highbrow, eccentric, abnormal”<sup>576</sup>. The project of this collection (compared by Bazlen to the cult “Bücherei” series by German publisher Insel Verlag) would also fail – first because of the falling out, in 1954, between Bocca and ALI<sup>577</sup>, and finally, in 1956, for Bazlen's own disenchantment: “De Marzio [Bocca's representative] doesn't really want to be a publisher, and I surely don't want to be a consultant for a publisher who doesn't want to be a publisher”<sup>578</sup>.

Addressing the unsuccessful outcomes of many of Bazlen's editorial projects, Foà argues: “The truth is that the small and medium publishers, to different extents, had at the time some difficulties, and Bobi's proposals were considered too hazardous”<sup>579</sup>. It is arguably also for this reason that Bazlen, already in 1948, had tried to start a

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<sup>574</sup> Bazlen to Rodocanachi, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1947, qtd. in Marcenaro, *Una amica di Montale*, 192: “non leggo quasi più: la ragione per cui non avevo smesso ancora di leggere era bompiani, ma s'è arenato completamente nelle cose che più mi interessano, ed i pochi romanzi americani che mi manda giustificano che mi metta a vomitare mezz'ora dopo averli ricevuti”.

<sup>575</sup> In a letter of May 8<sup>th</sup> 1940, Bazlen asks Rodocanachi's about ideas on Eighteenth and Nineteenth century English novels for Longanesi, and in another one of May 14<sup>th</sup> 1940 he addresses the issue of some translations proposals for the publisher (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>576</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Rodocanachi of December 10<sup>th</sup> 1953: “sto preparando per bocca una specie di insel-bucherei, ma molto hig-brow, ausgefallen [eccentrica], anormale, però senza 'curiosa' ed evitando tutto il prickling [formicolio] snob a vuoto: volumetti [...] che vanno dal book of tea a firbank, da una conferenza di klee alle lettere dal carcere di tommaso moro, da jarry a un testo zen” (Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>577</sup> In this regard, see Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 211-212.

<sup>578</sup> Bazlen to Linder, August 27<sup>th</sup> 1956, qtd. in *ibid.*, 218: “De Marzio ha poca voglia di fare l'editore, io ancora meno di fare il consulente per un editore che non ha voglia”.

<sup>579</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 15.

collaboration with Einaudi, a major publisher with which his projects could have ideally found more continuity and success, and which, according to the Triestine intellectual, really needed an injection of “fresh air”<sup>580</sup>. “I would be really pleased to have Einaudi's lectureship (if it pays)”, Bazlen writes to Foà in October 1948, “It would be the least bad looking of the many job possibilities that in this moment I am starting to be offered”<sup>581</sup>.

## 2.2. Einaudi

Bazlen's “long and labored relation”<sup>582</sup> with Einaudi started at the end of the forties and lasted until 1962, with Foà (initially through ALI, and then, starting 1951, in the capacity of secretary general of Einaudi) as main interlocutor and intermediary between him and the editorial board of the publishing house. Bazlen never participated to the editorial meeting of the board (the renowned “riunioni del mercoledì”), and intervened in the choices of the publishing house almost exclusively through hundreds of letters and reader's reports sent mostly to Foà (but also to Daniele Ponchiroli, Carlo Fruttero, Bruno Fonzi, Giulio Bollati, and Italo Calvino)<sup>583</sup>. These editorial letters (whose volume substantially increases starting from 1959, when Bazlen's position as consultant was finally formalized) contain synopsis and opinions on works, books and collection

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<sup>580</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of December 11<sup>th</sup> 1948: “[...] ma, naturalmente, molto più di una traduzione mi interesserebbe un lettorato da einaudi, anche perché mi sembra necessario portarci dentro un po' d'aria nuova” (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1948. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

<sup>581</sup> Bazlen to Foà, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1948, qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 107: “avere il lettorato di Einaudi (se paga) è una cosa che mi farebbe molto piacere. Sarebbe la meno peggio delle parecchie possibilità di lavoro che cominciano ad offrirmisi in questo momento”.

<sup>582</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 18.

<sup>583</sup> Bazlen's correspondence with Einaudi (1071 sheets) is preserved in Archivio di Stato di Torino (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).



proposals, suggestions of collaborators, comments and information on the translations and editorships assigned to Bazlen and to his acquaintances. From these letters we moreover occasionally learn of his travels and of his net of acquaintances, which also allowed him access to a vast pool of at times original or rare works (such is for instance the case of his friendship with Boris and Mary de Rachewiltz, which granted him access to Ezra Pound's library<sup>584</sup>).

Bazlen was mainly employed by Einaudi as advisor for foreign literatures, especially German one, but he also presented to Einaudi (at times successfully, as in the case of Stelio Mattioni's *Il sosia*<sup>585</sup>) Italian works by some of his friends and acquaintances. He often also suggested to the publishing house collaborators and translators (over the years he sponsored, among the others, Gabriella Bemporad<sup>586</sup>, Lucia Rodocanachi<sup>587</sup>, Margherita Pieracci Harwell<sup>588</sup>, Cristina Campo<sup>589</sup>, Elémire Zolla<sup>590</sup>,

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<sup>584</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of January 10<sup>th</sup> 1960, qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 173, note 269: “ho deciso che entro quest'estate vado da loro, al castello, dove ci sono quattro grandi biblioteche interessanti (per es. tutta la biblioteca di Ezra Pound) e dove pescherò. [...] la Mary R. ha molto altro materiale inedito che sta traducendo, Vi direi di scrivere subito, parlando del vostro progetto di un volume di Nô, e proponendo un accordo”.

<sup>585</sup> Bazlen mentioned for the first time Mattioni to Foà in a letter of October 21<sup>st</sup> 1960 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 154): “è venuto a trovarmi, qualche settimana fa, un non intellettuale triestino, l'ometto Stelio Mattioni, sotto i 40 anni, impiegatino self-made, provincialissimo come non lo si può essere che a Trieste, simpaticissimo (anche alla Ljuba), autore di un volume di versi disprezzatissimo da Stuparich and Co, [...] e mi ha lasciato il suo piuttosto grosso manoscritto, i *Sosia*, 3 lunghe novelle”. After meeting the appreciation of Calvino and Vittorini, *Il sosia* was published by Einaudi in 1962.

<sup>586</sup> See *ibid.*, 168.

<sup>587</sup> See *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>588</sup> Bazlen arguably refers to Pieracci Harwell in a letter to Foà of December 4<sup>th</sup> 1960: “ho sottomano una ragazza che, per sganciarsi da famiglia fascista e sposare un pastore protestante negro, ha bisogno urgente di guadagnare qualche soldo. Kulturell molto a posto. Toscana, non toscaneggiante [...] – ricordati di pescarle qualcosa di 'facile' – in qualche modo bisogna aiutarla” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>589</sup> See Bazlen's letter of December 16<sup>th</sup> 1959: “Vittoria Guerrini [...] ha bisogno di guadagnare regolarmente 10.000 (sic! diecimila) lire mensili. Disposta anche a tradurre, purchè libri brevi, e sotto altro nome. È bravissima, e pignolissima (le traduzioni di W. C. Williams sono perfette – tra le pochissime belle traduzioni poetiche italiane che conosca)” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

Gillo Dorfles<sup>591</sup>, Antonio Pizzuto<sup>592</sup>). Moreover, he translated for Einaudi works by Herbert Marcuse<sup>593</sup>, Jean Rostand<sup>594</sup>, Bertolt Brecht<sup>595</sup>, and Williams Carlos Williams<sup>596</sup> (writer he admired and whose writings he had already translated in 1952 for *Prospettive USA*, review with which he collaborated between 1952 and 1954<sup>597</sup>).

If Bazlen had signed his translations for Astrolabio with his own name, and the one for Guanda as “R.B.”, his translations for Einaudi were signed with the pseudonym “Lorenzo Bassi”. In addition to his notorious desire of anonymousness, Riboli argues that in the case of the translations for Einaudi the use of a pseudonym might be related to the dissatisfaction towards his own work<sup>598</sup>, but we might actually presume that this choice was at times connected also with his desire of distancing himself from the works he translated, as in the case of Marcuse's *Eros e civiltà*, in relation to which he writes to Foà: “You come up with whatever name for the translator. I didn't come up with it, and I don't want to be involved with the choice of the pseudonym; in part because I find the book

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<sup>590</sup> In the above-mentioned letter to Foà of December 16<sup>th</sup> 1959 to Foà, Bazlen expresses his opinion on Zolla: “Elemire Zolla: Giulio Einaudi mi aveva chiesto se non era il caso di inventargli qualcosa [...]. Mi pareva di no: Ma ora gli ho dato un'occhiata, e mi pare di sì. Non so se accetterà, ma me la sentirei di proporgli la lettura di pochi libri per pochi soldi”.

<sup>591</sup> So we learn from a letter to Foà of June 8<sup>th</sup> 1959 (in Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>592</sup> So we learn from a letter to Foà of February 4<sup>th</sup> 1959 (in Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>593</sup> *Eros e civiltà*, Torino, Einaudi, 1964.

<sup>594</sup> *L'uomo artificiale*, Torino: Einaudi, 1959.

<sup>595</sup> *Gli affari del signor Giulio Cesare e Storie da calendario*, Torino: Einaudi, 1959 (translated by Bazlen, Paolo Corazza, and Franco Fortini).

<sup>596</sup> *I racconti del dottor Williams*, Torino: Einaudi, 1963.

<sup>597</sup> For *Prospettive U.S.A.* (published by Sansoni), Bazlen translated Williams Carlos Williams' “La distruzione di Tenochtitlán” and “Commedia morta e sepolta” (1.1, Autumn 1952, 30-41 and 52-61). For the review Bazlen also translated: Oscar Handlin, “Democrazia e potere: l'immigrato nella vita politica americana” (1.1, Autumn 1952, 81-83); Hugh Harrison, “Case americane. Architettura moderna” (2.5, Autumn 1953, 14-36); Kenneth Burke, “Antonio si pronuncia sul dramma” (2.5, Autumn 1953, 76-90); Manny Farber, “Il cinema non è più il cinema” (2.2, Winter 1953, 175-194); William Troy, “Virginia Woolf e il romanzo della sensibilità. Tre commenti 1932, 1937, 1952. Sviluppi di una posizione critica nel corso di vent'anni” (3.6, Winter 1954, 70-94).

<sup>598</sup> See Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 4.

dangerous [...], and in part because there is an attack against Jung that Jung (who deserves many attacks) really does not deserve”<sup>599</sup>. Other times, as in the case of Brecht's *Gli affari del signor Giulio Cesare e Storie da calendario*, the desire not use his own name seems to reveal some condescension for the editorial choices of the publishing house: “translator's name for Brecht: whatever you want, but not mine. It seems to me that the translators of Brecht should be called Lorenzo. I don't know about the surname: as banal as possible”<sup>600</sup>.

With regard to Bazlen's editorial proposals, Foà recollects that, during the almost fifteen years of his collaboration with Einaudi, he managed to have published only “three or four books”<sup>601</sup>. This seems tough to be a rather conservative estimation. Besides works such as Robert Musil's *L'uomo senza qualità* (1957) and *I turbamenti del giovane Törless* (1959), and Hermann Broch's *I sonnambuli* (1960), by him directly suggested<sup>602</sup>, other books published by Einaudi seem to be connected to his recommendations. Among them *Popol Vuh. Le antiche storie del Quiché* (1960), *Il sogno della Camera Rossa. Romanzo cinese del secolo XVIII* (1958), Schichirō Fukazawa's *Le canzoni di Narayama* (1961),

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<sup>599</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano Foà, 11 Dec. 1957. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen: “Inventa un qualsiasi nome di traduttore. Non l'ho inventato io, non voglio entrarci nemmeno con la scelta dello pseudonimo: in parte, perché il libro mi sembra pericoloso [...], e in parte perché c'è un attacco contro Jung che Jung (che si merita molti attacchi) proprio non si merita”.

<sup>600</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano Foà, 23 Jan. 1959. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen: “nome traduttore Brecht: quello che vuoi, ma non il mio. Mi pare che i traduttori di Brecht dovrebbero chiamarsi Lorenzo. Come cognome non so: il più banale possibile”.

<sup>601</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 18.

<sup>602</sup> Bazlen addresses Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* in the letters of March 19<sup>th</sup> and May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1951 to Fonzi, and, more in detail, in a letter to Foà of June 12<sup>th</sup> 1951. In the letter to Fonzi of March 19<sup>th</sup>, he also suggests Musil's *The Confusions of Young Törless* and Broch's *The Sleepwalkers*: “Ma intanto, le direi che sarebbe forse il caso di rivedere il primissimo libro [...] di Musil: Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless. [...] E poiché mi avete tirato fuori i romanzi della disgregazione (sic!), non avete pensato mai a [...] Hermann Broch: Die Schlafwandler?” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

Simone de Beauvoir's *Memorie di una ragazza per bene* (1960), Jurij Karlovič Oleša's *Invidia* (1969) – all works which, although not published within the collections planned by Bazlen, still were by him indicated to Einaudi. Henry Miller's *I libri della mia vita* (1976), although published fifteen years after, might also be ascribable to his recommendation<sup>603</sup>.

Foà's recollection seems therefore to primarily express his disappointment and frustration for the limited consideration with which Bazlen's proposals were received. Since the beginning of his collaboration with Einaudi, his relations with the publishing house had in fact been difficult (initially maybe also because of Cesare Pavese's “ambivalent position” towards him<sup>604</sup>). In 1953 Foà brought to the attention of Giulio Einaudi the issue of Bazlen's unclear and precarious position within the publishing house:

Roberto Bazlen. He has been collaborating with us for three years with

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<sup>603</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of March 12<sup>th</sup> 1959: “Henry Miller, The Books in my Life: T'ho detto che intendevo fare una lista dei libri che lui menziona, perché di lui mi fido come di pochi. Non soltanto è un lettore straordinario (del resto, il libro è bellissimo) ma gli piacciono anche tutte le cose che piacciono a me” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>604</sup> Bazlen mentions the issue in a letter of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1948 (qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 107), when, addressing an editorial proposal he planned to submit to Einaudi, he informs Foà: “Tenterò di farlo con molta cautela, anche per la posizione ambivalente che Pavese ha nei miei riguardi”. In another letter of January 25<sup>th</sup> 1949 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 111), Bazlen asks Foà news on his own position at Einaudi, and bitterly recollects: “Einaudi: non mi hai più scritto come stia la situazione ai miei riguardi. Cian m'ha accennato vagamente, ma anche lui non sapeva nulla di preciso, che Pavese ha fatto opposizione. Del resto, benché non mi conoscesse e non sapesse nulla di me, mi sono imbattuto già una volta nell'opposizione di Pavese, quindici anni fa, all'epoca di Frassinelli: aveva opposto il suo veto contro il mr. Weston di Powys, che stavo per far fare a Frassinelli, con una lettera che Frassinelli mi mostrò in seguito, e che era di un'animosità veramente degna di nota”. We do not know the reasons behind Pavese's apparent hostility against Bazlen, but, for the period here in question (late forties), it might be related to the fact that Bazlen, with Astrolabio, was “sacking” the NEI fund, to which also Pavese needed to draw from for his “Collana viola”. He in fact writes to Linder on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1947: “Bisogna che quel briccone di Luciano se ne ricordi, e non ci ripeta lo scherzo di Jung. Smetta di rifornire Astrolabio, Ivrea, Cantoni, ecc. Insomma, aspettiamo splendidi titoli e testi di etnologia, di psicanalisi, di sangue e lussuria sacrale. Intesi?” (Cesare Pavese, *Lettere 1945-1950* [Torino: Einaudi, 1966], 175); and again, this time to Foà, on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1947: “Non parlarmi del fondo Ivrea. È come l'antro di Trofonio. Né di Bazlen che voglio lasciare ad Astrolabio. Mandami invece (a giudiziari intervalli) i titoli che ti paiono buoni e vedremo. Tieni presente che più dell'antico Oriente e dei *mandala*, a noi interessa la vera e propria etnologia, oppure buona psicanalisi” (*ibid.*, 181).

indications and advices, without receiving a single penny from us, apart from some books. Our program accepted five works he had signaled [...]. Furthermore, many of his indications are at the moment being considered. I think that [...] we should pay him a one-off sum for the work he did in these years.<sup>605</sup>

Foà on the other hand retrospectively also argues that, at the beginning of the fifties, a real dialogue and collaboration between Einaudi and someone as radically anti-ideological as Bazlen, was impossible<sup>606</sup>. As publisher Paolo Boringhieri (in those years editor at Einaudi) summarize it, at the time at the Turinese publishing house “the political interest prevailed”<sup>607</sup>, and Bazlen surely did not fit in with its engaged editorial policy. Some of his letters indeed display sarcasm or downright irritation towards the publishing house's political concerns (see for instance how, in 1962, arguably asked about the political appropriateness of Fritz René Allemann's *Fidel Castro. Die Revolution der Bärte*, he replies to Ponchiroli: “It is a very fine informative journalistic work. I would say reliable and publishable. But you have to judge yourselves about Mr Allemann's political stance, for I don't know a lot about such things”<sup>608</sup>). In some of his statements we recognize a more generic condescending attitude towards the cultural and literary choices of Einaudi themselves, of which he apparently held in contempt the pedagogical and ideological components (in 1959, writing to Sergio Solmi about Tomasi di

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<sup>605</sup> Foà to Einaudi, sine data, qtd. in *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 116: “Roberto Bazlen. Da tre anni collabora con segnalazioni e con pareri, senza aver ricevuto da noi un soldo, a parte qualche libro. Cinque opere segnalate da lui [...], sono state accolte nel nostro programma [...]. Inoltre parecchie sue segnalazioni e proposte sono allo studio. Penso che [...] bisognerebbe riconoscergli una somma una tantum per il lavoro fatto in questi anni”.

<sup>606</sup> See Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 17.

<sup>607</sup> Paolo Di Stefano, “Boringhieri: Musatti sopravvalutato, evitava il lavoro”, *Corriere della Sera*, June 12, 2005, 29.

<sup>608</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Daniele Ponchiroli, 16 Apr. 1962. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen: “E' un molto buon lavoro giornalistico informativo. Direi attendibile e pubblicabile. Ma della posizione politica del signor Allemann dovete giudicare voi, son cose che non capisco”.

Lampedusa's *Il gattopardo*, he points out: “It is nothing special; however, its worst page is worth more than the entire 'gettoni' series”<sup>609</sup>).

Besides single books, during the fifties Bazlen presented to Einaudi also projects of new series. Already in 1951, in relation to “Collana viola” (the “collection of religious, ethnological, and psychological studies” created in 1948 by Cesare Pavese and Ernesto De Martino), he pointed out to Fonzi: “especially in the 'viola' field, almost everything still has to be published in Italy – and I'm not just thinking about modern studies, but rather about the materials addressed by these studies: ethnological works, ancient religious books, fairy tails collections etc.”<sup>610</sup>. Two years later, he submitted to Foà the outline of a new series and some possible titles:

I told you in Turin (and I also briefly addressed the issue with Einaudi) that there are almost no comprehensible and non-impenetrable translations of almost all the mythological, religious, esoteric, folkloristic texts that are commonly mentioned in books of psychology, anthropology, religious studies etc. – This material will soon become “fashionable” (and let's not forget that it includes the better part of the most a l i v e things of this world), and I believe that – if presented in an analogously fresh way, and if protected from the attacks of pure philology – it might be possible [...] to put together a collection which would be not disappointing also from a strictly commercial perspective.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Bazlen to Sergio Solmi, May 7<sup>th</sup> 1959, in *Lettere editoriali*, 289: “Non è un gran che; comunque la pagina più brutta vale tutti i 'gettoni’”. In his comment Bazlen evidently mocks Vittorini (director of the collection “I gettoni” for Einaudi), who had refused to publish Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, which was eventually published by Feltrinelli in 1958, and immediately became a literary sensation.

<sup>610</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Bruno Fonzi, 3 May 1951. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen: “particolarmente in campo 'viola' in Italia resta da pubblicare ancora quasi tutto – e non penso soltanto agli studi moderni quanto al materiale sul quale questi studi lavorano, testi etnologici, antichi libri religiosi, raccolte di favole ecc”. Bazlen's observations on the collection are related to the possible inclusion in it of Hans Schär's *Erlösungsvorstellungen und ihre psychologischen Aspekte*, the work at the center of the letter to Fonzi.

<sup>611</sup> Bazlen to Luciano Foà, letter of July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1953 (qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 190): “Ti ho detto a Torino (e ne ho parlato brevemente anche con Einaudi) che quasi non esistono traduzioni accessibili e non impenetrabili di quasi tutti i testi mitologici, religiosi, iniziatici, folkloristici ecc. che vengono comunemente citati nei libri di psicologia, antropologia, storia delle religioni ecc. – È un materiale che sta per diventare di 'attualità' (senza dimenticare che comprende gran parte delle cose più

Bazlen's proposal was though judged incompatible with “Collana viola” (directed at this point by De Martino alone), and Foà informed him that some of the books he suggested could have found place within other already ongoing collections<sup>612</sup>.

In 1959 Bazlen proposed two new collections to Einaudi, addressed in the correspondence as “Collezione piccola” and “Collezione grande”, after the physical dimensions of the books by which they should have been composed. Both rather eccentric for the non obvious criteria which binded the titles in them included, the “Small” and “Big” collections would have however mostly contained works of biographical, autobiographical, and epistolary nature<sup>613</sup>. Riboli points out that the two

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v i v e di questo mondo) e credo che, presentato in modo altrettanto vivo, e proteggendolo dagli attentati della filologia pura, si potrebbe [...] mettere assieme una collezione non insoddisfacente anche da un punto di vista strettamente commerciale”. We report also the “first and very sketchy” list of works suggested by Bazlen within the same letter (qtd. in *ibid.*, 192): “POPOL VUH (libro sacro dei Maya Quiché) / Leggende e miti ebraici antichi (scelta dal Ben Gorion) / MILAREPA (Vita e Canti di un Santo tibetano) / PLUTARCO: Iside e Osiride / La Vita di APOLLONIO DI TIANA / PAUSANIA: Viaggio in Grecia / ORAPOLLO: I geroglifici / CONFUCIO: Analecta / Il Libro della Pittura bizantina / Il Sogno della Camera Rossa / PARACELSO / SWEDENBORG”.

<sup>612</sup> So Foà writes to Bazlen on October 6<sup>th</sup> 1953 (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>613</sup> In a letter to Foà of December 19<sup>th</sup> 1959 (qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 223-224), Bazlen suggests a temporary list of books for the “Small collection”: “Vi indico quelli che potrebbero essere i primi dodici volumetti. [...] / 1. Il libro del Tè / 2. Cabeza de Vaca / 3. Hogg: Peccatore / 4. Vita della contadina, raccontata a Tolstoi / 5. Musil: Ueber die Dummheit [...] / 6. Fukazawa: à propos des chansons / 7. Tutuola: Bevitore Vino di Palma / 8. Sauvageot: Commentaire [...] / 9. Daumal: Monte Analogue / 10. Ortega: un saggio (o diversi [...]) / 11. Una novella lunga (o un gruppo organico di novelle) di Dery / 12. Nossak: Der Untergang [...] / Gruppo di riserva [...] / 1. Artaud: Au pays des Tarahumeras (con aggiunti altri scritti del Messico) / 2. Mandelstam: I due 'racconti' [...] / 3. Wedekind: Mine Haha / 4. Thurn und Taxis: Ricordi di Rilke / 5. Dahlberg: The Flea of Sodom / 6. Kierkegaard (documenti di K. - o forse, con meno entusiasmo lettere a Regina [...]) / 7. Le satire del giovane polacco di cui Vi ho scritto ugualmente oggi [Witold Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke*] / 8. The Way of a Pilgrim (l'autobiografia del Pellegrino Russo) / 9. Poesie e racconti dei gauchos / 10. Olecha: L'invidia [...] / 11. Una nobilissima riduzione per la radio francese di un dramma leggendario taoista / 12. Un racconto lungo della Lagerlof. [...] Per vostra norma: ho in riserva dozzine e dozzine di altri titoli”. In the same letter Bazlen lists some ideas for the “Big collection”: “Collezione grande: I primi quattro: / Gosse: Father and son / Saxe / Beauvoir / e quasi sicuramente Neihardt: Eagle Voice (an authentic tale of the Sioux Indians) [...] / In caso negativo: sostituire con uno dei seguenti, tutti da prendersi in considerazione per la continuazione della collana: / Misia / De Poncins: Kablouna / Aksakow: La prima parte delle Cronache / Henry Miller / Swami Nikhilananda: Ramakrishna, Prophet of New India [...] /

collections were considered by Einaudi as possible competitors for Il Saggiatore's series "Biblioteca delle Silerchie", created in 1958 and directed by Giacomo Debenedetti<sup>614</sup>. From the correspondence between Giulio Einaudi and Italo Calvino, we though learn of the latter's doubts about the characteristics of the collections (perplexities motivated by editorial and ideological concerns<sup>615</sup>), and of his idea of a "fusion of the small collection and the big one"<sup>616</sup>, temporarily named "Collezione dell'io"<sup>617</sup>. The possibility of a compromise was though unlikely: after reading Calvino's observations on the collection drafted on a document entitled "notes and general ideas for a small collection of writings of moral research for the modern man"<sup>618</sup>, Bazlen wrote to Foà: "I had a quick look at Calvino's memo. I found it rather disconcerting, for, if I had to formulate 'the purpose' of

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Dickinson / Boswell / Herndon: *Life of Lincoln* [...] / Fothergill: *Innkeeper's Diary* [...] / *The Education of Henry Adams* [...] / Strindberg Strindeberg Strindberg Strindberg !!!!! / Vera Figner / *Colloqui con Goethe* / Lagerloef: *diari e ricordi* / Mallea: *Historia de una Pasion Argentina* [...] / Chaim Bloch: *Lebenserinnerungen des Kabbalisten* / Chajjm Vital (Vienna 1927 - chi lo ripescal!) / ecc. / ecc. / ecc. / ecc. / ecc." (ibid., 235-236).

<sup>614</sup> See ibid., 246.

<sup>615</sup> See Calvino's letter to Einaudi of November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1959, in Italo Calvino, *Lettere 1940-1985*, ed. Luca Baranelli (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 617: "Il patrimonio più prezioso di una casa editrice è il carattere, la fisionomia. (Il che sul piano commerciale si traduce nella capacità di crearsi, mantenere e accrescere un pubblico proprio). Dunque a ognuno le proprie silerchie, attenzione agli sconfinamenti spiritualistici, bisognerebbe fare delle antisilerchie tali da marcare decisamente la differenza tra il nostro modo di rispondere a quegli interessi e il modo di Alberto [Mondadori] e Giacomino [Debenedetti]". See also the letter of January 18<sup>th</sup> 1960 (in ibid., 636): "Mi è difficile fare una critica argomentata all'elenco di Bazlen, dato che molti di quei titoli non li conosco neanche di nome. Il mio parere è che è troppo letteraria, che ci vedrei anche testi d'interesse storico, memorie tipo Venturi che lì troverebbero il loro esito: ma insomma quello che mi interesserebbe è vedere una linea di ricerca, mentre qui siamo su un terreno di gusto, molto casuale, così come a gusto e a caso si sono sempre fatte le collane di questo genere".

<sup>616</sup> Foà writes to Bazlen on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1960: "Intanto ti mando il 'responso' di Calvino a Einaudi [...]. A parte l'inizio, che troverai sconcertante, mi pare che ci sia dentro tutto e che, anzi, costituisca una fusione tra la collana piccola e quella grande" (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: *Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani*. File: Bazlen).

<sup>617</sup> As Riboli suggests, the first mention of this denomination can be found in a letter from Foà to Bazlen of April 1<sup>st</sup> 1960 (see Valeria Riboli, "Un progetto di collana tra Einaudi e Adelphi. Roberto Bazlen e la 'Collezione dell'io'", *L'officina dei Libri* 3 [2012]: 75, note 36).

<sup>618</sup> The notes of "Appunti e idee generali per una piccola collezione di testi di ricerca morale per l'uomo moderno" were included in the mentioned letter to Giulio Einaudi of January 18<sup>th</sup> 1960 (see Calvino, *Lettere*, 621, note 4), and were subsequently forwarded to Bazlen. The document was subsequently published in Italo Calvino, *Saggi*, ed. Luca Baranelli (Milano, Mondadori, 2000), 1705.



the two collections, I would say that is to abolish the term 'moral'”<sup>619</sup>. Few of the works suggested by Bazlen would have finally found place in different series, but the planned collections would have not been realized – not only because of Einaudian positions and Bazlen's lack of enthusiasm for the new direction of the project (in the following months Foà would have in fact asked him more than once, but in vain, his feedback and notes on the new project<sup>620</sup>), but also because of Foà's 1961 resignation from Einaudi, which was followed, one year later, by Bazlen's<sup>621</sup>.

Between 1956 and 1958 Einaudi experienced a critical “political, financial, and orientational crisis”<sup>622</sup>, which resulted in significant changes within the publishing house. In 1957 Einaudi sold to Paolo Boringhieri “Edizioni Scientifiche Einaudi” (from now on: ESE), the scientific branch of the publisher which Boringhieri previously directed, and that subsequently became the core of his new publishing house. The reorganization of Einaudi also led to the parting of some prestigious collaborators such as Carlo Muscetta, Ludovico Geymonat, Ernesto de Martino, Giulio Carlo Argan<sup>623</sup>, and, few years later, Luciano Foà and Giorgio Colli. Foà attributed his choice of leaving Einaudi primarily to family reasons, but also admitted a “certain weariness” and “dissatisfaction” for his own

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<sup>619</sup> Bazlen to Foà, February 15<sup>th</sup> 1960, qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 256: “Ho dato una rapida occhiata al promemoria di Calvino. Per me un po' sconcertante, considerando che, se dovessi formulare 'lo scopo' delle due collezioni, direi che è quello di abolire il termine di 'morale'”.

<sup>620</sup> Riboli (*Un progetto di collana*, 73) quotes in this regards two letters by Foà, sent on April 1<sup>st</sup> and July 13<sup>th</sup> 1960.

<sup>621</sup> See Foà's letter to Bazlen of July 29<sup>th</sup> 1961: “Caro Bobi, probabilmente (molto) l'ultima lettera che ti scrivo come Einaudi”. In the Einaudi archive we have also found a letter addressed to Bazlen dated July 24<sup>th</sup> 1962 with a handwritten note which informs of Bazlen's resignation from the publishing house: “Bazlen non è più consulente nostro dalla settimana scorsa” (both letters are held in Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>622</sup> Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri. La casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), 882.

<sup>623</sup> See *ibid.*, 868-870.

work at the Turinese publishing house<sup>624</sup>. From a letter of June 13<sup>th</sup> 1961 to Giulio Einaudi (with whom subsequently Foà would have nevertheless maintained good relations), we learn of his dissatisfaction for his compensation at Einaudi, and of his discontent for the organization of the editorial work and for the “plain, merely executive” duties of his own position<sup>625</sup>. In other occasions, Foà admitted that his decision of leaving Einaudi was also connected with the failure of his attempts of including a new, “Bazlenian” line in Einaudi's program:

Bobi [. . .] met Giulio Einaudi only once, but that single time was also the only moment, I would say, of ignition of a by then long and labored relationship. Giulio Einaudi, for a couple of hours, seemed to yield to Bobi's fascination, to the point of apparently be willing to entrust him the direction of a completely “Bazlenian” collection. But, as days passed by, the project came to nothing. Once more, the trajectory that had characterized his relationships with many publishers (with the exception of Olivetti), was repeated: the publisher got carried away by meeting him, he allowed himself to be seduced, but after a little while he backed out, scared of following him in his proposals, which were considered risky and untimely. From this disappointment arose the idea [...] of putting to good account my editorial experience [...] to at last dedicate myself to a publishing activity inspired to Bazlen.<sup>626</sup>

### 3. The Publishing Legacy: Adelphi

Foà initially planned to create a humanistic branch of the publishing house Boringhieri<sup>627</sup>. He intended to publish part of the constellation of books that Bazlen had

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<sup>624</sup> See Foà and Porzio, Interview.

<sup>625</sup> The mentioned letter is held in Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori (Archivio Luciano Foà. Series: 1.4. Folder: 6. File: 64).

<sup>626</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 18.

<sup>627</sup> See *ibid.*, 19.

kept suggesting in the preceding years, thus mainly works from the German world of the first half of the century, and books connected with the “Eastern world”, which in Italy until that point had been almost “banned”<sup>628</sup>. Paolo Boringhieri, for the good rapport with Bazlen and Foà and for the proximity of his editorial program with the positions of the two intellectuals, seemed an ideal partner for Foà's new project. Bazlen's collaboration with Paolo Boringhieri had started in Fifties within ESE, and had continued with a certain success after Boringhieri's separation from Einaudi. At the beginning of the Sixties, some of Bazlen's proposals for “Collana viola” (now of Boringhieri and not anymore under the direction of de Martino) were accepted and subsequently published (“the more I think about it, the more I believe you should not renounce to the 'viola’”, Bazlen writes in 1961 to Boringhieri, “I know you don't like it, but it had and it might still have [...] its own purpose. Think it over, and if you agree with me, I can feed it finely for you”<sup>629</sup>). Bazlen also successfully signaled to Boringhieri works for other series<sup>630</sup>, and proposed to him projects of collections not dissimilar from the ones advanced earlier to Bocca and Einaudi (which in this case as well were though not realized)<sup>631</sup>. Finally, he also mediated

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<sup>628</sup> See Foà and Porzio, Interview.

<sup>629</sup> Bazlen to Boringhieri, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1961, qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 284: “più ci penso, più mi sembra giusto che tu non lasci cadere la viola. So che non ti è simpatica, ma ha avuto e può avere [...] una sua funzione. Pensaci, e se sei d'accordo, la viola te la posso nutrire bene”. According to Riboli's research (see *ibid.*, 284-288), the works that Bazlen suggested and managed to publish within Boringhieri's collection of ethnologic and religious studies were Boris de Rachewitz's *Egitto magico-religioso* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1961), Titus Burckhardt's *L'Alchimia* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1961), and Carl Gustav Jung's *La realtà dell'anima* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1963).

<sup>630</sup> Riboli signals that Bazlen's recommendations concerned: Helene Deutsch's *Psicologia della donna. Studio psicanalitico* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1957); Erich Neumann's *Il mondo archetipico di Henry Moore* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1962); David Katz's *Trattato di psicologia* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1960), of which Bazlen also selected the excerpts and probably translated some parts; Jolande Jacobi's *Complesso, archetipo, simbolo nella psicologia di C. G. Jung* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1971); Carl Gustav Jung's *Lo sviluppo della personalità* (Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), of which Bazlen also translated a section (see *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 276-281).

<sup>631</sup> See *ibid.*, 289-302.

between Boringhieri and Astrolabio, from which the former acquired part of its psychoanalytical catalogue, subsequently becoming the publisher of the complete works by Freud and Jung, and thus the Italian psychoanalytical publisher par excellence<sup>632</sup>.

A series of conjunctures led however Foà to create an independent publishing house. The first one was the financial investments of Roberto Olivetti and Alberto Zevi<sup>633</sup>; the second, the chance of publishing the critical edition of the complete works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Giorgio Colli (at the time co-director of the series “Classici della Filosofia” for Einaudi and director of “Enciclopedia di Autori Classici” for Boringhieri) had proposed to Einaudi the project of the translation of the complete works of Nietzsche already in the late forties. Einaudi had though rejected Colli's proposal, because, as Pavese argued, the time in Italy was not yet riped for the German philosopher<sup>634</sup>. Nietzsche's name was in fact at the time (and not only in Italy) still controversial: as Banfi summarizes, on Nietzsche's work “had developed a series of foolish interpretations which depicted him, each time, as anti-Semitic philosopher (Förster-Nietzsche), ideologist of Nazism (Rosemberg, Baeumler), precursor of fascism (Lukàcs), ecc.”<sup>635</sup>. Colli kept insisting with Einaudi for the publication of the complete works during the Fifties, towards the end of which Foà became his principal interlocutor in regard to the

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<sup>632</sup> As Riboli reports, Boringhieri asked Bazlen to mediate with Astrolabio for the acquisition of some works by Jung, and subsequently Bazlen notified him: “ho parlato con Bernhard (che non ha alcun diritto legale, ma è persona che non si merita carognate) e [...] per quel che lo riguarda, mi ha permesso di farne quel che meglio credo. [...] Il Dott. Bernhard avrebbe preferito che tutta la sua collezione (Psiche e coscienza) finisse nelle stesse mani. Effettivamente ha un suo diritto di esistenza anche come organismo” (Bazlen to Boringhieri, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1959, qtd. in *ibid.*, 279-280).

<sup>633</sup> See Stefano Guerriero (“Adelphi al paragone”, *Belfagor* 57.3 [2002], 348), who also informs us that Adriano Olivetti's son withdrew from Adelphi in 1964, and that new capitals were subsequently provided to the publishing house by Zevi and, later, by Giulia Devoto-Falck, Alberto Falck, and Francesco Pellizzi.

<sup>634</sup> See Alberto Banfi, “Nietzsche, Colli, Foà: l'azzardo di un'edizione critica e di una nuova casa editrice”, in *Giulio Einaudi nell'editoria di cultura del Novecento italiano* (Firenze: Olschki, 2015), 277.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*

project. In the meantime, he managed to publish with Boringhieri some works of the German philosopher<sup>636</sup> of whom, as Paolo Boringhieri recollects, he spoke as a “living colleague”, and of whom he felt as a “spiritual son”<sup>637</sup>.

In 1959 Giulio Einaudi finally agreed to the publication of the translations of Nietzsche's existent editions, declining though Colli's claim of the necessity of a new critical version which should have included the philosopher's unpublished writings. Still, after Mazzino Montinari's examination of the manuscripts held in the Goethe-Schiller Archiv in Weimar, and considered the cultural importance of the project, the necessity of an *ex novo* critical edition based on the manuscripts revealed itself to Colli and Montinari as unavoidable<sup>638</sup>. At the time Einaudi could not though afford to embark on the ambitious enterprise, and not only because of financial reasons. The project in fact, as Domenico Scarpa points out, did not fit with Einaudi's history and cultural project, and the publishing house certainly did not want to become “the par excellence 'publisher of Nietzsche”<sup>639</sup> (Calasso, in this regard, has spoken of “reason of state”<sup>640</sup>). At that point

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<sup>636</sup> Boringhieri published (with the editorship of Mazzino Montinari) *Schopenhauer come educatore* (1958), *Lettere a Erwin Rohde* (1959), and *Carteggio Nietzsche-Wagner* (1961).

<sup>637</sup> Di Stefano, “Boringhieri”.

<sup>638</sup> See Banfi, “Nietzsche, Colli, Foà”, 281-282; see also Foà's account in Adriano Sofri, “Federico il pendolare”, *Panorama*, February 22, 1987, 141: “Il piano della traduzione di Nietzsche [...] era stato varato da Colli, Einaudi e me. Le opere sarebbero state pubblicate nei Millenni. Nel 1961 però Colli venne a Torino, e spiegò che il sopralluogo di Montinari a Weimar, dove sono conservate le carte di Nietzsche, aveva mostrato la necessità di una edizione interamente rifatta sui manoscritti, moltissimi fra i quali inediti. La mole dell'impresa cresceva, e con essa il rilievo culturale, ma anche l'impegno finanziario e politico. Einaudi non se la sentì, e con Colli fu la rottura”.

<sup>639</sup> Domenico Scarpa, “Torino, 8 novembre 1956. L'editore, uno e trino”, in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, vol. 3, *Dal Romanticismo a oggi*, eds. Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà (Torino: Einaudi, 2012), 803.

<sup>640</sup> See Calasso's words as reported by Antonio Gnoli (“50 anni di Adelphi”, *La Repubblica*, March 15, 2013): “Non ci fu nessuna contesa. Einaudi aveva capito che pubblicare qualcosa di Nietzsche era una buona idea. Ma dovette, diciamo per 'ragioni di Stato', tornare sui suoi passi. Gli apparve chiaro che l'edizione critica di Nietzsche voluta da Colli e Montinari avrebbe cambiato radicalmente la sua casa editrice. Mentre Luciano Foà capì subito che l'edizione di Nietzsche sarebbe diventata l'asse di Adelphi”.

(1962), the newborn Adelphi acquired the rights for Nietzsche's works from Einaudi<sup>641</sup>, and, also thanks to the co-edition contracts stipulated with other foreign publishing houses<sup>642</sup>, embarked in the realization of the monumental Colli-Montinari critical edition of the complete works of Nietzsche, which subsequently became the source and model of most editions of Nietzsche worldwide.

In the first days of Adelphi, Calasso recollects, “only few things were certain: the critical edition of Nietzsche was enough to give direction to everything else. And then a series of classics, an ambitious project that sought to do well what had previously been done less well, and to do for the first time what had previously been disregarded”<sup>643</sup>. The publication of Nietzsche's complete works (started in 1964) had by itself “all the characteristics for providing international prominence to the publisher”<sup>644</sup>. The “Classici” series (started in 1963, and whose importance was primarily recognized and advocated by Foà<sup>645</sup>) should have given an editorial and commercial basis to the new publishing house. But what from the beginning would have characterized the most the perception of Adelphi and its catalogue was the collection “Biblioteca”, the real “pillar of the publisher”<sup>646</sup>, and the one in which Bazlen's influence displays the most. Roberto

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<sup>641</sup> See Foà's account in Sofri, “Federico il pendolare”, 141: “Nel luglio del 1961 io lasciai la Einaudi; seppi poi che di lì a poco c'era stata una discussione in un ‘mercoledì’ einaudiano, conclusa con la decisione di lasciar cadere anche la traduzione delle opere già in cantiere. Ne rilevammo noi i diritti. Un anno e mezzo dopo la comparsa del primo libro Adelphi, uscì, nel 1964, il primo volume delle opere di Nietzsche”.

<sup>642</sup> The first publishing house to join Adelphi in the project was Gallimard, in 1962, then the German Walter de Gruyter (1966), and finally the Japanese Hakusuisha (1969).

<sup>643</sup> Roberto Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, trans. Richard Dixon (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 17.

<sup>644</sup> Banfi, “Nietzsche, Colli, Foà”, 283.

<sup>645</sup> In this regard, see Calasso's account in “Memoria, editoria, scrittura”.

<sup>646</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 21.

Calasso, who joined Adelphi at its birth, and who subsequently became editorial director (1971), president (1999), and (starting 2015) majority owner of the publishing house, recalls:

When Bazlen talked to me for the first time about the new publishing house that would become Adelphi [...] he naturally spoke at once about the critical edition of Nietzsche and the future series of classics. He was very happy about both, but what mattered most to him were the other books that the new publishing house would produce: those that Bazlen had come across at different times and had never managed to get *passed* by the various Italian publishers he had worked, including Bompiani and Einaudi. What were they? Strictly speaking, they could be anything.<sup>647</sup>

The first, programmatic book of “Biblioteca” was Alfred Kubin's *The other side*<sup>648</sup>: “a singular novel by a nonnovelist [...]. A book written in a state of delirium that lasted three months. There was nothing like it in Kubin's life before that moment; nothing like it after. The novel coincides perfectly with *something that happened* to the author on a particular occasion”<sup>649</sup>. Alongside novels, “Biblioteca” would have soon featured memoirs and autobiographies (Elena Croce, *L'infanzia dorata*, 1966), a tibetan classic (*Vita di Milarepa*, 1966), an ethology treaty (Konrad Lorenz, *L'anello di Re Salomone*, 1967), psychoanalytical works (Georg Groddeck, *Il libro dell'Es*, 1966), philosophical writings (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lezioni e conversazioni sull'etica, la psicologia e la credenza religiosa*, 1967), works on eastern art (Zeami Motokiyo, *Il segreto del Teatro Nō*, 1966) or religion (Jiří Langer, *Le nove porte*, 1967). “What bound them together? This wasn't entirely clear. It was then that Bazlen, by way of explanation, began talking

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<sup>647</sup> Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 18-19.

<sup>648</sup> Alfred Kubin, *L'altra parte. Un romanzo fantastico*. Milano: Adelphi, 1965.

<sup>649</sup> Calasso, *The art of the publisher*, 19.

about *singular books*<sup>650</sup>. A singular book, Calasso explains,

is one in which it is clear that *something has happened* to the author and has been put into writing. [...] The writer needed to live through this other thing, he needed to absorb it physiologically, preferably (though this did not have to happen every time) transforming it in style. If this had happened, these were the books that most attracted Bazlen.<sup>651</sup>

In the jacket flap of the first volumes of “Biblioteca”, this principle is clearly formulated: “A series of 'singular' books, chosen by a single criterium: the depth of the experience from which they are born and of which they are living testimony. Today's and yesterday's books – novels, essays, autobiographies, dramas –, experiences of reality or imagination, of the world of affections or thought<sup>652</sup>. As Riboli suggests, it is exactly in the autobiographical and experiential nature of the books of “Biblioteca Adelphi” that has to be recognized the fundamental component “of the editorial pact signed [by Adelphi] with the reader<sup>653</sup>”.

Confronting the titles of the Adelphi's catalogue with Bazlen's editorial and personal letters, it is evident that the core of it is deeply grounded on his suggestions and personal taste. The emphasis on the Mittel-European world reflects the area of specialization of Bazlen's earliest literary suggestions, and not surprisingly Adelphi would have been subsequently identified as “the [Italian] depositary of the Mittel-European myth<sup>654</sup>”. Maybe more surprisingly, the publishing house also found in it,

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<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>652</sup> “Una serie di libri 'unici' scelti secondo un unico criterio: la profondità dell'esperienza da cui nascono e di cui sono viva testimonianza. Libri di oggi e di ieri – romanzi, saggi, autobiografie, opere teatrali – esperienze della realtà o dell'immaginazione, del mondo degli affetti o del pensiero”.

<sup>653</sup> Riboli, “Un progetto di collana”, 63.

<sup>654</sup> Guerriero, “Adelphi al paragone”, 355.



besides a recognizable identity, one of the motifs of his editorial success<sup>655</sup>. Adelphi's predilection for biographies and accounts of personal and singular experiences also mirrors Bazlen's fondness for such works, and so does the abundance of Eastern works and studies printed by the publishing house.

It is actually possible to identify a series of books that Bazlen managed to publish with Adelphi years or even decades after his first recommendation to other publishers. Adelphi for instance published some of the works planned for the collections that Bazlen was supposed to direct for NEI (such as Hugo Ball's *Byzantinisches Christentum*<sup>656</sup>, planned for NEI's "Collana letteraria", and Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*<sup>657</sup>, a book evidently dear to Bazlen, who, after including it in NEI's collection "Mondi e Destini" in the forties, in 1959 suggested it also to Einaudi; Rilke's letters planned for "Mondi e Destini" were also published by Adelphi<sup>658</sup>). A comparison with the titles suggested to Einaudi for the "Big" and "Small" collections also shows that Adelphi found in Bazlen's

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<sup>655</sup> In this regard, see Calasso's words as reported by Antonio Gnoli ("Roberto Calasso", *La Domenica di Repubblica*, October 29, 2006): "La vera svolta arrivò con Joseph Roth. Quando uscì *La cripta dei cappuccini* (1974), Roth era pressoché uno sconosciuto. Ma già con *Fuga senza fine* (1976) i suoi lettori erano numerosi. In due anni, politicamente durissimi e ostili alla letteratura, questo scrittore aveva fatto breccia. Che cosa era accaduto? 'Si stava cristallizzando una idea di Vienna e della Mitteleuropa. Roth ruppe gli argini perché al contempo avevamo pubblicato o stavamo pubblicando Kraus, Wittgenstein, Schnitzler, Loos, Hofmannsthal, Canetti. Si delineava una costellazione letteraria che fu colta e capita". Calasso also claimed: "We had no idea these people would become so popular. At the time some were not even in print in Germany. The reason why we published them was not about a kind of geographical inclination. You cannot do without Vienna in a way. From Joseph Roth to Wittgenstein from Adolf Loos to Schiele, they are all essential figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I remember, when I myself was translating Karl Kraus's aphorisms, I met Erich Linder, who was maybe the greatest literary agent of those years. He told me: 'Ya, that's good that you're doing Kraus. You'll sell 20 copies'. By now Kraus is near his 20<sup>th</sup> printing. So a lot has changed" (Stephen Heyman, "Roberto Calasso, Italy's Publishing Maestro", *The New York Times*, November 4, 2015; available from [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/05/arts/international/roberto-calasso-italys-publishing-maestro.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/05/arts/international/roberto-calasso-italys-publishing-maestro.html?_r=1) [accessed April 11, 2017]).

<sup>656</sup> *Cristianesimo bizantino*, Milano: Adelphi, 2015.

<sup>657</sup> Gosse's *Padre e figlio* was published in 1965 as the second title of Biblioteca Adelphi.

<sup>658</sup> Rilke's letter planned by NEI (see note 555) were published in a single volume by Vallecchi in 1965, and then acquired by Adelphi and published in 1980 in the volume *Lettere a un giovane poeta - Lettere a una giovane signora - Su Dio*.

proposals to the Turinese publisher a fundamental core for part of its future publications. Not only many books planned for the two collections were finally published by Adelphi<sup>659</sup>, but the very creation of “Biblioteca” and “Piccola Biblioteca” (started in 1973) shows fundamental analogies with the projects proposed to Einaudi, and arguably also with “the sort of insel-bücherei” planned for Bocca and with the proposals to Boringhieri. The trajectory of books such as Eugen Herrigel's *Lo zen e il tiro con l'arco* and Amos Tutuola's *Il bevitore del vino di palma* (both printed but not distributed by Bocca, subsequently suggested by Bazlen to Einaudi e Boringhieri, and finally published by Adelphi) well illustrates Bazlen's *modus operandi* and his determined (or even “obstinate”<sup>660</sup>) reproposal to different publishers of analogous projects and titles with which, as Riboli suggests, he seemed to maintain “an almost affective relationship”<sup>661</sup>.

Calasso firmly denies that Adelphi was born “from a rib of Einaudi”, and has often emphasized the antithetical nature of Adelphi's “premises and physiology” in

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<sup>659</sup> A list of the books from the two collections planned for Einaudi (see note 613) that – in some instances after decades – were published by Adelphi: from “Collezione Piccola”: René Daumal, *Il Monte Analogo. Romanzo d'avventure alpine non euclidee e simbolicamente autentiche* (1968); Amos Tutuola, *La mia vita nel bosco degli spiriti - Il bevitore di vino di palma* (1983); Haniel Long, *La meravigliosa avventura di cabeza de Vaca* (2006); Antonin Artaud, *Al paese dei Tarahumara e altri scritti* (1966); Frank Wedekind, *Mine Haha, ovvero Dell'educazione fisica delle fanciulle* (1975); Anonimo russo, *La via di un pellegrino. Racconti sinceri di un pellegrino al suo padre spirituale* (1972); Eugen Herrigel, *Lo Zen e il tiro con l'arco* (1975). From “Collezione Grande”: Edmund Gosse, *Padre e figlio* (1965); John G. Neihardt, *Alce nero parla. Vita di uno stregone dei Sioux Oglala* (1968); Misia Sert, *Misia* (1981); James Boswell, *Visita a Rousseau e a Voltaire* (1973); Henry Adams, *L'educazione di Henry Adams* (1964); Sergej Timofeevic Aksakov, *Cronaca di famiglia* (1984). Other authors suggested for the “Big Collection” (without specifying the titles) that have subsequently been published by Adelphi are Henry Miller (of whom Adelphi published two books), Strindberg (seven volumes), and arguably Maurice Sachs (signaled by Bazlen as “saxe” – of whom Adelphi published, in 2011, *Il sabba*). Adelphi also published two works from the collection of mythological, religious, and folkloristic works that Bazlen proposed to Einaudi: *Vita di Milarepa* (1966) and Filostrato, *Vita di Apollonio di Tiana* (1978).

<sup>660</sup> Riboli, “Un progetto di collana”, 65.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*

comparison with Einaudian ideology<sup>662</sup>. Still, as we have seen, Adelphi's initial core figures (Foà, Colli, Bazlen) had been prestigious collaborators of Einaudi, and the new publishing house developed projects initially proposed to and subsequently discarded by the Turinese publisher. Not only the edition of Nietzsche and the series “Biblioteca” and “Piccola Biblioteca” seem to be related to the projects proposed to Einaudi, but we conjecture here that also the collection “Classici” might at least in part be inspired to a new series planned by Einaudi at the end of the fifties.

Among Foà's papers held in Fondazione Mondadori, within a file named “Einaudi Adelphi”, we came upon a document describing the project of a collection temporarily named “Nuova Libreria”<sup>663</sup>. We know that Einaudi planned this new collection (which eventually was not realized) in the second half of the fifties, and that at the end of 1958 its development was assigned to Renato Solmi<sup>664</sup>. The undated draft of the project we found in Foà's papers is in all likelihood anterior to Solmi's intervention<sup>665</sup>, and presents substantial differences with the one developed by the latter. The fact that Solmi, asked to give his opinion on the new project (possibly on the very document we mentioned), replied to Foà, also encourages us to hypothesize that the document might have been redacted by Foà himself (and so does the fact that Foà, after leaving Einaudi, brought

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<sup>662</sup> Roberto Calasso, “Il vero editore infrange il tabù del pubblicabile”. *Corriere della Sera*, June 20, 2009, 45.

<sup>663</sup> The document (held in Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Archivio Luciano Foà. Series: 1.4. Folder: 6. File: 64), consists of several typewritten pages, and is divided in the sections: “Caratteristiche della collezione”, “Programma per il 1959, 1960, 1961”, “Volumi da preparare”, “Volumi pronti”, “Ristampe interne”, “Volumi di facile preparazione”, “Volumi di preparazione più complessa”, “Volumi da riscattare”, “Osservazioni di carattere generale”.

<sup>664</sup> See Mangoni, *Pensare i libri*, 881, note 22.

<sup>665</sup> We deduce that from the fact that the the document lists 9 titles planned for 1959, and by the differences with Solmi's final project.

with him a copy of the document<sup>666</sup>).

Solmi's project contemplated an encyclopedic collection of classics, “a sort of 'new index' of culture”<sup>667</sup>, possibly divided in specific sections and fields, within which each volume should have been accompanied by an introduction which should have represented almost “a work by itself”<sup>668</sup>. The project held in Foà's archive, which Solmi found questionable and unsatisfying<sup>669</sup>, presents some analogies with the premises and general lines of Adelphi's “Biblioteca” and “Classici”, and with the core philosophy of Adelphi itself. “Nuova Libreria” contemplated in fact the compresence of essayistic and scientific writings, poetry and fiction, foreign and Italian classics; it was not supposed to be organized by ages, disciplines or genres, but should have found its own coherence in “the necessity and in the actual vitality” of its books, which all should have conveyed also “the imprint of the moral experience [and] of the worldview” from which they were born<sup>670</sup>. As we learn from the section “Caratteristiche della collezione”, “Nuova libreria' [looked] for its unity in the unity of the reader, in that unity that ideally precedes specialization”; the relation of the reader with its books should have been “direct and free

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<sup>666</sup> Foà might be referring to “Nuova Libreria” in the above-mentioned interview with Porzio, when, asked about the motives of his resignation from Einaudi, recollects: “era una certa scontentezza [...] perché io suggerivo certe cose, di fare una certa collana di classici in un certo modo [...]” (Foà and Porzio, Interview).

<sup>667</sup> See Mangoni, *Pensare i libri*, 882.

<sup>668</sup> See Solmi's letter to Tommaso Gnoli of October 26<sup>th</sup> 1961 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 882, note 22), in which he so describes the project: “una piccola storia della letteratura e del pensiero in questione, delle sue principali fasi e correnti, dei suoi diversi sviluppi [...] L'introduzione, insomma, dovrebbe conquistare una sua autonomia ed essere quasi un'operetta a sé. Questa è appunto la formula della collana”.

<sup>669</sup> See Solmi's letter to Foà of February 7<sup>th</sup> 1959 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 882, note 23): “Ho ricevuto il programma della collana, su cui ci sarebbe molto da discutere. Vi dico subito che non sono d'accordo sull'impostazione che mi sembra risultare da questo primo programma, e in cui mi sembra sacrificato (o non sufficientemente sottolineato) il carattere nuovo, 'enciclopedico', della collana”.

<sup>670</sup> So we learn from the above-mentioned document “Nuova Libreria” (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Archivio Luciano Foà. Series: 1.4. Folder: 6. File: 64).

– a congenial relationship”<sup>671</sup>. The collection should have thus avoided a “pedantic methodicalness” in the choice of its titles, and its books should have presented an extremely precise but at the same time discreet critical apparatus<sup>672</sup>.

Now: among the works planned for “Nuova libreria”, besides Nietzsche (of whom the author of the document asks the consultants to propose the specific works they suggests to publish), only few were published by Adelphi<sup>673</sup>. What we want to emphasize here is rather the consonance between the early guidelines of the unrealized collection and some of the core principles of Adelphi's catalogue, and the fact that – through a process of derivation and distancing – Adelphi seems indeed to owe an important part of its editorial identity to the development of some of the projects discarded by Einaudi.

Calasso – who, according to Stefano Guerriero, has been inclined to emphasize more than Foà the “anti-Einaudian character of Adelphi's project”<sup>674</sup> – argues that the new publishing house was born in an ideal moment: after the war there was in fact an enormous quantity of works to discover and publish which had been ignored during the fifties, a decade ruled by Einaudi<sup>675</sup>, which, “although in the most enlightened and

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>673</sup> At times after many years, or after the publication by other publishers, Adelphi printed: Stendhal, *Vita di Henry Brulard - Ricordi d'egotismo* (1964); Wu Ch'êng-ên, *Lo Scimmiotto* (1971; the book had been previously published by Einaudi in 1960); Benjamin Constant, *La mia vita* (1998; indicated in the list included in “Nuova Libreria” as “Scritti autobiografici”); Benedetto Croce, *Storia del regno di Napoli* (1992); Giuseppe Gioachino Belli, *Sonetti erotici e meditativi* (2012; in the project of “Nuova Libreria” we find the general indication of “Sonetti”). Among the the works planned in the above-mentioned document, we also find: Immanuel Kant's “Scritti illuministici” (Adelphi published in 1976 Kant's *Critica della ragione pura*); Machiavelli's “Opere” (Adelphi published in 1964 *Opere letterarie*); Paul Valery's “Pensieri e aforismi” (Adelphi published several works by Valery, including, between 1985 and 2002, 5 volumes of *Pensieri*). We might also underline that Einaudi, at the time of the drawing up of the document at issue, already owned the rights of some of the works in it mentioned, and that other books were already prepared or in preparation.

<sup>674</sup> Guerriero, “Adelphi al paragone”, 358.

<sup>675</sup> So Calasso claims in “Memoria, editoria, scrittura”.

versatile way”, nevertheless “flourished under the cape of that dulling Sovietism which burdened the whole cultural Left in Europe”<sup>676</sup>. After the war, Calasso claims, Italy was culturally divided in three blocs: the secularist and liberal one, represented by positions such as the ones of Mario Pannunzio's review *Il Mondo*; the catholic one, which, through the Christian Democrats, did not though aim at the cultural hegemony; and the Marxist one, “which referred to the Communist Party and had in the publishing house Einaudi its most prestigious agency”<sup>677</sup>. “Oceans of things ran through these blocs, things which slipped through all three of them; and that is where we initially went fishing”<sup>678</sup>. Foà himself (without directly addressing Adelphi's relation with Einaudi) has also actually claimed the antagonistic nature of the publishing house he created in 1962, and pointed out the distance between his new project and the one in which he had importantly participated to in the previous years: “I founded Adelphi, with Bazlen's advices, to break free from the monotony of leftist publishing ideologism”<sup>679</sup>.

Bazlen helped tracing the initial editorial line of Adelphi, and left notes and letters with many indications from which the publishing house drew importantly after his death, occurred only three years after its creation. Still, Bazlen's influence towards it goes well beyond his direct activity for Adelphi, which seems to actually model itself on his approach to culture and on his literary taste. Even some of the most commercially successful or apparently light works and authors published by Adelphi are arguably ascribable to his influence or suggestions; such for instance seems to be the case of

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<sup>676</sup> Calasso, “Il vero editore”, 45.

<sup>677</sup> Calasso, “Memoria, editoria, scrittura”.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Enzo Siciliano, “Gli editori leggono. Adelphi”, *La Stampa*, December 20, 1972, 3.

Colette (present in the Adelphi catalogue with 11 titles)<sup>680</sup> and Georges Simenon (long-seller of Adelphi, which published 158 volumes of the Belgian writer to whom, as we learn from his private correspondence, Bazlen confessed to be addicted)<sup>681</sup>. Furthermore: Adelphi acquired catalogues of publishing houses for which Bazlen had worked (Frassinelli in 1965, with titles from Joyce, Kafka, Melville, and Hermann Hesse's best seller *Siddhartha*); it acquired Italian authors previously recommended or discovered by Bazlen (such as Mattioni) or close to him or belonging to an akin cultural environment (Savinio, Landolfi, Gadda, Campo, Juan Rodolfo Wilcock); it published, at times decades after his death, books he suggested to other publishing houses (Henry Miller's *The books in my life*, loved by Bazlen and thus recommended through Foà to Einaudi which subsequently published it in 1976, entered in the Adelphi catalogue in 2014<sup>682</sup>, thus more than 50 years after Bazlen's first recommendation in 1959).

We can safely conjecture that the written traces of Bazlen's editorial suggestions to Adelphi to which we can resort to must be only a very partial portion of his

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<sup>680</sup> Regarding Colette, see Bazlen's letter to Foà on *Lettere à Marguerite Moreno*: “queste lettere scoppiano di ricchezza, di gioia di vita, di sensi continuamente all'assalto. [...] degli scritti autobiografici di Colette [...] io non ne conosco che due o tre volumi – non ricordo nemmeno più i titoli, ma so che ci si morde con gusto” (Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Luciano Foà, 9 Mar. 1960. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>681</sup> Regarding Simenon, see Bazlen's letters to Rodocanachi: “durante il periodo denti non ho letto che Simenon” (June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1957); “ti ho già avvisato che ho ricevuto gli ultimi tre (cinque) Simenon? Grazie, e rimanderò quando avrò raccolto gli altri che girano. Già letti, ed ora, per favore, smetti per un po' di tempo. Quando li ho in casa, diventa una specie di addiction” (October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1957); “[...] E per ringraziarti anche a nome di diversi altri viziosi dei nuovi Simenon. Rispedirò tutti quando tutti avranno goduto” (July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1957; all the quoted letters are held in Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Bazlen, Roberto). Adelphi sold almost 7 million copies of Simenon's books, three million of which were not Maigret's titles (see Enrico Arosio, “Il direttore di Adelphi: ‘Vi racconto il sistema di Georges Simenon’”, *Pagina 99*, January 7, 2017; available from: <http://www.pagina99.it/2017/01/08/giorgio-pinotti-adelphi-georges-simenon-libri-maigret> [accessed April 11, 2017]). We may also add that Adelphi drastically changed the perception of the writer, who, previously published by Mondadori, in Italy was regarded as a light author.

<sup>682</sup> Henry Miller, *I libri della mia vita*, Milano: Adelphi, 2014. Regarding Bazlen's opinion on the book, see note 603.

recommendations. His fundamental influence and inspiration is on the other hand openly declared by Adelphi (Calasso's office's library at the publishing house is still composed of what remains of Bazlen's personal library<sup>683</sup>), and led Boringhieri to argue that, basically, “Adelphi is him”<sup>684</sup>. The eccentric, eclectic, and firmly non-systematic nature of Bazlen's proposals and projects, which often caused other publishers to decline them, has been adopted by Adelphi as model for its editorial line, and, in spite of their alleged economical hazardousness and their perceived lack of consistency, they became one of the reasons of the recognizability and success of the new publishing house. In this regard, Banfi and Scarpa nevertheless correctly suggest that “in cultural publishing there may be authors which reveals themselves essential for a publisher, while marginal for another one”<sup>685</sup> – and this depending not only on the specificity of the editorial project, but also on the historical moment and circumstances.

As we have seen, Bazlen's “singular books” and Nietzsche's critical edition – works that were in contrast with or unsuitable for the vast and prestigious cultural project of Einaudi – were essential and defining for Adelphi. From the start the tutelar deities of Adelphi would have been thus Kafka (the “singular author for the Twentieth century”<sup>686</sup>) and Nietzsche (considered at the time in Italy the forefather of a misinterpreted irrationalism: “Where else could we have started?”, Calasso writes, “The begetter of all things *irrational* could only be Nietzsche”<sup>687</sup>). In defining the cultural profile of the

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<sup>683</sup> See Calasso, “The Art of Fiction”.

<sup>684</sup> See Paolo Boringhieri's account in Di Stefano, “Boringhieri”.

<sup>685</sup> Banfi (“Nietzsche, Colli, Foà”, 283) follows here an analogous observation by Scarpa (“L'editore, uno e trino”, 805).

<sup>686</sup> Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 20.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.



publishing house, next to Bazlen, the most important collaborator was thus Giorgio Colli, who so suggests to approach the work of the German philosopher:

Nietzsche does not need interpreters. He has spoken enough of himself and of his ideas, and in the most limpid way. All one needs to do is to listen, with no intermediary. To that end, the preliminary condition is obviously that one “might be able” to understand him; but not negligible is the ulterior condition – since his discourse is mostly exoteric – that one might indeed “want” to understand him.<sup>688</sup>

In this primacy of reading over interpretation we recognize a core affinity with Bazlen's positions, and a criterion at the basis of Adelphi's publications, which often (but obviously depending also on the collections and on the specific works) present an agile paratext (light or no introductions, afterwords, and critical apparatuses). This non-mediated e non-prescriptive approach to the text is connected with Adelphi's anti-pedagogical vocation and with its idea of culture itself, which Guerriero has described as “an atemporal and ahistorical world, which denies any organization of knowledge, and which revolves exclusively around the book-object, the writing, and the 'numinous' act of reading”<sup>689</sup>. According to Guerriero, this is possible because, in spite of the eclecticism of the publishing house, such an idea “mostly crystallizes around the taste and perspective of a single person”<sup>690</sup> – originally Bazlen, and in later years Calasso.

In his maybe excessively categorical observations, Guerriero identifies a defining characteristic of Adelphi's catalogue, which indeed seems to find its roots in the (alleged? we will later more thoroughly address the issue) arbitrariness of Bazlen's choices, based essentially on a vast and extremely up-to-date literary culture and on a rare and cultivated

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<sup>688</sup> Giorgio Colli, *Dopo Nietzsche* (Milano: Adelphi, 1974), 26.

<sup>689</sup> Guerriero, “Adelphi al paragone”, 349.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*

literary ear. Calasso himself observes in regard to Adelphi's "singular books": "Among such disparate books, what at this point could be the essential requisite that had nevertheless to be recognized? Perhaps just the 'right sound', another expression that Bazlen sometimes used, as a final argument"<sup>691</sup>. These kind of nonchalant and unsophisticated claims are though to be read within the context of the anti-intellectualizing and anti-academic perspective embraced by Adelphi, and have also been interpreted as what we could describe as a sort of anti-rhetorical rhetoric (to which are also due the imputations of snobbishness or snootiness not rarely directed to the publishing house). These kind of assertions seem to ask to be contextualized within a rhetorical strategy which dismisses intellectualization, but which should not belittle the consideration of the editorial planning at the basis of a project that eventually revealed itself as extremely successful both on the cultural and commercial level, and which from the start found in Luciano Foà and in his core collaborators figures of remarkable editorial intelligence and experience.

For its history, for the uniqueness of its catalogue, and for the aspect of the object-book itself (immediately recognizable for its physical characteristic such as logo, pastel covers, Baskerville type), Adelphi is today regarded as a cult publishing house. It enjoys a peculiar and distinct relation with its most dedicated public: the very name "Adelphi" (from the Greek ἀδελφοί: brothers) alludes not only, as Foà and Calasso suggest, to the relationship between the people involved in the project of the publishing house, but also

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<sup>691</sup> Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 22.

to its research for akin people among the readers<sup>692</sup>. Calasso claims that the “relationship of complicity” between Adelphi and its readers is established on the basis of their “repeated experiences of not being disappointed”, and that this kind of trust relies on one single rule: “to think that what has not disappointed us (meaning that minuscule group that forms the mind of a publishing house) will not disappoint others”<sup>693</sup>.

After a financially difficult first decade<sup>694</sup>, Adelphi was able to enlarge its public thanks to the publication of books that imposed themselves as best-sellers. Between the seventies and the eighties Adelphi thus emerged also as a commercially successful publishing house, to the point (in 2015) of being able to call itself out from the merging of Italy's largest publishing groups (Mondadori and RCS Libri, of which it was part), and, as Calasso claims, of enlarging therefore its independence “from *de facto* to *de jure*”<sup>695</sup>. In this regard, it has also to be noticed that the “brotherly” environment of the birth of the publishing house had to be crucial also in relation to financial issues – not only for what concerns the initial financial support of Zevi and Olivetti (who at the time also owned Edizioni di Comunità, and arguably financed the project for a non-merely economic interest), but also for what Biagi describes as Linder's and ALI's generous “accounting tolerance”<sup>696</sup>.

During the years, Adelphi further defined and consolidated its cultural profile with the acquisition and publication of works and writers previously printed by other Italian

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<sup>692</sup> See Foà and Porzio, Interview.

<sup>693</sup> Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 69-70.

<sup>694</sup> In this regard see Banfi, “Nietzsche, Colli, Foà”, 283.

<sup>695</sup> Stefano Carrer, “Calasso: 'Adelphi indipendente da de facto a de iure'”, *Il Sole 24 ORE*, March 12, 2015.

<sup>696</sup> Biagi, *Il dio di carta*, 95. Biagi refers here to the fact that Linder practiced to Adelphi what he describes as a “mouth-to-mouth breathing for some twenty years, until its balance were in red” (ibid.).

publishers (among the Italian authors: Croce, Manganelli, Sciascia, Savinio, Landolfi, and Gadda; among the foreign ones: Joyce, Kafka, Melville<sup>697</sup>, and, more recently, Borges). Its catalogue is furthermore extremely vital (in 2015 Calasso pointed out that, thanks to Adelphi's policy of reprints, approximately 2300 of the 2500 titles printed by the publishing house were still purchasable<sup>698</sup>), and is capable of decreeing new critical and commercial success to previously published works or authors, or even to change their perception (in this regard, we already mentioned the case of Simenon, and we may add the one of Sciascia<sup>699</sup>; Guerriero also suggests the cases of Landolfi and Anna Maria Ortese<sup>700</sup>). This seems to be a consequence of Calasso's idea of publishing as a literary genre and of his view of the Adelphi's catalogue as a unitary “long, serpentine of pages”, as a “variegated” and “polymorphous” single book in which every actual volume represents a chapter, a segment, or a part of a single work or discourse<sup>701</sup>.

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<sup>697</sup> Calasso recalls that Adelphi acquired the entire Frassinelli catalogue just to be able to publish few of its titles: “*Siddharta* era nel catalogo di una casa editrice che noi abbiamo comprato negli anni Sessanta: Frassinelli. Perché aveva dei titoli che c’interessavano molto: *Siddharta*, *Il processo* di Kafka, il *Dedalus* di Joyce e il *Moby Dick* di Melville tradotti da Cesare Pavese. Per quei quattro libri comprammo Frassinelli, poi abbiamo di nuovo ceduto il marchio” (Silvia Truzzi, “I fratelli di Adelphi”, *il Fatto Quotidiano*, November 26, 2010).

<sup>698</sup> See Calasso's account in Antonio Gnoli, “Roberto Calasso: 'Ma quali socci occulti? L'Adelphi l'ho ricomprata io'”, *La Repubblica*, October 6, 2015.

<sup>699</sup> Regarding the relationship between Sciascia and Adelphi, see Giorgio Pinotti, “Sciascia Adelphiano”, *Todomodo* 4 (2014): 9-19. Sciascia has more than once attributed his choice to move to Adelphi to the characteristics and composition of its catalogue: “come lettore, è l’editore che seguo di più, era piuttosto ovvio che ci andassi come autore”, he claimed in an interview (Guido Valdini, “Onor di contessa”, *L’ora*, October 14, 1986, 4; qtd. in *ibid.*, 19); and again, in a letter to Mario Andreose at Bompiani on November 19<sup>th</sup> 1986 (qtd. in *ibid.*, 9): “Mi piace il libro Adelphi, mi piacciono gli scrittori con cui da Adelphi mi trovo in compagnia; e mi piacciono i lettori che seguono l’Adelphi, anche se sono di minor numero di quelli dell’Einaudi o della Bompiani”.

<sup>700</sup> See Guerriero, “Adelphi al paragone”, 351.

<sup>701</sup> See Calasso, *The art of the publisher*, 83-84: “what happens if we look upon that series of segments as a single book? A book that contains within it many genres, many styles, many periods, but which proceeds continually and naturally, always in the expectation of one new chapter, which each time is another author. A perverse and polymorphous book that aims towards *poikilia*, 'variegation' [...]. After all, this strange process by which a series of books can be read as a single book has already happened in the mind of somebody, or at least in the mind of that anomalous entity behind each individual book: the

Addressing the compresence within Adelphi's catalogue of books of undoubted cultural worth and of publications arguably derived from commercial evaluations, Guerriero speaks of “the double soul of Adelphi”, which has managed to balance “a project of high culture with strongly unitary traits which is – for its very nature – intended for a narrow public”, and “an artful collocation on the market of the mass-circulation” thanks to the “seal of quality” represented by the Adelphi book itself<sup>702</sup>. This strategy is common to most publishers, Guerriero continues, but the exceptionality of the Adelphi case is that it has managed to do that without undermining its own name<sup>703</sup>, thanks to cautious openings to the market that did not affect the perception of the refinement of its catalogue<sup>704</sup>. In regard to Adelphi's “double soul”, we may point out that the publishing house was already born with it, or at least from a double premise: on the one hand, the will to publish the books “truly liked”<sup>705</sup> by a small group of intellectuals (books, as we have seen, that previously could not find an editorial collocation); on the other, the pragmatic and commercial considerations of a new publishing house whose catalogue was initially strongly determined by the availability of works to publish and by the necessity of establishing a distinctive editorial identity.

Adelphi is today perceived by the non specialistic public as the Italian cultivated

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publisher”.

<sup>702</sup> Guerriero, “Adelphi al paragone”, 354.

<sup>703</sup> See *ibid.*, 355.

<sup>704</sup> Regarding Adelphi's obvious attention to the market, we may point out that it has been at times superficially or tendentiously interpreted. Guerriero for instance, addressing the collection of illustrated books “I cavoli a merenda” (inaugurated in 2002), correctly describes it as a careful mixture of considerations of cultural and commercial nature, but improperly interprets it as an attempt by Adelphi of extending its publications to the area of Junior books (see *ibid.*), misinterpreting the nature of the collection (and identifying illustrated books with children books), and belittling the commercial intuition and the cultural merits of the project (“I cavoli a merenda” hosts for instance six volumes by Edward Gorey, cult author previously unpublished in Italy).

<sup>705</sup> See Calasso, “The Art of Fiction”: “Bazlen told me that a publishing house was going to start where we might publish the books we truly liked”.

and refined publishing house par excellence. In this regard, Guerriero argues that it has taken the place previously occupied by Einaudi, and stresses some pivotal differences between the cultural projects of the two publishers: Adelphi's program, compared to Einaudi's, has a narrower field and range, an anti-pedagogical and unsystematic attitude, and an anti-historical and politically disengaged approach which privileges "pure literariness"<sup>706</sup>. Its program was born as alternative or even antagonistic to a hegemonic publishing culture (and an important part of Adelphi's first publications can indeed be seen as the "scraps", the excluded or refused works by other publishing houses), but once this antagonism faded, Adelphi found itself occupying in the perception of the public the place formerly held by a much vaster and more articulated (and also collegially directed) cultural project<sup>707</sup>. Guerriero finally argues that, if Adelphi was born as a "necessary and useful" discordant voice within a panorama in which "the engagement of the intellectuals risked to stiffen the cultural discourse", now that the context is radically changed, Adelphi's antagonism is reduced to an emblem: "this carefree freedom, of which Adelphi is the champion, is maybe today the new shortcoming of Italian culture"<sup>708</sup>.

If Guerriero's conclusions seems to overestimate Adelphi's alleged hegemonic cultural role and may be too trenchant in identifying its supposedly anti-historical and exquisitely literary inclination, they though single out an aspect for which the publishing house has been vastly criticized, that is a certain disengagement – be that from political and social issues or from moral and pedagogical concerns (and it is certainly not fortuitous that, already in 1968, in the movie *Teorema* Pasolini portrayed the bored and

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<sup>706</sup> Guerriero, "Adelphi al paragone", 357-358.

<sup>707</sup> See *ibid.*, 358.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*

dissatisfied Lucia, the bourgeois “mother”, intent on reading an Adelphi's book – Lorenz's *L'anello di Re Salomone*, as we learn from the novel<sup>709</sup> –, while “the visitor” is portrayed reading a Rimbaud paperback<sup>710</sup>). Beyond the criticism that Adelphi attracted – objective and circumstantial (such as Guerriero's), ideological (such as the one of *Controinformazione*, which blamed the publishing house of being a tool of cultural counterrevolution<sup>711</sup>), or plainly ludicrous (such as Maurizio Blondet's interpretation of Adelphi's program as the vanguard of a gnostic and anti-Christian program aiming at the dissolution of Christian faith and morality<sup>712</sup>) – Adelphi's cultural merits are undeniable. First of all, as Franco Fortini argues, in making available “a cultural tradition avoided by Italian Idealism, and in many ways fought or ignored by the leftist culture bent on Hegelo-Marxism and Gramsci”<sup>713</sup>. Secondly, for what concerns Italian literature, in discovering or allowing new visibility and commercial success to writers who, if at times excluded from literary histories and canons, are nevertheless crucial authors of twentieth-century Italian literature (among Adelphi's discoveries we can mention Guido Morselli,

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<sup>709</sup> See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teorema* (Milano: Garzanti, 1968), 18.

<sup>710</sup> Franco Fortini (“C’era una volta la Mitteleuropa”, *L’Espresso*, May 2, 1993, 103) employs an almost identical image in an analogous interpretation of Adelphi's cultural positioning: “Ricordate la pubblicità con con quell'odiosa bella donna intellettuale così fine e sobria che davanti a un oceano irlandese o norvegese fotografa uccelli marini e poi sorseggia un nescafé? Accanto alla sua poltrona pieghevole potresti vedere un libro Adelphi, edito nel 1983”.

<sup>711</sup> See “Controrivoluzione culturale e guerra psicologica. Le avanguardie della dissoluzione”, *Controinformazione*, June 1979. Calasso addresses the issue in *The art of the publisher*, 58-62.

<sup>712</sup> We refer here to Maurizio Blondet, *Adelphi della dissoluzione. Strategie culturali del potere iniziatico*, Milano: Ares, 1994.

<sup>713</sup> Fortini, “C’era una volta la Mitteleuropa”. In the article, Fortini, who moves from radically different positions in comparison to Adelphi, also underlines the “strong ideological connotation” of the publishing house: “Per quasi vent’anni – fra 1973 e 1991 – siamo vissuti nel segno della repressione politica e non c’è nulla di strano che una intelligente industria culturale abbia sovvenuto alla richiesta, o anticipata la domanda, di un ceto sempre più ricco e bisognoso di rispettabilità mentale e poi dei figli di quel ceto, conversi dai giovanili furori 1967-1972 e in giro per i colleges, armati di etica della fluidità. Adelphi ha genialmente compreso fin dalle sue origini che un bisogno 'di destra', di adulti o di imminenti rassegnati, cresceva in parallelo alla 'sinistra' tra la fine degli anni Sessanta e i primi anni Settanta [...]. Con Hesse, lo Zen e simili ingredienti, si preparava il Grande Rientro dalla 'sinistra’”.

Salvatore Satta, and Aldo Busi; but also some established authors such as Michelstaedter, Savinio, Landolfi, Manganelli, or Solmi found with Adelphi a visibility and subsequently an editorial fortune and longevity not so easily conceivable outside of the vitality of its catalogue).

We have dedicated special space and attention to Adelphi first of all because it represents the most visible and identifiable part of Bazlen's publishing legacy, the one in which his traces are most evident and his influence is more openly declared. Secondly, because Adelphi's philosophy itself, with its professed inspiration to Bazlen, represents an important and valuable interpretation of his figure and positions, and might help us to advance towards the treatment of his critical approach. Furthermore, Bazlen's role within Adelphi is particularly explicatory of the characteristics of his work: often fundamental, at times vast, but always performed as support to someone else's projects. It is in fact important to emphasize that Adelphi was “inspired to Bazlen”<sup>714</sup>, but it was not *his* project, and that within the publishing house his official position was merely the one of consultant<sup>715</sup>.

Foà recollects in fact that Bazlen “encouraged” him in the enterprise of the new publishing house because he believed that it would have been a vivifying experience for his friend<sup>716</sup>. Nonetheless, Bazlen had reservations on many aspects of the project: he was not that interested in the collection “Classici”<sup>717</sup>, and was actually not enthusiastic about the publication of Nietzsche (Foà recalls: “It took me some energy to make him accept

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<sup>714</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 18.

<sup>715</sup> See Calasso, “Giardino Bazlen”.

<sup>716</sup> See Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 18.

<sup>717</sup> See Calasso, “Memoria, editoria, scrittura”.



the project of Nietzsche, author which nonetheless was not missing from Olivetti's editorial program [NEI]<sup>718</sup>). In spite of the fact that “most part of what [Adelphi] published in the first years came from Bazlen”, Foà argues that his position was that the publishing house “was born too late, in comparison to what he had accumulated in [...] many years (50 years!) of readings”<sup>719</sup>. Calasso also claims that Bazlen's idea of *singular books* “went contrary to the idea of complete works”<sup>720</sup>, an editorial praxis in later years adopted by Adelphi; and we may presume that Calasso's idea of Adelphi's catalogue as a unitary, “long, serpentine of pages” would have clashed with Bazlen's unsystematic inclination. As we will see, Bazlen acknowledged and took into consideration the necessity of a vast and defined editorial program, but we may conjecture that he viewed the new publishing house primarily as a vehicle for the works he most cherished or which he could not publish before. We agree with Piero Citati when he claims that Bazlen (“the funniest and most amiable of the consultant”), in comparison to Einaudi (“who dreamt of creating an Einaudian Italy”), “did not want to be an educator and a pedagogue [...] and [...] would have been highly displeased by an Adelphian Italy”<sup>721</sup> (and in this regard, we can extend this final observation to Foà and Calasso).

Bazlen actually displayed self-criticism and a certain discontent towards what he considered the “feeble and rather unimaginative” character of some of Adelphi's first publications<sup>722</sup>, towards which he at times was particularly harsh. He for instance wrote

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<sup>718</sup> Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 20-21.

<sup>719</sup> So Foà argues in Foà and Porzio, Interview.

<sup>720</sup> Calasso, *The art of the publisher*, 40-41.

<sup>721</sup> Pietro Citati, “Il sogno del Libro di tutti i libri”, *Corriere della Sera*, March 15, 2013.

<sup>722</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Voghera of January 18<sup>th</sup> 1964, in *Tracce del sapiente*, 75: “Bene che Adelphi ti sia piaciuta. Fa propaganda e fa andare i volumi [...]. Se vanno, potremo fare roba molto più inaspettata e inquietante, in caso contrario dobbiamo continuare nella forma blanda e piuttosto phantasielos [priva di

to Linder in occasion of Adelphi's 1964 special edition of Carlo Dossi's *Note azzurre*: “Luckily, I haven't seen the limited edition of Dossi's book; for that matter, the disgraceful text itself was for me already enough”<sup>723</sup>. Few days later he again addressed the issue, criticizing the book, and admitting that even though its publication might have been justified by the gloomy state of the Italian cultural and publishing environment, he nevertheless had never believed in History of Culture or Literary History, and that the only measure he had ever used in judging a book was his own “Verwandlung” (transformation): “that is the difference between Mr. Bazlen before reading a certain book and Mr. Bazlen after having read it. And after leafing through the Dossi for maybe an hour, Mr. Bazlen was a man who had lost an hour in bad company”<sup>724</sup>. Certainly, he concludes, the Italian cultural situation justifies the operation, “but who wants to think about that, at a time when we already start to feel claustrophobia of cosmos?”<sup>725</sup>.

Also in connection with the publishing house which realized his ideas the most, we thus recognize the posthumousness of Bazlen's figure and of his work, which could find its most complete but still partial and necessarily unfaithful realization only after his death (even in the most literal sense, since Bazlen barely managed to see printed the first

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fantasia] che hai visto”.

<sup>723</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Erich Linder, 30 Dec. 1964. Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1964: “Per fortuna, l'edizione di lusso del Dossi non l'ho vista, mi basta del resto la vergogna del testo”. In the same letter Bazlen also expresses his dissatisfaction for the covers of the collection “Biblioteca”: “A Luciano, per la parte esterna di 'Biblioteca', avevo già l'intenzione di scrivere una lettera molto energica per conto mio. Non so se servirà. [...] Per fortuna i classici non sono andati troppo (dico: troppo) male. [...] Poi ci sono stati i 'Saggi' [collection started in 1964] – che nascondo affinché nessuno li veda”.

<sup>724</sup> Bazlen, Roberto. Letter to Erich Linder, 5 Jan. 1965. Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale (ALI) – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1965: “L'unica misura che conosco è la mia Verwandlung [trasformazione]: cioè la differenza tra il signor Bazlen prima d'aver letto un certo libro e il signor Bazlen dopo averlo letto. E il signor Bazlen dopo aver sfogliato il Dossi per forse un'ora, era un uomo che aveva perso un'ora in cattiva compagnia”.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid.: “Of course, se pensiamo all'Italia, anzi a quell'Italia. Ma chi ci pensa in un momento in cui cominciamo già ad avere claustrofobia del cosmo?”.

three volumes of the collection “Biblioteca” in July 1965, just few days before his death<sup>726</sup>). In connection with the idea of Adelphi as the only publishing house which “corresponded to him totally”<sup>727</sup>, we might observe that, beyond the homage to such an important figure for the publishing house, we nevertheless assist to another (however virtuous) betrayal: Adelphi might indeed be the closest publishing house to Bazlen's ideas and inclinations, which though, for their own nature, seem realizable only through approximations, interpretations, and compromises. As Calasso argues, Bazlen constantly “looked for a 'new' that was new for him as well”<sup>728</sup>, and his letters show that his editorial research of “new” was first of all an extension of his curiosity as a reader<sup>729</sup>. The distance between the divulging aims intrinsic to any publishing project and the constant tension of his personal interests (his self-declared “claustrophobia of cosmos”) seems in fact to result in a resistance to direct realization. His editorial activity also thus reveal itself mostly as a tension which allows and drives others to realize their own projects, which may accomplish fragments, snapshots, or interpretations of a work which is appreciable

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<sup>726</sup> So Foà recollects in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 21.

<sup>727</sup> Calasso, “Giardino Bazlen”.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

<sup>729</sup> From Bazlen's letter to ALI we for instance learn of his scarce attachment to the book as object, and of his frequent requests of help in selling or bartering part of his library to restart his own culture “ab ovo”. In this regard, see his letter to Linder of February 28<sup>th</sup> 1956: “ho bisogno di molta agilità e voglio ridurre la mia Habe al minimo civilizzato indispensabile. Dei libri che ho qui, me ne porto via poche dozzine; tutto il resto, è Atombombenfutter [scoria nucleare]. [...] Ci tengo perchè il ricavato libri è destinato all'acquisto di oggetti veramente superflui che non si comperano mai” (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale [ALI] – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1956. File: Bazlen, Roberto). See also Bazlen's letter to Linder of December 13<sup>th</sup> 1956: “Ho finalmente ribaltato gran parte delle cose che dovevo ribaltare. [...] Ti chiedo in certe cose il tuo aiuto, al caso di aiutarmi a fare strani affari. Per esempio, per ricominciare a farmi una cultura ab ovo (qualche settimana fa ero giunto alla tabula rasa) ho bisogno di A. Pinakoff: The Tomb of Ramesses”; after proposing a possible barter with a second edition of Rilke's letters, Bazlen claims: “Con questo metodo, investo cultura passata in cultura futura, e arrivo ai libri che attualmente mi sono essenziali, senza tutti i Restbestaende [rimanenze] di una biblioteca passée che non sarebbe che un peso morto, e che finirebbe male com'è finita la prima” (Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori. Collection: Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale [ALI] – Erich Linder. Series: Corrispondenza, 1956. File: Bazlen, Roberto).

more for its influence than for a precisely identifiable legacy.

#### 4. The Critical Criteria: Against *the Love*, *the Art*, and *the Immortal Principles*

Reviving and developing Stuparich's portrait of Bazlen as horizontal reader, Rolando Damiani has described Bazlen's unwillingness of “moving on the critical level” and of “acting as an intellectual” as a refusal to engage in the vertical exercise of literary criticism in favor of a horizontal discourse<sup>730</sup>. Bazlen's approach to reading, Damiani writes, is horizontal, such as the one of “who, lying on a bed, reads with his head raised by the pillows”, position which implies “a state of complete receptivity”<sup>731</sup>. His discourse is not the one of the critic, but rather the one of a man “nourished by books” who towards them allows himself “the highest freedom”, and whose critical gesture is founded first of all on the license of his “individual hypersensitivity”<sup>732</sup>. This does not imply an amateurish approach, but rather the possibility not to remain entangled in the categories of speculation: the “horizontality of reading” allows, rather than knowledge (whose direction Damiani describes as vertical), the possibility to understand and experience what is or presents itself as impossible or paradoxical<sup>733</sup>. If it is therefore arguably vain to try to identify a systematical and coherent critical method behind Bazlen's literary and publishing choices, it is still possible to isolate some of the criteria behind his indications

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<sup>730</sup> See Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 90.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>733</sup> See *ibid.*, 92.

and judgements – criteria which furthermore seem to a certain extent to remain constant and consistent through the years, being them the fruits, rather than of cultural positions, of personal and intellectual inclinations.

Besides the notes and the aphorisms of *Note senza testo*, there are only few unpublished articles in which Bazlen directly addresses cultural and literary issues, which are though abundantly addressed in his letters. Especially his editorial correspondence in fact, although being directed at illustrating particular works, often presents extemporary but also complex and enlightening general considerations on literary issues, which suggest, in flashes, the actual range and depth of Bazlen's literary reflection. In these letters, mostly addressed to friends (such as Foà, Solmi, Linder), we may actually argue that we find Bazlen's finest writing: in his few (mostly unfinished) articles, despite their remarkable critical intuitions, we can observe some uncertainties, maybe a lack of conviction or a sort of uneasiness with the article form (or maybe even with the idea of writing for publishing itself). This rigidity<sup>734</sup> cannot be found in Bazlen's letters, in which he displays, together with ruthless judgements or unconditioned approvals, his wit and irony, his constant love of paradoxes, and often a trenchant and iconoclastic tone. The critical gesture of this “eminently mercurial”<sup>735</sup> and oral man, materializes in fact in the written form only when addressed to an interlocutor (and in this regard, it has to be noticed that even most of Bazlen's articles have an interlocutory form, in which the author declares his presence and addresses the reader with a conversational tone, often as

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<sup>734</sup> In this regard, see also Guagnini's words in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 75: “Bisogna dire che [...] gli unici scritti prodotti per la pubblicazione (assai eventuali e improbabili [...]) sono più anonimi nello stile e di minor vigore di quanto lo siano le pagine di carattere più privato, anche se di taglio professionale (come molte *Lettere editoriali*)”.

<sup>735</sup> Calasso in Marcoaldi, “L'uomo che sapeva troppo”.

answering to a question<sup>736</sup>).

Bazlen's letters can only partially and indirectly illustrate his positions: they in fact address single works, and involve considerations on their characteristics and on the opportunity of their publication. La Ferla identifies though in Bazlen's editorial letters a "precise critical parameter", according to which the text, "initially judged through the elusive criterion of his own sensibility", is subsequently addressed "within a broad cultural perspective"<sup>737</sup>. This second operation is what within Bazlen's epistolary might reveal more of his positions.

A first observation that can be made regards the trajectory of Bazlen's cultural interests. His publishing work, including his Adelphian legacy, shows a predilection for the Mittel-European area, but in this regard we have to observe that this seems to be due primarily to two factors: the way he was employed by publishers (consultant for foreign literatures, and especially German ones), and the fact that the Mittel-European world was still vastly to be explored by the coeval publishing industry. As Solmi suggests, the Mittel-European background (exactly as his Triestinity, which Bazlen never disown, but which, as every origin, he considered limitative<sup>738</sup>), rather than a specialization, represented for Bazlen "a sort of central 'platform' from which the incomparable breadth of his curiosity would have unfold"<sup>739</sup>. Surely an ideal platform, considering the trajectory of Bazlen's subsequent cultural path: the novelty and radicalism of the culture

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<sup>736</sup> See the incipits of: "Il nazionalismo è veramente morto": "Come vuole che lo possa sapere?" (in La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 184); "Vi sono grandi uomini viventi in Germania": "Cosa vuole che le risponda?" (*Note senza testo*, 262); "Intervista su Trieste": "Dunque... però bada bene che non vivo a Trieste dal '34 [...]" (ibid., 242).

<sup>737</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 64.

<sup>738</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 204: "Provincia perché radice – ma noi abbiamo radice nel grande mondo".

<sup>739</sup> Solmi, "Nota", in *Lettere editoriali*, 268.

developed in the German world at the turn of the century displays itself clearly with the “literature of crisis”, with psychoanalysis, and with the discovery of the Eastern world.

Bazlen's culture and inclinations find their basis in the diagnosis of the crisis of Western culture and civilization and of the very bourgeois culture and self, and they thus recognize their paradoxical foothold in the removal of previous certainties and conclusions. In 1963, writing to Foà about Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmel*, Bazlen recollects: “I remember the shocks when, just after 1920, I bumped for the first time into these kind of documents, which truly shattered my last (and already very vacillating) Western certainties”<sup>740</sup>. Such a disintegration is completed thanks to the studies of scholars such as Leo Frobenius, Rudolf Kassner, Alfred Weber<sup>741</sup>, and thanks to some of the great witnesses of the crisis of European culture and man: Nietzsche, Musil, Kafka, but also Hamsun, Strindberg, and the other “complicated men of the nineteenth-century: figures of dissolution, with no solution”<sup>742</sup>. This crisis seems to be by Bazlen cheerfully accepted (“So the West is in shards... shards bring luck...”<sup>743</sup>), and to foster his interest for extra-European philosophies, religions, and literatures, for psychology and psychoanalysis, and, through them, for parapsychology<sup>744</sup>.

The inclinations of his youth ripened in later years together with a progressively

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<sup>740</sup> Letter of June 14<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *ibid.*, 339: “Ricordo cos'erano gli shocks di quando, subito dopo il '20, sbattevo per la prima volta in documenti come questo, che mandavano veramente in frantumi le mie ultime (e già quella volta molto vacillanti) sicurezze occidentali”.

<sup>741</sup> In this regard, see Calasso's account in Grasso, *Tuttilibri*.

<sup>742</sup> *Note senza testo*, 183: “I grandi complicati dell'Ottocento: figure della dissoluzione, senza soluzioni”.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, 231: “Allora l'Occidente è in cocci... i cocci portano fortuna...”.

<sup>744</sup> Regarding Bazlen's estimation and interest for parapsychology, see his letter to Foà of July 25<sup>th</sup> 1964 on Rosalind Heywood's *The Sixth Sense* and *The Infinite Hive* (in *Lettere editoriali*, 346-347): “Se i 'saggi' [Adelphi] devono servire a portare qualcosa di nuovo, non ci resta che la parapsicologia: il nuovo nella matematica e nella fisica sono formule, che non potremo mai pubblicare; nelle altre scienze, risulta solo da lavori specializzati”.

more distinct intolerance for the literary datum<sup>745</sup>. As Calasso argues:

Bazlen had a marked impatience about writing. Paradoxically, considering that he spent his entire life among books, he regarded the book as a secondary result, which suggested there was something else behind it. [...] To understand this, it's worth remembering that Bazlen had grown up at a time when it was widely claimed that the pure literary word had a right to self-sufficiency, the years of Rainer Maria Rilke, of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, of Stefan George. And as a result he had developed certain allergies.<sup>746</sup>

The first being the one towards the inspired author possessed by the demon of writing (the “Dichter”, “the poet-creator”)<sup>747</sup>; the second, the one towards the self-sufficient refinement of style and language. In a note that reveals the actual significance and necessity of the paradoxicalness of Bazlen's aphorisms, we read: “A man lives and writes fine poetry. But if a man *does not* live to write fine poetry, how plain is the poetry of the man who *does not* live to write fine poetry”<sup>748</sup>.

What in a writer for Bazlen is unforgivable, is literary craftiness. He for instance writes on Heimito von Doderer's *Die Dämonen*:

I say it straightaway, I don't like him. Of course, the Leistung [performance] is noteworthy. In few words (I know it is inaccurate): suppose that Substanz and Leistung were divisible; one might then say that while in some fine writers of little substance (Thomas Mann; partially also Joyce) the Leistung becomes substance, in Doderer, on the contrary, it only hides and masks an absolute absence of substance, the pure void. There is nothing but a lot of craftiness [*furberia*], a great superficial elegance which does not compensate for the fundamental hybris, an extremely parasitical and (at the very end) banal intelligence, and a

<sup>745</sup> See for instance Bazlen's letter to Ponchirolì of August 25<sup>th</sup> 1962 in regard to some fictional works on which his opinion was requested: “Di ognuno, non ho letto che poche pagine: la mia intolleranza della narrativa è più acuta che mai” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>746</sup> Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 20.

<sup>747</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>748</sup> *Note senza testo*, 187: “Un tizio vive e fa bei versi. Ma se un tizio *non* vive per fare bei versi, come sono brutti i bei versi del tizio che *non* vive per fare bei versi” (the aphorism is one of the few originally in Italian).



demonic ambition. [...] Probably perfect as a “machine”, but *indescribably boring*.<sup>749</sup>

Stylistic and formal dedication, in the absence of “Substanz”, triggers Bazlen's irritation and irony. Thus William Gaddis' *The Recognitions* (a book “written and polished with such ambition and tenacity which can be taken for intensity and style”<sup>750</sup>) is nothing but a phony compendium of American high-brow culture (“a very shrewd forgery made by an extraordinarily sly forger”<sup>751</sup>); Edwin O'Connor's Pulitzer-winning *The Edge of Sadness*, in spite of its fine prose, is soporific<sup>752</sup>; and William Sansom's efforts in writing *The body*, besides being plainly grotesque, are a sign of the times:

I think [...] it's horrific that in Europe there is a man (among countless others, approximately just like him) who is not stupid, who possess non despicable qualities, who, on the personal level, is probably not so lousy; but who, for mysterious reasons – maybe because of the demon (but it is about time, at last, that we agree upon a hierarchy of literary demons) –, spends on a desk I don't know how many hours for a year, and racks his brain over the “creation” of a barber who is struggling with his inferiority complex towards a garage attendant. What world are we living in?<sup>753</sup>

On the contrary, the stylistic and general limitations (“the reasons of good taste”)

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<sup>749</sup> Bazlen to Foà, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1957, in *Lettere editoriali*, 284: “Premetto che non mi è simpatico. Of course, la Leistung [prestazione] è considerabile. Per cavarmela con poche parole (so che è inesatto) ammettiamo che Substanz e Leistung siano divisibili; si potrebbe allora dire che mentre in certi buoni scrittori di poca sostanza (Thomas Mann; in parte anche Joyce) la Leistung diventa sostanza, in Doderer invece non serve ad altro che a nascondere, a mascherare, una mancanza di sostanza assoluta, il vuoto puro. Non c'è che molta furberia, una grande eleganza superficiale che non compensa la hybris fondamentale, un'intelligenza molto parassitaria e, se gratti, molto banale, e un'ambizione demonica. [...] Probabilmente perfette come 'machine', ma di una *noia indicibile*”.

<sup>750</sup> Bazlen to Ponchiroli, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1962, in *ibid.*, 320: “scritto e lavorato con un'ambizione e una tenacia che possono passare per intensità e stile”.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*: “un falso molto abile fatto da un falsario eccezionalmente carogna”.

<sup>752</sup> See *ibid.*: “Buonissimo prosatore. Letto un centinaio di pagine. Dimenticato. Saputo che ha vinto il Pulitzer. Preso in mano. Letto una ventina di pagine. Addormentato. [...] Per me, l'ultimo romanzo irlandese della mia vita”.

<sup>753</sup> Bazlen to Foà, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1961, in *ibid.*, 309: “mi sembra [...] raccapricciante il fatto che in Europa ci sia un uomo (tra infiniti altri, circa come lui) non stupido, con doti non disprezzabili, umanamente probabilmente non troppo scadente, che chi sa perché, sarà il demone (ma sarebbe ora, finalmente, di stabilire anche una gerarchia dei demoni letterari), passa a tavolino, per un anno intero non so quante ore al giorno, rompendosi la testa per 'creare' un barbiere alle prese col suo senso d'inferiorità davanti a un garagista. In che mondo siamo?”.

of works which are considered fundamental because of their “Substanz” are more than tolerable. Such is the case of André Dhôtel's *Le plateau de Mazargan* (“In this case I don't feel like insisting, because I love it, and love is blind: and I see its flaws – my love is only short-sighted –, but they don't bother me”<sup>754</sup>), or of Carl Spitteler's *Imago*:

As a “classic”, it is not questionable – it is one of the direct determinant [...] of our recent culture [...]. The internal agility of the story is burdened by the way it is narrated, *qui date*, by some naiveties, pedantries, gaucheries, oversimplifications, stiffnesses, allegorisms [...]. And I know that the provincial démodé element might be a little disturbing. But the whole seems to me such a huge thing that the (superficial) reasons of “good taste” should fade into the background.<sup>755</sup>

As we have seen in his opinion on Svevo, especially in regards to novelists (“great amateurs” able to examine the inner frictions from which “uncertainty and doubt” rise<sup>756</sup>), for Bazlen literary cleverness actually represents a limit: “The fact that only bad writers can write great novels (the bigger the craftsmanship, the smallest the worlds)<sup>757</sup>. Certainly with some exceptions, such as Proust (“Thou shalt not take the name of Proust in vain”<sup>758</sup>, we read among Bazlen's notes), and of the ones whose ingenuity is excusable because of other virtues (such is the case of Claude Seignolle's *Un Corbeau de toutes couleurs*, which, in spite of the taste, passion, and demonic pleasure that the author

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<sup>754</sup> Bazlen to Foà, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1961, in *Lettere editoriali*, 307: “Qui non mi sento di insistere, perché lo amo, e l'amore è cieco: e i difetti li vedo (il mio amore è soltanto miope) ma non mi pesano”.

<sup>755</sup> Bazlen to Foà, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *ibid*, 338: “Come 'classico' mi pare non sia il caso di discuterlo – è uno dei determinanti diretti [...] della nostra cultura di qualche giorno fa [...]. L'agilità interna del racconto viene un po' appesantita dal modo di raccontare, *qui date*, da qualche ingenuità, qualche pedanteria, qualche gaucherie, qualche semplicismo, qualche legnosità, qualche allegorismo [...]. E comprendo che l'elemento démodé provinciale possa un po' disturbare. Ma l'insieme mi pare una cosa così grossa che le ragioni di 'buon gusto' (superficiali) dovrebbero passare in secondo piano”.

<sup>756</sup> “Prefazione a Svevo”, in *Note senza testo*, 240.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.*, 189: “Il fatto che solo dei cattivi scrittori possono scrivere grandi romanzi (quanto maggiore l'arte, quanto più piccoli i mondi).

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, 233: “Non nominare invano il nome di Proust” (originally in Italian).

displays in his writing, is still praisable for its ambiguity and uncanniness<sup>759</sup>). This intolerance for polished writing is an early idiosyncrasy of Bazlen, who already in 1925 so expresses to Montale his opinion on Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*: “Extremely delicate and very enjoyable. Fortunately not excessively well written”<sup>760</sup>.

As evident by the argumentations of his editorial letters, a further allergy of Bazlen concerns conventional critical criteria, and more broadly any theoretical perspective which pretends to explain or exhaust the interpretation of a text. Addressing Bazlen's “complete detachment from any theoretical framework [and] cultural fashion”, Solmi argues:

It is not that he was indifferent to them, quite the opposite: see how [...] he effortlessly employs them to color the case of an author and the characteristics of a book. But he seems utterly detached; he seems concerned in disentangling himself from them [...], and in considering them merely as backgrounds and streaks of a vast and moving panorama, where past and present ideas fade away and change and contrast with each other like the elements of a landscape to the eyes of a wayfarer.<sup>761</sup>

Bazlen's letters indeed testify of his solid, vast, and deep literary, cultural, and artistic grounding. Bazlen was in fact extremely well informed about European and Northern American literatures and on coeval theoretical perspectives. Still, his observations or

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<sup>759</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of July 14<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 339-340: “Seignolle è un industriale [...] che scrive, e che ha un grosso difetto: il gusto, la passione dello scrivere. Per cui in tutto quello che scrive si sente il gusto, la passione, il piacere demonico-artigianale del domare la frase, e del far nascere la vita dalla carta bianca, la quale poi (vedere il caso esemplare di Thomas Mann) in forma di carta sporca diventa la pietra tombale della vera vita. Per fortuna è molto meno bravo di Thomas Mann, e perfino molto più ambiguo [...] per cui la bella pagina gliela perdono volentieri. Messa al passivo la bella pagina, rimane in ogni caso in attivo [...] un uomo simpatico, disinvolto, con una vita piena, con grossi interessi folkloristici, per un floklore vissuto in un modo inafferrabilmente ambiguo (con un distacco quasi illuministico e una partecipazione quasi primitiva), con un senso [...] per l'*uncanny* [...] che mi disorienta”.

<sup>760</sup> Bazlen to Montale, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1925, in *Lettere a Montale*, 360: “Delicatissimo e molto simpatico. Scritto, fortunatamente, non eccessivamente bene”.

<sup>761</sup> Solmi, “Nota”, in *Lettere editoriali*, 268.

comments on general literary and theoretical issues are mostly incidental, and rarely represent the main topic or reveal themselves to be the perspective thanks to which a work is approached; they rather generate from the contextualization of a specific text. Bazlen refuses the detached position of the scientist of letters, and generally does not resort to critical jargon and categories. In his editorial letters the language is plain, and his discourse mostly oscillates between the poles of good sense and paradoxicalness. Analogously to the portrait of the extremely experienced but at the same time almost candid man we have mentioned in the previous chapter, Bazlen's approach to literary and cultural issues demonstrates simultaneously vast and deep competence and disarming common sense.

See in this regard his opinion on Hans Schär's *Erlösungsvorstellungen und ihre psychologischen Aspekte*. In his letter to Einaudi Bazlen first of all admits his “embarrassment in taking a not excessively favorable position towards an absolutely exemplary work for life commitment, competence, and inner integrity”, especially considering that “at least part of [his] reservations are due to personal idiosyncrasies”<sup>762</sup>. After some general observations on the book and on its possible editorial positioning, Bazlen argues: “The problem (always from my perspective, but mind that I am not making a boutade, which would be too easy) is the fact that the book is written by a Swiss, and by a theologian. And you can tell it”<sup>763</sup>. With a strategy common to other

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<sup>762</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Fonzi of May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1951: “Ho tardato molto a scriverle di questo libro, per quel comprensibile imbarazzo che si prova quando si tratta di prendere una posizione non eccessivamente favorevole contro un'opera assolutamente esemplare per impegno di vita, solidità delle conoscenze e pulizia intima. E tanto più, quando si deve riconoscere che una parte almeno delle riserve è dettata da idiosincrasie personali” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.: “Ciò che va meno bene, invece (sempre dalla mia prospettiva – ma badi che non intendo fare una

letters, Bazlen then proceeds to elaborate on what indeed appears as a boutade based on commonplaces: his “perplexity towards that curious human case represented by the Swiss theologian [...] of today” is motivated by the book's (Swiss) prolixity, disarming candor, gaucherie, and inner inconsistency; Bazlen's problem with the theologian concerns the excessive prominence accorded by the author to Christian and Western issues<sup>764</sup>:

Now: you might object that his tongue turns to his aching tooth, and that I demand it to turn to *my* aching tooth. And I don't know what to reply. Maybe I can get off with the observation – which I would sell as statistics – that right now, in Europe, my toothache is more endemic. But I know that this isn't a good argument.<sup>765</sup>

The first trenchant opinion is thus expanded and integrated with considerations of editorial and cultural nature, and even the openly declared personal impatience for some aspects of the book is contextualized within editorial considerations.

In his probably most famous editorial letter, the one on Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Bazlen uses a similar strategy. He opens his long letter on the novel with an enthusiastic opinion on it<sup>766</sup>, to subsequently express some concerns:

On the other hand, it is very debatable in regard to the editorial-commercial perspective. Here I need to be the devil's advocate. And as the devil's advocate, I have four objections. The novel is 1°) too long 2°) too fragmentary 3°) too slow (or boring, or difficult, or whatever) 4°) too

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boutade, che sarebbe troppo facile), è che il libro è scritto da uno svizzero, e da un teologo. E lo si sente”.

<sup>764</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*: “Qui, lei mi può obiettare che la sua lingua batte dove il dente duole a lui, e che io pretendo che batta dove duole a me. Ed io non so cosa risponderle. Forse me la caverei con la constatazione, che farei passare per statistica, che in questo momento, in Europa, è più epidemico il mal di denti mio. Ma siamo d'accordo che non è un vero argomento”.

<sup>766</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of June 12<sup>th</sup> 1951, in *Lettere editoriali*, 273: “Come livello, non si discute, e (malgrado le riserve che vi farò ed infinite altre che si possono fare) va pubblicato ad occhi chiusi. Come valore sintomatico in ogni singola pagina, come valore assoluto in moltissime parti, rimane una delle faccende più grosse tra tutti i grandi esperimenti di narrativa non conformista, fatti dopo la prima guerra mondiale, quasi tutte opere basate sul predominio di un'unica funzione, usata fin oltre i limiti permessi dalla pedanteria (Joyce, per esempio, l'associazione sonora; Musil, la precisione di pensiero)”.

Austrian.<sup>767</sup>

The final boutade is this time also subsequently developed, as the previous three points, within considerations of editorial nature<sup>768</sup>. The colloquial and playful tone of Bazlen's editorial letters is certainly due to his own disposition, to his refusal of professional coldness, and at least in part intended for the amusement of his interlocutors<sup>769</sup>. His categories are nevertheless keen and effective in describing the nature of the analyzed works, through the strategy of developing the initial paradoxical or caustic personal judgments in detailed considerations without recurring to literary jargon or adopting specific critical perspectives.

Bazlen's irony on literary professionalism, especially if connected with academia, is on the other hand ruthless. He for instance writes about the much appreciated *The Hidden Remnant* by Gerald Skyes': "It's the first book of this kind that doesn't smell of college and foundation"<sup>770</sup>. His contempt for academia, and especially for the American

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<sup>767</sup> Ibid., 273-274: "Da discutersi molto, invece, da un punto di vista editoriale-commerciale. Qui, devo fare l'avvocato del diavolo. E come avvocato del diavolo, ho quattro argomenti. Il romanzo è 1°) troppo lungo 2°) troppo frammentario 3°) troppo lento (o noioso, o difficile, o come vuoi chiamarlo) 4°) troppo austriaco".

<sup>768</sup> See *ibid.*, 275: "4°) troppo austriaco: il tutto si svolge su uno sfondo implicito dell'Austria prima del '14, ed è carico di allusioni a forme di vita, abitudini, istituzioni, machines burocratiche, ecc. di quel mondo, poco familiari al lettore italiano. Non sarebbe un gran male, si pubblicano e si comprendono libri con premesse ben più lontane, ma qui c'è troppo che in traduzione deve andar perduto: la fisionomia dei nomi e dei cognomi, che sono di una sintomaticità e di una precisione clinica sbalorditiva, e che spesso basterebbero da soli a caratterizzare quasi completamente il personaggio; – un particolare négligé di dizione (non parlo di dialettismi, ma quasi di cadenze dicôteries) che crea 'l'atmosfera' e dà corpo ai personaggi, e che in italiano deve andare necessariamente perduto".

<sup>769</sup> If the letters published in *Lettere editoriali* are consistent in providing a portrait of Bazlen as a carefree, ironical, and paradox-loving writer of editorial opinions, the unpublished letters we consulted in the Einaudi and ALI archives are absolutely consistent for tone and approach, regardless of the addressee (the mentioned letter on Schär's work from the Einaudi's archive is in fact addressed to Fonzi and not the usual Foà, Solmi, or Linder).

<sup>770</sup> Bazlen to Foà, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 341: "è il primo libro di questo genere che non puzzi di college e foundation".

one (which was not particularly rare among the Italian intellectuals of the time<sup>771</sup>), is even more caustically expressed in regard to Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, book evidently appreciated by part of the Adelphi's entourage (and eventually published by Einaudi<sup>772</sup>), but despised by Bazlen. Kuhn's book is according to Bazlen emblematic of the academic world for its dulness and banality<sup>773</sup>, and for its actual aims:

Now: I unfortunately cannot prevent this little American guy from divulging this discovery of his and to subsequently be condemned to sterilization through foundations' grants and college teaching (to then write new books which he will dedicate to his parents, without whom, as you know, dear Luciano, the books would not have been written). This is something I must endure. But the implicit and almost arrogant pretension of teaching something to someone who didn't die before 1914 is so offensively naïve, that it seems to me that it's finally time to grab a whip and expel this breed from the temple. If nothing else, to chase off boredom.<sup>774</sup>

The private nature of Bazlen's critiques allows him the chance of this kind of unsparing and amused judgements. The list of Bazlen's infamous slatings is on the other hand

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<sup>771</sup> See for instance Emilio Cecchi's *America amara* (Firenze: Sansoni 1939; now in *Saggi e viaggi*, Milano: Mondadori, 1997, 1115-1523), especially the section “Intellettuai e dilettanti” (in *ibid.*, 1157-1162); see also Italo Calvino's letters collected in “Diario americano. 1959-1969” (in *Eremita a Parigi. Pagine autobiografiche*, Milano: Mondadori, 1994: 26-138), especially the paragraphs “Le borse di studio” (*ibid.*, 61) and “Il professore” (*ibid.*, 94).

<sup>772</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *La struttura delle rivoluzioni scientifiche*, Torino: Einaudi, 1969.

<sup>773</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of August 28<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 344: “Il Kuhn [...] ha avuto la rivelazione che la storia della scienza (che del resto, come fine a se stessa, è una disciplina che ti raccomando), non si svolge in una marcia prussiana rettilinea da scoperta culminante a scoperta culminante, ma – e direi come qualsiasi altro fenomeno della vita – attraverso esitazioni, contrasti, opposizioni, incomprensioni, sconfitte, dalle quali si cristallizza qualcosa che viene o definitivamente assodato o generalmente accettato, e che costituisce la base di partenza convenzionale per la prossima marcia non prussiana”.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*: “Ora, che un americanucolo tenti di divulgare questa sua rivelazione per farsi condannare alla sterilizzazione mediante i grants di qualche foundation e l'insegnamento in qualche college (per poi scrivere altri libri che dedicherà ai suoi genitori, senza i quali, come sai, caro Luciano, i libri non sarebbero stati scritti) è un fatto che disgraziatamente non posso impedire, e che subisco. Ma che implicitamente ci sia la pretesa quasi arrogante di insegnare qualcosa a qualcuno che non sia morto prima del '14, è di un'ingenuità così offensiva che sarebbe ora, finalmente, di prendere la frusta in mano per cacciare tutta questa genia dal tempio. E se non altro, per difendersi dalla noia”.

considerable, and includes authors and works today considered untouchable classics of twentieth-century culture. In this regard see his opinion on Georges Bataille (“the caricature of an aestheticizing and self-compassionate small neurotic”<sup>775</sup>), or his reservations on Walter Benjamin's *Einbahnstrasse*, which, reexamined for Einaudi years after first reading it, urges him to remark that “some diamonds, with time, become adamantine banalities”<sup>776</sup>. For Bazlen books are organisms that age, or rather: which may or may not find their own place and necessity according to the times and to the cultural landscape.

Bazlen's editorial letters are often opinionated, and at times consciously and professedly biased; occasionally they are even declaredly influenced by his physical or psychological state. Such is the case of his editorial opinion on Pierre Jean Jouve's *Le monde désert*, read during a feverish and “hellish” trip on a sleeping-car in Switzerland, and whose worth and clinical precision is recognized thanks to the correspondence of Bazlen's state of mind with the one of the narrator<sup>777</sup>. Sadègh Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* is read under similar circumstances, and Bazlen, conscious that his first opinion might have been influenced by the consonance of the narrator's delirium with his own during a

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<sup>775</sup> Bazlen to Foà, August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963, in *ibid.*, 341: “la caricatura di un piccolo 'nevrotico' estetizzante e pieno di auto-compassione”.

<sup>776</sup> “**BENJAMIN**: State un po' attenti prima di fare il contratto [...]. Te lo dico, perché dopo che me ne hai parlato, ho riletto 'Einbahnstrasse' che è un vero orrore. [...] Certi diamanti, col tempo, diventano banalità adamantine” (Roberto Bazlen. Letter to Luciano Foà, 2 October 1956. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>777</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1960, in *Lettere editoriali*, 299: “Qui c'entra un fatto personale. [...] In treno faceva freddo, avevo passato una notte irritante sulle ruote, avevo una sgradevole impressione di febbre, mi sono nuovamente sentito sfiorato dalla polmonite. Per cacciare questa sensazione, prendo in mano il libro dove l'avevo lasciato, e mi trovo davanti al monologo durante il delirio di una polmonite. Letto a freddo, forse mi sarebbe sembrato voluto, artificiale, tirato per i capelli, - ma letto in quelle condizioni mi sono accorto che era di una precisione fotografica, e tutto quello che avrebbe potuto sembrare 'stile' non era che una geniale economia. Ho letto di un fiato tutto il libro sotto questo segno, e devo dire che mi ha 'gepackt' [avvinto]”.



feverish pneumonia, proceeds in rereading the novel, to finally confirm his first enthusiastic impression<sup>778</sup>.

The admission of the role played by the circumstances in allowing him to appreciate a work is not only significant in the direction of the comprehension of Bazlen's approach to reading, but also reveals the precaution with which he introduces his opinions to his interlocutors. His own idiosyncrasies and prejudices are often expressed in advance, and at times in Bazlen's letters we find the description of the process through which they are overcome. Such is the case of Maurice Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire*, towards the author of which Bazlen confesses a certain previous impatience:

With these premises, I started to leaf through *L'Espace littéraire*, initially only reluctantly, and then also extremely annoyed by finding him not as annoyingly spiritually acrobatic as I thought he was; until I found myself in front of the chapter "Le Regard d'Orphée", and that's when I started striving, for too many previous experiences taught me that when Orpheus is involved (and let's not talk about Eurydice!) I find the solution of all my intolerance. And I found myself in front of six beautiful pages, written not on this side nor beyond the watershed; pages in which the elusive paradoxicalness of the relationship between artist and work is expressed as I have never seen before.<sup>779</sup>

As we will see, Blanchot's merit is of being able to seize and express "the watershed" of the relationship between artist and work, which is a crucial motif for Bazlen

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<sup>778</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of March 9<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *ibid.*, 291-292: "Ti ho detto che è stato il primo libro che abbia letto a Londra, durante la polmonite, e che s'era incastrato in certi semideliri della febbre che ho avuto durante il viaggio. E quanto ti ho scritto potrebbe sembrare troppo determinato dal momento in cui l'ho letto. Ti avviso quindi che l'ho riletto 'a freddo', lentamente e con la testa attenta, circa tre settimane dopo – col risultato che ho trovato la trama ancora più stretta, e certi eccessi ancora più giustificati".

<sup>779</sup> Bazlen to Foà, April 9<sup>th</sup> 1961, in *ibid.*, 306: "Con queste premesse, mi sono messo a sfogliare *L'Espace littéraire* dapprima soltanto di malavoglia, poi anche irratissimo di trovarlo meno irratamente acrobata spirituale di quanto lo credessi, finché mi sono trovato davanti al capitolo 'Le Regard d'Orphée', e qui mi sono messo d'impegno, perché per troppe esperienze precedenti so che quando c'è di mezzo Orfeo (e Euridice poi!) trovo la chiave di tutta la mia intolleranza. E mi sono trovato davanti a sei pagine stupende, scritte non al di qua né al di là ma sullo spartiacque, dove la paradossalità inafferrabile del rapporto artista opera è espressa come non l'ho trovata espressa mai".

(“Spartiacque” was contemplated as one of the possible names for Adelphi<sup>780</sup>).

The moodiness and quirkiness of Bazlen's counsels are part of the pact with his interlocutors. Nonetheless, as particularly evident by his editorial opinions for Einaudi, Bazlen was not unconcerned with the exigencies of the publishers he collaborated with. His notes on Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* might be illustrative of the above-mentioned points:

Here it gets complicated. On the one hand, we agree that I write to you with absolute unscrupulousness and exclusively on the basis of my impressions on books, with no regards for general intellectual conventions nor for the ones of Einaudi in particular; on the other hand, there are many books which, a priori and regardless of their subject and worth, are not your thing.<sup>781</sup>

At times, after expressing and motivating a negative opinion on a book, Bazlen suggests to have it read also by someone else<sup>782</sup>. Other times, in spite of his irritation or dislike for a work, he nevertheless recommends its publication. In this regard, see his letter on Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*:

It's a book by a little, causality-obsessed maniac [...]. I found it rather annoying, and, as for me, I would like to pull the plug on causal Geistesgeschichte; even a confused and awful astrology book can show you more than what hundreds of these petty monomaniacal perspectives can make you think. On the other hand, he formulated the problem in a way that might represent a progress for most Italians; and I must admit that – even if it is nothing more than virtuosity on a one-string instrument

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<sup>780</sup> See Marco Belpoliti, “I fratelli della luna nuova”, *La Stampa – Tuttolibri*, June 22, 2002, 12.

<sup>781</sup> Roberto Bazlen. Letter to Luciano Foà, 2 June 1960. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen: “Qui la faccenda si complica: da un lato siamo d'accordo che io ti scrivo con assoluta spregiudicatezza e unicamente in base all'impressione che i libri fanno a me, senza riguardi per le convenzioni intellettuali generali né per quelle delle edizioni Einaudi in particolare – d'altra parte ci sono molti libri che, indipendentemente dal loro soggetto e del loro valore, a priori non fanno per voi”.

<sup>782</sup> Such is the case of Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*, appreciated but nevertheless turned down: “per cautela faresti bene a farlo leggere a qualcun altro. Per quello che mi riguarda, sono costretto a dirti di no [...]. Peccato. Le malheur de n'être pas high-brow” (Bazlen to Foà, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *Lettere editoriali*, 298).

– there are some intuitions on the interpretation of the materials that I found truly “enlightening”. So: hélas, yes.<sup>783</sup>

The above-quoted letter (sent to Foà at Adelphi) also shows that pedagogical and divulging concerns were not completely foreign to Bazlen<sup>784</sup>. However, as his letter to Adelphi on Bruno Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart. Autonomy in Mass Age* suggests, he was rather opinionated on the threshold from which the pedagogical function inherent to his editorial activity should have started: “I perfectly understand that there is people who still don't get it and need to be educated. But we got to agree on the starting point from which to begin education. On the contrary, we'd better give up the publishing house and give the money to the organization against illiteracy, or publish reading books for the first grade”<sup>785</sup>.

Among the reasons of the scarce success of Bazlen's collaboration with Einaudi there was his incompatibility with the publisher's interpretation of its pedagogical role, and with the political and ideological orientation of its cultural program, towards which, particularly in the last period of their collaboration, Bazlen expressed plain sarcasm. He for instance writes to Ponchioli with regard to Christopher Burney's *Solitary*

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<sup>783</sup> Bazlen to Foà, December 5<sup>th</sup> 1962, in *ibid.*, 329-330: “È il libro di un piccolo maniaco, ossessionato dalla causalità [...]. Mi ha piuttosto irritato, e per conto mio vorrei farla finita con la Geistesgeschichte causale; un libro, anche confuso e pessimo di astrologia, fa vedere di più di quanto facciano pensare centinaia di queste piccole prospettive monomani. D'altra parte, il modo in cui ha impostato il problema, per gran parte degli italiani può significare un passo avanti; e devo anche dire che nell'interpretazione del materiale, per quanto si tratti di virtuosismo su una corda sola, qualche volta ci sono delle intuizioni che mi hanno veramente 'illuminato'. Dunque: hélas si”.

<sup>784</sup> In this regard, see also his opinion on Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death*: “È un libro intelligente chiaro, pensato fino in fondo. [...] Insegna a leggere e a pensare Freud [...]. Di libri importanti e stimolanti, ne escono pochi. E perché, stimolati noi, evitare che vengano stimolati gli altri? Gli altri (e particolarmente in Italy) ne hanno più bisogno di noi” (Bazlen to Foà, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *ibid.*, 301-302).

<sup>785</sup> Bazlen to Foà, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1962, in *ibid.*, 325: “Capisco benissimo che esiste della gente che non c'è ancora arrivata e che va educata. Ma dobbiamo metterci d'accordo sul limite da cui cominciare l'educazione. In caso contrario conviene mollare la casa editrice e dare i soldi alla società contro l'analfabetismo o pubblicare i libri di lettura per la prima”.

*Confinement*: “It’s a book that tells of an experience, and I know that, as a rule, you don’t want to do them. But since you made many exceptions when dealing with war, Resistance, and bad Germans, I suggest you not to reject it before you have carefully looked through it”<sup>786</sup>. In this regard, we argue that Bazlen’s self-declared “anti-fascism” might be interpreted in the light of his contempt for the conformist and paternalist drifts of post-war antifascist culture (“Italy is bad at losing wars”<sup>787</sup>, we read among his notes; and again, in a letter to Boringhieri: “every fascism has the antifascism it deserves”<sup>788</sup>). Analogously, Bazlen’s impatience for neorealism (both cinematographic and literary), seems to have its roots in the normativity he recognizes in it, in its being part of a “pitiful” hegemonic culture. He writes to Foà about Benoîte and Flora Groult’s *Journal à Quatre Mains* (novel he has fallen in love with<sup>789</sup>, but whose publication he nonetheless considers extremely hazardous):

two extraordinary portraits of two girls of the race of the masters (not to be mistaken with the Herrenrasse) that need to be put under the nose of Italian women, the race of the skivvies. To avoid misunderstandings: master of their own bodies, of their souls, of their spirits, *of their freedom*. [...]. I am not trying to convince you, because assuming responsibility of its publication means assuming the responsibility of your martyrdom. Because “Adelphi” would face martyrdom, allegations of frivolousness and snobbery, implicit discredit, and, worst: Montenapoleone. In Italy, everything that is not neorealist, provincial, or university misery is Montenapoleone. And the only licit way of having suffered the Germans is

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<sup>786</sup> Bazlen to Ponchiroli, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1962, in *ibid.*, 319: “È un libro che racconta un’esperienza e so che in genere non volete farli. Ma poiché avete fatto varie eccezioni quando si tratta di guerra, resistenza e cattivi tedeschi, ti consiglierai di non scartarlo senza avergli dato un’occhiata molto attenta”. Burney’s book was eventually published by Adelphi (Christopher Burney, *Cella d’isolamento*, Milano: Adelphi, 1968).

<sup>787</sup> *Note senza testo*, 202: “l’Italia non sa perdere le guerre” (originally in Italian).

<sup>788</sup> Bazlen to Boringhieri, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1961, qtd. in Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 285: “ogni fascismo ha l’antifascismo che si merita – vecchio proverbio cinese fatto in questo momento e che ti dedico”.

<sup>789</sup> “[...] sono innamorato e l’amore non ragiona (ma non è vero che l’amore renda ciechi. Apre gli occhi)” (Bazlen to Foà, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 336).

of having become a pitiful case. Now: I find pitiful cases pitiful, and I will be always willing to contribute so that there won't be other ones. But I'm fed up with the confusion over the categories produced by the will of reducing them to the single common denominator of physical suffering, of physical death [...]. And there is a wide gulf between the mediocrity of the life of all the poor Anna Frank and Simone Weil and the greatness of the Groult sisters [...], for they have that greatness [...] of the ones who are so alive that they survive *to live*.<sup>790</sup>

In his private writings, with no haughtiness or hypocrisy, Bazlen displays clear self-consciousness of his own cultural preparation and status. More in polemic with the condescending positions of fellow intellectuals than with the working-class itself, he writes among his notes: “Change with a proletarian – I carry the bags, he can read Mallarmé”<sup>791</sup>. We can safely interpret this kind of statements not as a classist stance, but rather as an anti-rhetorical criticism against a levelling conformism – not the one of “the race of the skivvies”, but primarily the one of his peers. In this regard, his observations on the above-mentioned *The Informed Heart* are particularly eloquent in describing his positions. In his letter to Foà Bazlen admits of having appreciated part of the book, but also of having otherwise detested the work because of his own impatience with the debate on mass-society and alienation (Calasso recollects that Bazlen could not even stand

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<sup>790</sup> Ibid., 336-337: “due straordinari ritratti di due bambine della razza dei padroni (da non confondersi con Herrenrasse) da mettere sotto il naso delle italiane, della razza delle sguattere. Per evitare malintesi: padroni del proprio corpo, della propria anima, del proprio spirito, *della propria libertà*. [...] Non voglio convincerti, perché [...] assumermi la responsabilità della pubblicazione significherebbe anche assumermi la responsabilità del tuo martirio. Perché 'Adelphi' andrebbe incontro al martirio, accuse di frivolezza, di snobismo, squalifica implicita, e peggio: Montenapoleone. In Italia tutto quello che non è miseria neorealista, provinciale o universitaria è Montenapoleone. E l'unico modo lecito di aver subito i tedeschi è di essere diventati un caso pietoso. Ora i casi pietosi mi fanno pietà, e sarò sempre disposto a contribuire perché non ce ne siano degli altri. Ma sono stufo della confusione di categorie che s'è creata per aver voluto ridurle tutte all'unico determinatore comune della sofferenza fisica, della morte fisica [...]. E tra la mediocrità di vita delle povere Anne Frank e delle povere Simone Weil e la grandezza delle sorelle Groult c'è un abisso [...], perché hanno quella grandezza [...] dove si è così vivi che si sopravvive *per vivere*”.

<sup>791</sup> *Note senza testo*, 202: “cambio con un proletario – io porto i sacchi, lui legga Mallarmé” (originally in Italian).

Adorno, whose dialectic of enlightenment he considered a “dead-end”<sup>792</sup>). “The reaction against the mass is a banality”, Bazlen argues: of course the first ones who understood, problematized, and expressed the danger of the mass were not expressing banalities, but the danger is now “for us” not the mass (“with which we have nothing in common”), but the “anti-mass mass” (“with which we can still choose if we want to share something or not”): this anti-mass mass is “an anti-herd herd that reacts against the prefabricated world with prefabricated reactions; in this case with a prefabricated terminology that I believe is more dangerous than the one of the mass”<sup>793</sup>. For Bazlen any intellectual discourse has a meaning only if it reverberates on the strictly personal level:

It's not about fighting morons; it's about creating a world with which morons have nothing to do. [...] Everyone reacts only against his own inner banality. There is no mass in me; hence, I don't get angry with the mass. I have in me a different banality, the banal reaction against the mass. And I get angry with the Bettelheims who react against the mass with what have become mass words.<sup>794</sup>

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<sup>792</sup> See Marcoaldi, “L'uomo che sapeva troppo”, 35.

<sup>793</sup> Bazlen to Foà, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1962, *Lettere editoriali*, 322-323: “un gregge anti-gregge che reagisce contro il mondo prefabbricato con reazioni prefabbricate, nel nostro caso con una terminologia prefabbricata che mi sembra più pericolosa di quella della massa”.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, 322: “Non si tratta di combattere contro i deficienti; si tratta di crearci un mondo in cui i deficienti non c'entrano. [...] Ognuno non reagisce che contro la banalità che ha in sé. Io non ho massa in me; dunque non mi arrabbio con la massa. Ho in me un'altra banalità, la reazione banale contro la massa. E mi arrabbio con i Bettelheim che reagiscono alla massa con parole diventate di massa”. Net of the personal idiosyncrasies, Bazlen's opinion on Bettelheim's book was motivated also by editorial concerns. He was in fact particularly critical towards it because the book could have been read as programmatic for the newborn Adelphi: “Pubblicarlo ora, tra i primi libri (tra cinque anni sarebbe uno dei tanti, dei moltissimi, e verrebbe neutralizzato dagli altri) mi sembra troppo un programma, una presa di posizione: propaganda per l'Usis, per il mondo chiuso del welfare” (*ibid.*, 324). Bazlen actually shared everything Bettelheim had written, but was critical towards the partiality of the scholar's perspective: “Ti ripeto che non posso che sottoscrivere quello che dice – a condizione che lo consideri un puro galateo pratico. Ma disgraziatamente è un galateo che sottintende, anzi postula che tutta la 'psicologia' (chi sa cosa vuol dire) sia quella miseria là [...]. In altri termini: Nessuno di noi vuole che alla gente cada una tegola in testa. Per questo siamo anche disposti a pubblicare un libro che dica alla gente di stare attenta quando va per la strada (manuale del Pedone). Ma pubblicarlo dando la sensazione, anzi in modo che confermi e non lasci possibilità di dubbio, che tutta la fisica [...] si risolve nella legge di gravità, e ora che l'abbiamo capita possiamo metterci a dormire, è un altro paio di maniche” (*ibid.*). Bettelheim's book would have been nevertheless published by Adelphi in 1965 with the title *Il prezzo della vita. L'autonomia individuale in una società di massa*.

For Bazlen, who believed that “the worst enemy is the enemy who shares our own arguments”<sup>795</sup>, the cultural commitment necessarily implied by any publishing endeavor is interpreted with a firm anti-paternalistic attitude (“the level of Italian readers [is] infinitely superior to what is commonly believed”<sup>796</sup>, we read in one of his letters), and with a chronic impatience for the central themes and perspectives of the contemporary cultural debate – not necessarily for their contents, but primarily for the very fact of being hegemonic or predominant, and therefore, in his opinion, already banal, useless, or outdated. The reading experience – and, more generally, every cultural experience – is for Bazlen first of all a personal and existential one, which necessarily but only secondarily affects the collective dimension. In this light, it is possible to recognize an ethical and dialectical value to Bazlen's entire publishing work, which mostly concerned original, ignored, or even ostracized books, perspective, and themes.

The fact that in his writings and letters (and, from what we learn from several accounts, also in his conversation) cannot be found declarations of principles in direction of an ethical commitment, does not allow to come to the conclusion that he refused or neglected its value. “I know I will not succeed, [...] but I would like for Adelphi to never publish the word 'ethics'”, Bazlen writes in 1963 to Voghera, “the too many abstract words, the juggling of concepts – which I know were surely justified – [...] are beginning to be too worn out”<sup>797</sup>. It is in this perspective that we can interpret his merciless

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<sup>795</sup> *Note senza testo*, 204: “Il nemico peggiore è il nemico che ha i nostri argomenti”.

<sup>796</sup> Bazlen to Foà, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1951, in *Lettere editoriali*, 278: “il livello dei lettori italiani [è] infinitamente più alto di quanto si ritenga comunemente”.

<sup>797</sup> Bazlen to Voghera, August 27<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Tracce del sapiente*, 59: “E proprio per evitare le troppe parole astratte, le jongleries di concetti, che so quanto siano stati giustificati, ma che cominciano a essere

judgement on José Orabuena's *Gross ist deine treue* (“It is so human, kind, just, smooth, clean, well intentioned, and genuinely lived and suffered that I actually have the bad conscience of spitting in his face all the poison he deserves”<sup>798</sup>), or the enthusiastic one on Witold Gombrowicz's satirical *Ferdydurke*: “Absolutely yes!!! I had a ball; and it's one of the fairest allies one can find in the revolution against *the love, the art, the immortal principles*, and all that crap. [...] It's a very respectable book, and a very healthy one”<sup>799</sup>. “Respectable” and “healthy” are the works that help in the revolution against “*il amore, la arte, gli immortali principi*” (revolution advocated by Bazlen also in other letters of this period<sup>800</sup>); the works which offer a “counterpoison” against the too many banal published books<sup>801</sup>; the works which have the impact of Alexander Dorner's *Überwindung der “Kunst”*: “It didn't only make me really think, but it also made me feel ashamed of all the prejudices I have, and of too many only half-thought ideas I had”<sup>802</sup>.

Bazlen recommends indiscriminately good books by non-writers (such as Kubin's *The Other Side*) or bad books by “true writers” (such as William March's *The Looking-*

troppo logori. Vorrei evitare per esempio (ma non mi riuscirà) che l'Adelphi pubblichi mai la parola etica”.

<sup>798</sup> Bazlen to Foà, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1959, in *Lettere editoriali*, 290: “è così umano, buono, giusto, patinato, pulito, bene intenzionato e sinceramente vissuto e patito che ho una vera cattiva coscienza di sputargli addosso tutto il veleno che si merita”.

<sup>799</sup> Bazlen to Foà, December 15<sup>th</sup> 1958, in *Lettere editoriali*, 285: “Direi assolutamente di sì!!! Mi sono divertito un mondo e mezzo; ed'è uno degli alleati più onesti che si possano avere nella vera rivoluzione contro *il amore, la arte, gli immortali principi* e tutte le fregnacce che sai. [...] È un libro veramente rispettabile, e veramente sano”.

<sup>800</sup> See for instance Bazlen's letter to Foà of November 27<sup>th</sup> 1960 on Alexander Dorner's *Überwindung der “Kunst”*, in *Lettere editoriali*, 304: “ho un conto personale troppo aperto con *la arte e il amore* e i valori eterni e tutto il resto per poter giudicare con imparzialità”.

<sup>801</sup> See *ibid.*, 305: “Farlo senz'altro: ottimo contravveleno ai Worringer e ai molti libri di *Kunstgeschichte* che avete fatto e che farete”.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, 303-304: “non soltanto mi ha fatto pensare veramente, ma mi ha fatto anche veramente vergognare di tutti i pregiudizi che mi porto dietro, e di troppe idee che m'ero limitato a pensare solo a metà”.



*Glass*: “It’s a *beautiful* book [...] – I mean, maybe it’s a bad book, but the bad book by a TRUE writer”<sup>803</sup>). What the two categories of works have in common is their uniqueness, and the fact of being somehow extemporaneous, necessary in their expressive drive but lacking or deserting literary ambition (“Great works are made with no ambition / through ambition one makes only culture / a priori lack of destination”<sup>804</sup>). True works of art imply research, iconoclasm, indifference to the result. Gerald Sykes (the author of the treaty *The Hidden Remnant*) is a true writer: “He is what I believe a writer should be: he has something to say; what he says is directly experienced, personal; he tells it with his own, clear words; with great constant density”<sup>805</sup>; but so is also William March: “A mad man with his soul on edge, and whose images offers themselves to him so violently that he somehow manages to fix them, convey them, chew them and develop them – but he never suppresses them, thus he is forced to put *everything* within the book”<sup>806</sup>. March is a true writer not because he is capable of controlling his writing, of using his skills to realize a planned and well-pondered work, but rather because he is able to register and comply with an existential and psychological experience – just like the beloved August Strindberg, or like Sadègh Hedayàt, the author of *The Blind Owl*:

I don't know of any other story [...] in which, as in this one, all the realities (material reality, “psychic” reality, opium vision, karmic life) overlap, merge, are part of the person, are the person – but even the person

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<sup>803</sup> Bazlen to Foà, March 9<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *ibid.*, 292: “è un *bellissimo* libro [...] – cioè, forse è un brutto libro, ma il brutto libro di un VERO scrittore”.

<sup>804</sup> *Note senza testo*, 208: “La grande opera è fatta senza ambizioni / con ambizione si fa soltanto cultura / A priori la non destinazione”.

<sup>805</sup> Bazlen to Foà, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 342: “È quello che per me dovrebbe essere uno scrittore: ha qualcosa da dire; quello che ha da dire è vissuto, è suo; lo dice con parole sue, chiare; con una grande densità costante”.

<sup>806</sup> Bazlen to Foà, March 9<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *ibid.*, 293: “È un matto con l'anima a fior di pelle, e le figure gli si impongono con una prepotenza tale che lui riesce bene o male a fissarle, a renderle, a masticarsele e a svolgerle, – mai però ad abolirle, per cui, nel libro, è costretto a mettere dentro *tutto*”.

is no more, he is nothing more than his shadow against the wall – the shadow of an owl – a blind owl. I don't know if it is the finest story published in I don't know how many years, let's say after Kafka's short stories – probably not. What I know is that I don't know of any other story (after Kafka) born from the same necessity, with the same violence, and which is equally suggestive. I say: born – not: written – I don't know what Sadègh Hedayât had in mind when he started writing it. What is certain is that many of its parts, especially towards the end, were born while being written – the themes overlap with an organicity which cannot be the result of a cold pre-construction. You'll see.<sup>807</sup>

A “healthy” and “respectable” book is one which is able to convey and induce a psychic or existential experience, and this regardless of observations of literary nature or personal taste. Alfons Rosenberg's *Durchbruch zur Zukunft* is according to Bazlen a serious, committed, and clumsy work, with an intolerable Christian undertone; nevertheless it is capable of urging Bazlen to question his own inclinations, and to make him wonder if it eventually might be one of the most fundamental books he has ever read<sup>808</sup>. Skepticism against even his own critical considerations surfaces in many of Bazlen's letters, in which he nevertheless does not refrain from expressing his personal and at times visceral opinions on the books he reads, whose evaluations are always

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<sup>807</sup> Ibid., 291: “non conosco altro racconto [...] in cui come in questo tutte le realtà si coprono – realtà materiale, realtà 'psichica', visione dell'oppio, vita karmica – si fondono, sono parti della persona, sono la persona – ma anche la persona non è più, non è che la sua ombra sul muro – l'ombra di una civetta – civetta cieca. Non so se è il più bel racconto uscito da non so quanti anni, diciamo dopo i racconti di Kafka – probabilmente no. So invece che non conosco altro racconto (dopo Kafka) nato dalla stessa necessità, con la stessa violenza, e che abbia la stessa suggestione. Dico: nato – non: scritto – non so cosa avesse in testa Sadègh Hedayât quando si è messo a scriverlo. Sicuro è che molte parti, particolarmente verso la fine, sono nate mentre venivano scritte – i temi si coprono con un'organicità che non può essere il risultato di una precostruzione a freddo. Vedrai”.

<sup>808</sup> “ROSENBERG – DURCHBRUCH ZUR ZUKUNFT: che è un libro a proposito del quale non so che pesci pigliare – e bisognerà che una volta, a Milano, ci si metta a discutere di pesci. – Uno sketch astrologico dell'evoluzione dell'umanità con prognosi abbastanza dettagliata dei prossimi 2100 anni, di una serietà e di un impegno pari alla goffaggine con cui è scritto, e con un sottotono cristiano (e sai il rispetto che ho del cristianesimo) che quasi quasi rasenta qualcosa tra la sacristia e il basso pietismo, e che mi è insopportabile. D'altra parte, non escludo che nel mio bilancio finale, un minuto prima della morte, non risulti che sia uno dei libri che mi ha determinato di più” (Bazlen to Foà, August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963, in *ibid.*, 340).

accompanied or introduced by the description of his reaction or relationship with them. “Bobi's encounter with books was a supremely natural event, like the encounters with people in life”, Solmi writes, “with similar reactions, each time cautious, enthusiastic, irritated (though also his irritations often had something amused and playful about them”<sup>809</sup>). In this regard, see Bazlen’s opinion on Paul Goodman's *The Empire City*:

I *really* like Goodman. [...] He is from the most desperate generation, but he is maybe the only one who tries to overcome desperation not through a foolish American optimism or thanks to some petty recipe that cannot cover the problem in its entirety, but because (and one can tell it) he really aims at Good and not at Evil, and to aim at Good means to create Good. In his company I really breathed fresh, clean, “youthful” air, but youthful not because of innocence or inexperience. [...] [*The Empire City*] is probably a failed book – but is more respectable than most of the certainly accomplished books which are currently being published. It's a healthy book, and its healthiness is not stupid (which is rather rare). [...] I suspect that it's a bad book, and maybe Goodman is more flimsy than what it looks to me. But he is a good friend of ours, and I feel uncomfortable at shutting the door in his face.<sup>810</sup>

For Bazlen (who, as Montale wrote, “looked for the man in the writer, and in the man decency as a matter of style”<sup>811</sup>) the book is a reflection and a sign of the experience of the man behind it. Solmi recalls that in the last years Bazlen told him that he was actually not even interested in “literature” anymore, “but only – in literature and beyond it – in 'anthropology'”; anthropology not as discipline, but as “a free and adventurous

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<sup>809</sup> Solmi, “Nota”, in *ibid.*, 268-269.

<sup>810</sup> Bazlen to Foà, April 21<sup>st</sup> 1960, in *ibid.*, 294-296: “Goodman mi è *molto* simpatico, da molti anni. [...] È della generazione più disperata, ma l'unico, forse, che tenti di superare la disperazione non per un cretino ottimismo americano o per credere in qualche formuletta che non copre tutto il problema, ma perché, veramente, lo si sente, punta sul bene e non sul male, e puntare sul bene significa creare il bene. In compagnia sua, avevo respirato veramente aria fresca, pulita, 'giovane' di una giovinezza che non è innocenza né inesperienza. [...]. È un libro probabilmente fallito – ma più rispettabile di quasi tutti i libri sicuramente riusciti che si pubblicano correntemente. È un libro sano di una salute non stupida (cosa molto rara). [...] Ho il sospetto che si tratti di un brutto libro, e forse Goodman è più inconsistente di quanto io creda. Ma è un nostro buon amico, e chiudergli la porta in faccia mi imbarazza”.

<sup>811</sup> Montale, “Variazioni”, 1119.

understanding of men – of the individuals and of the elusive streaks of their character, environment, and history as revealed in their writings, or beyond them”<sup>812</sup>. For Bazlen, writers can thus be friends (as Goodman) or despised human beings (as Lewis Carroll, on whose *The Annotated Alice* he writes: “it helped me to scientifically confirm the impression I have always had of the two books: namely that they were written by a false, shady, and pedantic idiot”<sup>813</sup>). They can be enemies, such as the gifted Alain Robbe-Grillet (whose inexplicable efforts to write *Le Voyeur* clearly reveals that he is nothing more than “one of the many [...] who are laying the foundations of the Third World War”<sup>814</sup>), or can be comrades in the struggle against the many Robbe-Grillet – such as Pierre Minet and his autobiographical *La Défaite*, suggested to Einaudi for “Collezione dell'Io”:

I have never read a book in which the impatience is so instinctive, so echt [genuine], and so alien to any possibility of compromise – and, especially in the central chapters, there are pages on the exaltation and euphoria of living which get into your bones, and that really made me ashamed of the life we all live [...]. Yesterday I went to Oxford, where I spent one of the most nauseating days of my life. – If we don't help the people like Minet (of whom I know the limitations, stature, and flimsiness) to win, we really can't expect anything else but the atomic bombs.<sup>815</sup>

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<sup>812</sup> Solmi, “Nota”, in *Lettere editoriali*, 269.

<sup>813</sup> Roberto Bazlen. Letter to Daniele Ponchiroli, 13 November 1961. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen: “A me è servito perché mi ha confermato, scientificamente, l'impressione che ho sempre avuto dei due libri: cioè che sono stati scritti da uno stupido falso, losco e pedante”.

<sup>814</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Sergio Solmi of May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1956, in *Lettere editoriali*, 283: “Impressionante invece è il fatto che un uomo, probabilmente abbastanza giovane, veramente intelligente, sensibile e intuitivo, dotato di occhi veramente aperti, possa passare uno o due anni di vita all'unico scopo di creare una 'machine' che metta un lettore nelle condizioni di rivivere qualche giornata di un piccolo venditore ambulante piccolo criminale che rumina un alibi. Robbe-Grillet è uno dei tanti (dei quasi tutti) che stanno preparando la terza guerra mondiale; e da una cultura ridotta in questo stato non rimane altro che emigrare. Il male è che non ci rimane che la 'innere Emigration' [Emigrazione interna], molto nobile ma poco comoda”.

<sup>815</sup> Bazlen to Foà, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *ibid.*, 296-297: “Non ho mai letto un libro dove l'insofferenza sia così istintiva, e così echt [autentica], e così lontana da ogni possibilità di compromesso – e ci sono pagine, particolarmente nei capitoli centrali, sull'esaltazione e l'euforia della libertà che vanno nelle ossa, e che

Authors such as Minet and Goodman should be published in spite of the limits of their works. Similarly, Marcel Migeo's *Saint-Exupéry*, although considered a “rather flat biography” (but still a “reliable” and “persuasive” one), is recommended because of its subject<sup>816</sup>: “A rather flat book about him would be better than a 'brilliant' book on the same old crowd”<sup>817</sup>.

Even Bazlen's “classics” deserve such a status for their being fellows in the revolution against “*the love, the art, the immortal principles*”. Knut Hamsun is not just “one of the last great European novelists (of the writers of novels-novels – thus before the dissolvers)”<sup>818</sup>, and the importance of his *Mysterien* is not merely historical<sup>819</sup>: the novel is first of all an “extraordinary psychological portrait”, and its main character “is the Great Mess [*il Grande Sgangherato*] in the grip of unconscious, and was invented 10 years before Freud's first psychoanalytical publications”<sup>820</sup>. A further classic of Bazlen (and later of Adelphi) is August Strindberg (“I am warning you again: he is the *only* classic we have, *but* for a world that won't need to read it – *nor to read*”) <sup>821</sup>. Among “the most important of our grandfathers” (among “the ancestors [...] who truly and directly

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mi hanno veramente portato a vergognarmi della vita che facciamo tutti. [...] ieri sono stato a Oxford, dove ho passato una delle giornate più nauseabonde della mia vita. – Se non aiutiamo a vincere i Minet (di cui conosco i limiti, e la statura e l'inconsistenza) non rimangono veramente che le bombe atomiche”.

<sup>816</sup> “Ora, poiché S.E. è una delle due o tremila (o non so quante) persone veramente decenti di questo secolo, io personalmente lo metterei su S.-E. e sarei per farlo” (Roberto Bazlen. Letter to Luciano Foà, 10 May 1961. Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>817</sup> Ibid.: “Meglio un libro un po' piatto su di lui che un libro 'brillante' su tutta la gente che sappiamo”.

<sup>818</sup> Bazlen to Foà, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1961, in *Lettere editoriali*, 310.

<sup>819</sup> See *ibid.*: “il protagonista, Nagel, è uno dei grossi personaggi paradigmatici, uno di più grossi, della serie che, Werther da un lato, Adolphe dall'altro, porta a Leopold Bloom”.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311: “È il Grande Sgangherato in preda all'inconscio, inventato 10 anni prima delle prime pubblicazioni psicoanalitiche di Freud”.

<sup>821</sup> Bazlen to Foà, May 16<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *ibid.*, 349: “ti metto ancora una volta sull'attenti: è l'*unico* classico che abbiamo, *ma* per un mondo che non avrà bisogno di leggerlo (*né di leggere*)”

determined us”), next to Marx, Bazlen places Wilde and Jarry, authors to whose irreverence, iconoclasm, and paradoxicalness we owe “a certain nonchalance and a certain way of thinking of ours, and, we might dare, even a certain freedom of ours”<sup>822</sup>. Bazlen's classics are the “the great revolutionaries of the end of the century”: Strindberg, Wilde, Jarry, and obviously Nietzsche<sup>823</sup>.

As his amusement in addressing the “sacrilegious charge” and the “value of High Blasphemy” of Dadaism suggests, the literary episodes which delight Bazlen the most are in fact experiences of rupture and rebellion:

Dadaism, dear Luciano, has been a great and *unique* business, which, by definition, cannot have a history. It is by definition unrepeatable, inimitable. By definition, it cannot have a school, a second generation, a delayed eruption. The more time that passes, the more we realize [...] the intensity, the brilliant impatience, the genuine irritation of those kids who lived in a *Raum* [space] where Aeschylus and Goethe and the Kaiser, and Dante and Racine and Jean Paul and Mallarmé and Cervantes and Hegel and Keats and Manzoni and Kant (and one may go on for pages) were still alive and *lived*, and together they formed the *living* Kultur. If one doesn't understand what the solidity of that Kultur was like, he won't ever understand the sacrilegious charge, the value of High Blasphemy of every boutade, of every moaning, of every raspberry of Huelsenbeck and Ball and Tzara and Schwitters.<sup>824</sup>

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<sup>822</sup> Bazlen to Foà, June 4<sup>th</sup> 1961, in *ibid.*, 313: “Qualche anno fa ti ho detto [...] che sarebbe finalmente il momento di fare un libro sui nostri antenati, su quelli che ci hanno determinato realmente e direttamente (sono convinto per esempio che è vero che Marx ci ha scocciato più degli altri, e che per certe conseguenze bassamente *pratiche* della sua opera ci ha costretto a prese di posizione bassamente *pratiche* che senza di lui non ci sarebbero state – ma che una certa nostra disinvoltura e un certo nostro modo di pensare, anzi, se siamo coraggiosi, possiamo perfino dire una certa nostra libertà, le dobbiamo molto più a Wilde che a Marx); ora, di questi quattro di cui tratta il libro [Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*], almeno due e mezzo (Henri Rousseau, Jarry, e 1/2 Satie) sono, mi pare, tra i più importanti dei nostri nonni, con i quali, bene o male, converrebbe finalmente di fare i conti”.

<sup>823</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 185: “I grandi rivoluzionari della fine secolo (Strindberg, Nietzsche, Wilde, Jarry, ecc.)”

<sup>824</sup> Bazlen to Foà, February 18<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 331-332: “il Dadaismo, caro Luciano, è stata una faccenda grossa e *unica* che, per definizione, non può avere una storia. Per definizione, è irripetibile, inimitabile. Per definizione non può avere una scuola, una seconda generazione, scoppi ritardati. Più tempo passa, più ci si rende conto [...] dell'intensità, dell'insofferenza geniale, dell'irritazione genuina di quei ragazzi che vivevano in un *Raum* in cui Eschilo e Goethe e il Kaiser, e Dante e Racine e Jean Paul e Mallarmé e Cervantes e Hegel e Keats e Manzoni e Kant (e puoi

The passage is from a long 1963 letter to Foà about John Cage's *Silence*, which is particularly explicatory of the criteria adopted by Bazlen in recommending the publication of a work. In the introduction to his book, Cage informs that critics consider his music Zen or Dadaism, a statement that urges Bazlen to reply that Cage's writings for sure are not Zen, and in case just fifth-hand Dadaism – “hence no Dadaism”<sup>825</sup>. After the above-quoted digression on Dadaism, Bazlen so ridicules Cage and the cultural environment from which he believes the composer's positions raised:

And now, forty years later, you run into these American kids – with their anti-puritan conformism and their prefabricated intolerance to flat college education and more generally to American *cultcher* – who believe they are doing the same thing, while they merely are anti-ghosts of these ghosts, and not actual life that wants to live against life that doesn't want to die. Yes, dear Luciano. If you want to realize the grotesque flimsiness of these people, [...] have a look at [...] the episode in which Cage consults the I Ching [...]. Its buffoonery lives up to the best Molière. You almost wouldn't believe it. And you can find dozens of such things. Which, according to our measures, dismiss Cage and all the Cages with no possibility of appeal.<sup>826</sup>

Bazlen nevertheless recommends the publication of the book (provided that it is presented as writings by a musician), because he believes that his own criteria (or anyone else's) are not sufficient to decree the potential novelty of phenomena which he might not

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continuare per pagine e pagine) erano ancora vivi e *vissuti*, e tutti assieme formavano la *Kultur viva*. Se non si ha il senso di cos'è stata la solidità di quella *Kultur*, non si capirà mai la carica sacrilega, il valore di Alta Blasfemia di ogni boutade, di ogni mugolio, di ogni pernacchia dei vari Huelsenbeck e Ball e Tzara e Schwitters”.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid., 332: “E ora, quarant'anni dopo, ti capitano questi ragazzini americani col loro conformismo antipuritano e la loro intolleranza prefabbricata della *flaechenhafte* [piatta] [...] istruzione dei collegues e della *cultcher* americana in genere, e credono di fare la stessa cosa, e non sono che antifantasmici di fantasmici, non vita che vuole vivere contro vita che non vuol morire. Sì caro Luciano. Per renderti conto della grottesca inconsistenza di questa gente [...] guardati [...] l'episodio di Cage che consulta l'I King [...]. È d'una buffoneria da alto Molière. Non pare quasi vero. E di cose così, [...] ne trovi a dozzine. Che, con le nostre misure, liquidano Cage e tutti i Cages senza possibilità di ricorso”.

be able to comprehend:

The problem is that the “New” doesn't necessarily rise from values that can be measured by our measures, and cannot find its way but on a less solidified ground than ours (than mine). And the problem, in this instances, is no more: was ist [what is it], but was daraus werden kann [what can come from it]. [...] In spite of everything, I really believe that in Cage there is a “seed of life” (term of 1961), and since, in the end, he's a really nice fellow [...], I feel almost forced to say yes. If nothing else, it will work as a counterpoison to *The Informed Heart*. But I believe there's more in it; and surely one cannot pass from a world to the next goose-stepping.<sup>827</sup>

What despite his distance from “Cage and all the Cages” Bazlen senses in the book is the potentially iconoclastic drive of the author's stance. The most consistent criterion of Bazlen's editorial opinions is indeed recognizable in this constant search of the “New”, net of any consideration of literary nature, and of personal positions and idiosyncrasies.

Bazlen “was immensely well-read”, Calasso writes, “but in the end he was fascinated by only one kind of book, in whatever form it was and to whatever period or civilization it belonged: that kind of book that is an experiment of knowledge, and as such can be transmuted into the experience of those who read it, thereby transforming that experience”<sup>828</sup>. He called the quality of this kind of books “Erstmaligkeit” (or, with an Italian neologism, “primavoltità”): the quality of being absolutely original and unique, of happening for the first time. “The one and only value is *primavoltità*”<sup>829</sup>, we read

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<sup>827</sup> Ibid., 332-333: “Il male è che il 'nuovo' non deve nascere necessariamente da valori misurabili con le nostre misure, e che non può farsi strada che in un terreno meno solidificato del nostro (del mio). E che il problema, in questi casi, non è più: was ist [che cosa è], ma: was daraus werden kann [che cosa ne può venire]. [...] Credo veramente, nonostante tutto, che in Cage un 'germe di vita' (termine del 61) ci sia, e visto che tirate le somme è un ragazzo molto simpatico [...] mi sento quasi costretto a dirti di sì. Se non altro servirà da contravveleno ai cuori informati [Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart*]. Ma credo ci sia di più; ed è certo che non si passa da un mondo all'altro facendo il passo dell'oca”.

<sup>828</sup> Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 72.

<sup>829</sup> *Note senza testo*, 230: “L'unico valore è la primavoltità”.



among his notes. His skepticism and distrust towards any critical and theoretical category and perspective seem to find their reason exactly in the acceptance of the transitoriness of all other values. Change, transformation, and chaos (all positively connoted) are fundamental themes of Bazlen's writings and thought, and his very iconoclasm seems to be a necessary requirement for allowing change to happen (he writes in his notes: “people that, for they feel destroyed, consider me a destroyer – and they don't have the imagination to conceive that destroying them means opening the way to greater values, which deny them”<sup>830</sup>). It is furthermore the result of pondered and interiorized convictions.

Addressing Dorner's *Überwindung der “Kunst”*, Bazlen agrees with the author's idea of a radical change, after Enlightenment and Romanticism, in the conception of reality – “thus [...] of reality”<sup>831</sup>. This change, from a static and tridimensional western conception of reality, led to “the first hints of a reality experienced as becoming, not anymore as being”, which might eventually lead to “a future 'hyper-spatial' reality of pure energies”<sup>832</sup>: “Dorner [...] realized that, if we postulate the self-transformability of the absolute, art ceases to be the symbol of eternal values, and thus ceases to be 'art'; he realized that eternal ideas are being reduced to eternal spiritual determinant forces”<sup>833</sup>. Within this perspective, every interpretative approach that relies on systematic and traditional criteria becomes partial and unreliable, and every claim of identification of art

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid., 203: “gente, perché si sente distrutta, che mi considera un distruttore – e non hanno la fantasia di immaginare che distruggerli significa aprire la strada a valori più grandi, che li negano” (originally in Italian).

<sup>831</sup> See Bazlen's letter to Foà of November 27<sup>th</sup> 1960, in *Lettere editoriali*, 303.

<sup>832</sup> Ibid.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid., 304: “Dorner [...] ha capito che, posta l'autotrasformabilità dell'assoluto, l'arte cessa di essere simbolo di valori eterni, e dunque cessa di essere 'arte', che le idee eterne si stanno riducendo a forze spirituali determinanti eterne”.

with beauty, harmony, or truth impossible. Hence Bazlen's impatience for literariness, formalism, and for any ideology or system of thought. As his aphorism reads: "Form is the antipole of chaos, not the definitive overcoming of chaos. Misconception of European aesthetics, of classicism. The classical artist creates eternal death"<sup>834</sup>.

As we will see in the next chapter, Bazlen's unfinished novel allegorically narrates the story of a sea captain who longs for a shipwreck, and it is interrupted exactly in the moment in which its main character at last fulfills this unconscious desire and realizes the nature of the goal he had been aiming for. As Hans Blumenberg writes, the shipwreck topos often includes the presence of a spectator who observes and testifies the event from the safety of shore: this is an image that describes the "relationship between philosophers and reality", the position achieved by the philosopher who can study reality thanks to "the possession of an inviolable, solid ground for [his] view of the world"<sup>835</sup>. In modernity, though, the configuration of this metaphor changes: the spectator is himself embarked, and can no longer testify the shipwreck from the safety of dry land<sup>836</sup>. If the "spectator embodies theory (the Greek word *theoría* derives from *theoros*, 'spectator')"<sup>837</sup>, once embarked, theory itself seems necessarily liable or destined to be shipwrecked. For Bazlen's captain, the shipwreck eventually proves to be a cathartic moment, for it totally questions his own psychical and cultural reality. This seems also to be the approach to reading that Bazlen ("lone sailor [...] averse to the idea of return, to the seduction of

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<sup>834</sup> *Note senza testo*, 188: "La forma è il polo opposto del caos, non il definitivo superamento del caos. Equivoco dell'estetica europea, del classicismo. L'artista classico crea la morte eterna".

<sup>835</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator. Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 1997), 26.

<sup>836</sup> See *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>837</sup> Steven Rendall, introduction to *ibid.*, 2.

repatriation”<sup>838</sup>) embraces and, through his editorial activity, encourages: to lose oneself in the book, not as a spectator, but as someone who longs to question his own fund of knowledge and wealth of experience, and is thus open to ever new and auspicious shipwrecks.

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<sup>838</sup> Gino Brazzoduro, “Roberto Bazlen: un’idea di letteratura a Trieste”, *La Battana* 24.85 (1987): 5.

## Chapter III

## Shipwrecks and Footnotes

This incantatory human no longer exists. There is generally no human there anymore, only his symptoms.

– Gottfried Benn, “Nietzsche After Fifty Years”

## 1. The Posthumous Writings

## 1.1. The Manuscripts

In 1964, after being evicted from his house in via Margutta, Bazlen “in all likelihood”<sup>839</sup> destroyed most of his papers and correspondence. He subsequently entrusted the remaining papers to friend Silvana Radogna, asking her to get rid of them in case something had to happen to him<sup>840</sup>. Still, after Bazlen's death, Radogna entrusted the documents to Luciano Foà, who recollects: “Silvana told me that if Bobi had left his papers to her, whom he knew was a person by nature incapable of destroying anything, it meant that he did not actually purpose to destroy them”<sup>841</sup>. As we learn from a letter to Lucia Rodocanachi, in August 1965 Foà was already pondering the idea of publishing part of Bazlen's writings: “I would like to act with great caution, for I know how reluctant Bobi was to such things. [...] First of all, we however need to understand what actually there is in there, besides the poems found among his papers in Milan, of which we

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<sup>839</sup> See Calasso, “Giardino Bazlen”.

<sup>840</sup> See Foà's account in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 134.

<sup>841</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-135.

already knew the existence and the value”<sup>842</sup>.

As we learn from a following letter to Rodocanachi<sup>843</sup>, in January 1966 Ljuba Blumenthal visited Foà in Milan, in order to help him decipher Bazlen's handwriting. Few weeks later Foà updated Rodocanachi, informing her about his plan to offer a small selection of Bazlen's poems to a German publisher, of the existence, among Bazlen papers, of many psychological drawings, and of being waiting for Ljuba to finish deciphering and typing out Bazlen's manuscripts before deciding what to do of Bazlen's prose<sup>844</sup>. Few of Bazlen's German poems were eventually printed in scattered publications starting 1965<sup>845</sup>. Bazlen's drawings, with the exception of the 19 ones included in the 1973 edition of *Il capitano di lungo corso*, have not yet been published. The papers deciphered by Ljuba Blumenthal, together with further typewritten ones left by Bazlen, constitute the materials from which Adelphi drew for its edition of Bazlen's posthumous writings.

As we have seen, Adelphi started in 1968 the collection “Quaderni di Roberto

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<sup>842</sup> Foà, Luciano. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 23 Aug. 1965. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Foà, Luciano: “Io vorrei andare molto cauto, sapendo quanto Bobi fosse alieno da queste cose. [...] Prima bisogna vedere cosa c'è, comunque, oltre le poesie che sono state trovate tra le sue carte a Milano, e di cui si sapeva l'esistenza e il valore”.

<sup>843</sup> Foà's letter to Rodocanachi of January 27<sup>th</sup> 1966 is preserved in Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Foà, Luciano.

<sup>844</sup> “[...] pensiamo di proporre, per ora, una piccola scelta di poesie a un editore tedesco. Per le prose [...] potremmo decidere sul da farsi non appena avremo tutto decifrato e ricopiato a macchina. [...] Poi ci sono molti disegni [...] per la pubblicazione dei quali occorrerebbe trovare la persona adatta” (Foà, Luciano. Letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi, 31 Mar. 1966. Archivio del Novecento in Liguria. Collection: Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi. Series: Corrispondenza. File: Foà, Luciano).

<sup>845</sup> The poem “Freude an Freude...” was published in the privately printed volume *Per gli amici di Roberto Bazlen* (ed. Luciano Foà, Milano: 1965). “Brich dir die Bahn...” and “Einar kam...” were published in *Due poesie in lingua tedesca*, ed. Tino Sangiglio, Trieste: Edizioni del Tornasole, 1986. La Ferla subsequently included some of Bazlen's poems in the appendix of *Diritto al silenzio* (“Freude an Freude...”, “Irgendwo, Irgendwo...”, “Wenn auch mein Schritt...”, “Brich dir die Bahn...”, “Es wird noch anders werden”, “Atem aus...”, “Einer kam...”). “Freude an Freude...” (with Voghera's translation) was also included in *Le tracce del sapiente*.

Bazlen” (series named after “the tangible consistency” of the better part of his literary legacy, namely “handwritten notebooks in German language”<sup>846</sup>). Adelphi published part of Bazlen's correspondence within *Lettere editoriali* (1968), *Lettere a Montale* (1984), and the selection “Tre lettere” included in the 1971 issue of *Adelphiana*<sup>847</sup>. The correspondence with Voghera was published in 1995 in *Le tracce del sapiente*, and some translated excerpts from Bazlen's letters to Gerti Frankl Tolazzi were published within the catalogues of the documentary exhibitions dedicated to Gerti<sup>848</sup>. The already-mentioned letter to Papini of January 13<sup>th</sup> 1924 was included in Silvia Assenza's article “Lettura e creazione”<sup>849</sup>. In 1993 Adelphi sent to Bazlen's friends the privately printed volume *La lotta con la macchina da scrivere*<sup>850</sup>. In 1994, the brief prose “Il nazionalismo è vermanete morto?” was discovered and published by La Ferla as appendix to her monograph<sup>851</sup>. The above-mentioned publications, with the addition of the aphorisms and writings collected in *Note senza testo* (1970) and the unfinished novel *Il capitano di lungo corso* (1973), represent the totality of Bazlen's printed literary legacy. In the present chapter we will particularly focus on these last two publications, for, in spite of the private and mostly unfinished nature of the writings in them collected, they are the ones in which Bazlen's positions and thought are most clearly organized and deliberately expressed.

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<sup>846</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 105.

<sup>847</sup> See Chapter I, note 284.

<sup>848</sup> See Introduction, note 77.

<sup>849</sup> See Chapter I, note 106.

<sup>850</sup> See Chapter I, note 164.

<sup>851</sup> See Chapter I, note 122.

## 1.2. *Note senza testo*

The volume contains the notes that Bazlen left in the notebooks denominated by the editor and translator Roberto Calasso as E, N, C, and P<sup>852</sup>, in which Bazlen wrote between 1945 and 1965<sup>853</sup>. The fragments collected in the volume were originally handwritten in German, with some inserts in Italian (which, in the Adelphi edition, are put between angle brackets), and they have never been published in original language. We have not been able to examine the manuscripts, but La Ferla maintains that the published part of the notebooks was the result of a “careful and cautious choice”<sup>854</sup> – with the exception of “Quaderno E”, the only one thematically organized by Bazlen and printed almost in its entirety<sup>855</sup>. The appendix of the book consists of some occasional and mostly unfinished and previously unpublished writings in Italian (all written between 1934 and the first post-war years, and originally typewritten and included in “Quaderno C”)<sup>856</sup>.

Apart from the occasional writings and the draft of the dialogue between the master and the pupil which occupies 7 pages of the section “Dal quaderno C”<sup>857</sup>, we find ourselves in front of a collection of roughly 450 private notes. “Notes with no text”, as the title of the volume reads: fragmentary annotations and thoughts, footnotes on a non

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<sup>852</sup> The notebooks we here refer to are the ones entrusted by Radogna to Foà, and subsequently deciphered by Ljuba Blumenthal and listed by Calasso alphabetically.

<sup>853</sup> See “Notizie sui manoscritti”, in *Scritti*, 395: “La datazione degli appunti non è sicura. Nel quaderno E, Bazlen ha scritto a più riprese per molti anni, come risulta da vari riferimenti. I quaderni C, N, P, sono stati invece presumibilmente scritti di seguito, in un periodo più breve. Comunque tutto ciò che qui è pubblicato, con pochissime eccezioni, può essere compreso fra gli anni 1945 e 1965”.

<sup>854</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 105.

<sup>855</sup> See “Notizie sui manoscritti”, in *Scritti*, 395.

<sup>856</sup> The already-mentioned occasional writings included in *Note senza testo* are: “Introduzione a Svevo”, “Prefazione a Svevo”, “Intervista su Trieste”, “Leo Longanesi. Paliameo dell'elefante”, “Freud”, “Vi sono grandi uomini viventi in Germania”.

<sup>857</sup> In *Note senza testo*, 221-227.

existent, or rather, absent text, which mostly are non thematically organized, and whose precise dating is not possible. They address several topics: besides glosses on literary and cultural themes, and thoughts on progress, civilization, and history, we also find more intimate and personal annotations, as well as considerations on themes such as religion and spirituality, which are hardly tackled in Bazlen's writings addressed to a public or to an interlocutor. The voice and the shades we in them recognize are nevertheless the ones of his letters (and, as Mattioni testifies, also the ones of his conversation<sup>858</sup>), whose lapidary and paradoxical tone indeed reverberates in these *footnotes* within a form which particularly suits it: the epigrammatic and aphoristic one, by its own nature fragmentary, sententious, paradoxical, and for these reasons able to express and convey glimpses of Bazlen's centrifugal and unsystematic thought.

Many of the fragments collected in *Note senza testo* are classifiable as aphorisms<sup>859</sup>, of which they possess the features (concision, witticism, evocativeness, corrosiveness), the figures (paradox, antiphrasis, allusion), and, we might venture, also the mission. Aphorisms often are partial and sententious, and do not provide solutions, but, as Gino Ruozzi suggests, rather aim "to expose, to bring into the open the false virtues, to stigmatize the reigning hypocrisy"<sup>860</sup>. They in fact mainly address coeval culture and society, and, if they are constitutionally "imperfect and non reassuring", they

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<sup>858</sup> See Stelio Mattioni, "Note senza testo", *Messaggero Veneto*, May 10, 1970 (qtd. in de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 192): "A leggere queste *Note*, dopo averlo sentito parlare, si ha quasi l'impressione di riprendere con lui un colloquio da poco interrotto, senza neanche timore di annoiarsi ad ascoltare sempre le medesime cose, tanto sono aperte".

<sup>859</sup> In this regard, we might point out that an extensive selection of *Note senza testo* has been included in the anthology *Scrittori italiani di aforismi*. Vol. 2, *Il Novecento*, ed. Gino Ruozzi, Milano: Mondadori 1996, on pages 1007-1040.

<sup>860</sup> Gino Ruozzi, general introduction to *Scrittori italiani di aforismi*. Vol. 1, *I classici*, ed. Gino Ruozzi (Milano: Mondadori 1994), xxx.



nevertheless mobilize and open “to the research of a dialogue”<sup>861</sup>. Their evocative power and witticism might be deceiving (Umberto Eco in this regard coins the category of “degraded aphorism”<sup>862</sup>), but they might also represent, in spite of the arbitrariness of the premises of any aphorism<sup>863</sup>, a mean of knowledge – but only provided that we consider the aphorism not as an expression of a theoretical or philosophical statement, but, as Eco argues, as a poetic genre which “incite a sort interpretative curiosity”<sup>864</sup>. If the aphorism represents first of all a reflection, “a withdrawal of the mind on itself”, it nevertheless prompts both its author and the reader or possible interlocutor to “new actions and reflections”<sup>865</sup>.

The “openness” and imperfection of this fragmentary writing, as opposed to the closed completeness of the “work”, imply “a ludic writing [...] which cherish to remain on the frontiers and on the borders”<sup>866</sup>, which stimulates reflection and dialogue, and which only secondarily presupposes a system, philosophy, or worldview in opposition to

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<sup>861</sup> Ibid., xxvii.

<sup>862</sup> “Aforisma degradato” o “aforisma cancrizzabile” is, according to Eco, an aphorism that can be overturned without it losing its ostensible truthfulness, and therefore merely is an aphorism that brilliantly expresses a commonplace: “L'aforisma cancrizzabile è una malattia della tendenza al *wit*, in altre parole una massima che, pur di apparire spiritosa, non si preoccupa del fatto che il suo opposto sia egualmente vero” (Umberto Eco, “Note sull'aforisma. Statuto aletico e poetico del detto breve”, in Gino Ruozzi, ed., *Teoria e storia dell'aforisma* [Milano: Mondadori, 2004], 156-157).

<sup>863</sup> See *ibid.*, 164: “anche raggiunto il valore più nobile dell'aforisma, vediamo che il suo valore aletico è sempre contestuale, negoziabile, revocabile in dubbio”. See also *ibid.*, 155: “l'aforisma come genere non si presenta come la conclusione né di un sillogismo categorico né di un entimema, bensì di un possibile entimema è la premessa probabile. Esso si presenta come quello che nella retorica sarebbe un *endoxon*, un luogo comune, un'idea più o meno accettata o accettabile dalla comunità sulla cui persuasività il retore fa leva per poter sviluppare il proprio entimema. L'entimema è un sillogismo che parte da una premessa probabile che si appoggia sull'esperienza accettata”.

<sup>864</sup> See *ibid.*, 164-165: “E allora siamo pronti ad accettarne anche la stralunata improbabilità, il lampeggiare d'una intuizione che va al di là del paradosso stesso e ci spinge a un'ermeneutica continua, come accade con i migliori aforismi di Lec, o di Cioran, che non so se asseriscano, esortino, ammaestrino, minaccino o dicano la verità – ma certo ci fanno reagire come si reagisce a ogni discorso poetico, e di fronte ad essi sgraniamo il rosario dell'interpretazione”.

<sup>865</sup> Ruozzi, general introduction to *Scrittori italiani di aforismi. I classici*, xxvi.

<sup>866</sup> Louis Van Delft, *Frammento e anatomia. Rivoluzione scientifica e creazione letteraria* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 230.

the ones addressed or criticized. Aphoristic writing is corrosive, problematic, un-reassuring; it finds in paradoxicalness a most precious tool (and Bazlen is quite aware of his own witticism, of which he claims a non merely jocular dignity: “They believe that what I say mostly is paradoxical – thus I can gladly and advisedly assert that what others say mostly is not paradoxical”<sup>867</sup>). Furthermore, aphoristic writing allows an active stance without entering the fields of engagement and speculation, and without even expecting to express a “truth”. According to one of its twentieth-century most accomplished masters, in fact, “an aphorism does not need to be true, but it should outwing the truth. It must get beyond it with a spin”<sup>868</sup>.

As Giuseppe Pontiggia points out, the words aphorism and horizon share the same etymological root, the Greek verb *horízō*, “to bound”: “What is the foundation of the aphorism, as well as of the horizon? It is the origin of the gaze, the crossing of a distance, the possibility of carrying within the limits of a definition the otherwise elusive stream of experience”<sup>869</sup>. The concision of the aphorism excludes vast argumentations, theoretical justifications, detailed references to sources. Just as as Saba's *Scorciatoie* (which are in fact treated together with *Note senza testo* by Cacciari in the already mentioned “Un'oscura via di città vecchia”), Bazlen's *footnotes* are “at times difficult; real goat paths. They can make you long for the lengthy, even, straight, provincial roads”<sup>870</sup>. But

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<sup>867</sup> *Note senza testo*, 233: “Credono che ciò che io dico sia per lo più paradossale – di conseguenza io posso affermare, volentieri e con perfetta cognizione di causa, che ciò che gli altri dicono per lo più non è paradossale –”.

<sup>868</sup> Karl Kraus, *Dicta and Contradicta*, trans. Jonathan McVity (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 82.

<sup>869</sup> Giuseppe Pontiggia, “L'aforisma come medicina dell'uomo”, in *Scrittori italiani di aforismi. I classici*, xv-xvi.

<sup>870</sup> Umberto Saba, *Scorciatoie e raccontini* [Milano: Mondadori, 1946], 19: “SCORCIATOIE. Sono – dice il Dizionario – *vie più brevi per andare da un luogo ad un altro*. Sono, a volte, difficili; veri sentieri per

they lead to places not necessarily reachable through such roads, since by their nature they aim to outwing the fields of theory and systematization, being their vehicle an eminently experiential and unsystematic one.

*Note senza testo* is first of all a collection of selected private notes, whose themes echo in other writings by Bazlen. This is particularly evident in connection with *Il capitano di lungo corso*, in which many of the themes of *Note senza testo* seem to find an evident and coherent organization. The aphorisms (as shown most clearly by the section “Antiulisse”<sup>871</sup>) might even be interpreted as the thematic and philosophical reservoir from which Bazlen draws for the composition of the novel. They nevertheless certainly have a dignity on their own, since, in spite of their private nature, their form is evidence of the will to communicate an experience through a genre that particularly suits their author. The aphoristic form is in fact per se dialogical and sympathetic<sup>872</sup>, and, as we have argued, experiential and by some means engaged<sup>873</sup>. It is a form that strikingly befits Bazlen's inclinations, as well as his reluctance to write, which seems to be ascribable to both personal attitudes (as we have seen, in several letters he in fact laments the difficulties he faces when writing<sup>874</sup>) and intellectual positions. Bazlen seems extremely

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capre. Possono dare la nostalgia delle strade lunghe, piane, diritte, provinciali”.

<sup>871</sup> In *Note senza testo*, 209-217.

<sup>872</sup> See Pontiggia, “L'aforisma come medicina dell'uomo”, xvii: “Medicina dell'uomo, questa è l'essenza dell'aforisma. [...] [S]empre, pur nelle sue imprevedibili metamorfosi, l'aforisma resta un aiuto che l'uomo offre ad un altro uomo, una guida per evitare l'errore o porvi rimedio, il conforto che l'esperienza può dare a chi deve ancora affrontarla. Anche le qualità cangianti dell'aforisma rimandano al carattere dialogico di un messaggio solidale. La brevità [...] è un dono che l'autore fa all'inquieto lettore”.

<sup>873</sup> See Ruozzi, general introduction to *Scrittori italiani di aforismi. I classici*, xxv-xxvi: “La letteratura aforistica [...] ci invita [...] al confronto con noi stessi e la società in cui viviamo. È quindi una letteratura fortemente impegnata; non a caso, gli scrittori di aforismi raramente sono letterati di professione. Più spesso sono uomini d'azione [...] che fanno della scrittura un momento di riflessione e di bilancio. [...] Per scrivere aforismi occorre esperienza, saggezza. Senza aver saggiato, pesato le cose e gli uomini, non può esistere pensiero aforistico”.

<sup>874</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 102-104; see also Bazlen's letter to Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi of March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1951

aware that “distortion and dispersion are unavoidable when one tries to channel, to 'regularize', to bend to a rule” a thought or an intuition, and that “any completeness is in a manner artifice and potential adulteration”<sup>875</sup>. Aphoristic writing grants him the chance of expressing his intuitions without the compromises implied by any kind of argumentative or expositive form of writing, and thus allows him a “decent” and “respectable” outlook on the object, as well as an uncompromising and direct relation with the (arguably unlooked-for) reader.

### 1.3. *Il capitano di lungo corso*

The writing of *Il capitano di lungo corso* is also difficult to precisely date. The first draft of the novel consists of eight typewritten pages dated October 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> 1944. Bazlen's friends maintain that he devoted particular efforts to the novel in the first post-war years<sup>876</sup>, hypothesis corroborated by the reading of his letters of that period. Bazlen writes to Foà on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1950: “I write many hours each day (I hope that, in a dozen years, three different books will emerge from it, and not just one: all the material organically flows in three different directions)”<sup>877</sup>; and again, few weeks later: “I believe that my three books are now four – however, one of them flows like a charm, and I will

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(qtd. in Marcenaro, *Una amica di Montale*, 194): “[...] per scrivere (anche lettere!) ho bisogno di bere, ma per bere bisogna mangiare, ma se mangio, divento 'pesante' e non scrivo più, dunque bevo senza mangiare, ma se bevo senza mangiare il vino mi va in testa e la mattina dopo me lo sento, e allora non posso lavorare, ed allora ho cattiva coscienza perché non lavoro, ed allora non posso scrivere lettere perché dovrei lavorare, ma i lavori sono seccanti and so on, e questo casino (col deposito di lunghi pezzi di libri miei) è durato tutto l'inverno”.

<sup>875</sup> Van Delft, *Frammento e anatomia*, 237.

<sup>876</sup> See “Notizie sui manoscritti”, in *Scritti*, 393.

<sup>877</sup> The letter is mentioned by Foà in Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 16: “[...] scrivo per me molte ora al giorno (spero che fra una decina d'anni saltino fuori tre libri, e non uno: tutto il materiale scorre organicamente in tre direzioni diverse)”.

show you some passages when you'll come to Rome"<sup>878</sup>. Foà recollects that in 1950 the manuscript consisted of more than 400 pages<sup>879</sup>, which Calasso speculates were probably subsequently destroyed by the author<sup>880</sup>. Onofri recalls that at a certain point Bazlen told him that his novel could have become a film treatment, and that he realized that 400 pages could maybe be reduced to 80 with no harm<sup>881</sup>. Bazlen subsequently kept on rewriting and editing the novel, and, according to Calasso, went back to it until the last years of his life<sup>882</sup>.

The most recent draft of the novel consists of 49 typewritten fair-copy pages, which are followed by several typewritten and handwritten ones. The fair-copy pages narrate the journey of the main character, the Captain, until his shipwreck, and, for their consistency and polished writing, they can arguably be considered as an almost definitive version of what could have been the first part of the novel. In the same folder in which the fair copy was found, Bazlen also left some typewritten and handwritten pages which mainly expand the shipwreck scene; these pages are more fragmentary and, as the editor observes, "evidently non definitive"<sup>883</sup>. The second section of *Il Capitano di lungo corso* (in the volume *Scritti* on pages 79-149), where the rest of the journey of the Captain is sketchily narrated, is taken by the handwritten "Quaderno B", which mainly consists of notes, thoughts, and ideas for the continuation of the novel. In the appendix to the novel (pages 151-170) we find annotations, variants, drafts, and indications of bibliographical

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<sup>878</sup> Ibid.: "Credo che i miei tre libri sono quattro – comunque uno fila che è un gusto, e ti mostrerò dei brani quando sarai a Roma".

<sup>879</sup> See Foà's account in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 134.

<sup>880</sup> See "Notizie sui manoscritti", in *Scritti*, 393.

<sup>881</sup> Onofri's account is reported by Foà in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 134.

<sup>882</sup> See "Notizie sui manoscritti", in *Scritti*, 393.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid., 394.

researches taken from notebook D and the verso of notebook B<sup>884</sup>. The book published by Adelphi and (20 years later) with similar editing choices in original language by Wieser Verlag<sup>885</sup>, has been described by de Savorgnani as a novel *in fieri* – as “the project of a book, rather than a book”<sup>886</sup>.

*Il capitano di lungo corso* was written in German, with some “rare intrusions of Italian words”<sup>887</sup>, which seem mostly to serve as notes and temporary substitutes for definitive German expressions. Within the frame of the fluid structure of a novel *in fieri*, de Savorgnani suggests that these intrusions can be read as “shreds of consciousness’, chips sneaked between the lines to remember that, in Bazlen, the German soul is not separable from the Italian one”<sup>888</sup>. German in fact, de Savorgnani continues, was the language in which Bazlen used to write “when he wanted to narrate himself”, the language which allowed him “a sincere expression of his personal identity”<sup>889</sup>. Bazlen’s choice of German language might be attributed to both biographical and cultural reasons, being German at the same time the language of his first scholastic formation and of his first and fundamental literary discoveries<sup>890</sup>. In regard to his linguistic identity, de

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<sup>884</sup> For more information on the genesis of the book and on the characteristics and structure of the manuscript, see *ibid.* 393-395, La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 105-106, and de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 135-136.

<sup>885</sup> Roberto Bazlen, *Der Kapitän. Romanfragment*, Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 1993. A German edition of part of the novel (including the chapter “Vorspiel” [in the Italian translation: “Preludio”] and part of the chapter “Fahrt” [“Viaggio”]) had been published in review the previous year (Roberto Bazlen, “Der Schiffskapitän”, *Akzente* 39.3 [June 1992]: 206-220).

<sup>886</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 136.

<sup>887</sup> Roberto Calasso, “Avvertenza”, in Bazlen, *Il Capitano di lungo corso*, Milano, Adelphi: 1973, 8.

<sup>888</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 131.

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>890</sup> To understand Bazlen's choice of writing in German, it might be important to remind his fundamental aversion towards Italian literature and culture as he had known them during the school years, and to point out, on the opposite, that German was the the language of the radically modern literature that was most relevant for his intellectual formation. Italian, according to Bazlen, is a too early solidified language: “L'elemento troppo presto solidificato della lingua (da Dante al 'Messaggero'). (Piane, niente

Savorgnani suggests that, in his Triestine years, Bazlen's main "expressive mean of everyday communication, the language of his affections and of his roots" was however Triestine dialect, and that German and Italian retained for him some of the characteristics of learned languages<sup>891</sup>. This would explain why, either in German or in Italian, Bazlen not rarely commits orthographic and punctuation mistakes, and also why in his writings the syntaxes of the two languages at times influence each other<sup>892</sup>. In both languages Bazlen however deliberately avoids puristic choices. In this regard, de Savorgnani suggests that Bazlen, "favoring to give voice to his 'border identity', preserved not only the linguistic base offered by his environment, but also its eccentricities, without even trying to purify them"<sup>893</sup>. We nevertheless have to point out that most of Bazlen's writings are of private nature or unfinished, and thus not necessarily revised or polished.

Besides the above-mentioned peculiarities and some recurrent problems with prepositions and tense agreement, the German in which *Il capitano di lungo corso* is written is peculiar also for its lexical and syntactical choices<sup>894</sup>. This is probably due to

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dittonghi, niente *Umlaut*, niente H, niente consonanti in fine parola)" (*Note senza testo*, 179); it is a misogynistic language or, at best, an imprecise one: "In latino c'è ancora vir e homo – In Italiano solo uomo – e la donna è differenziata dall'uomo solo nel sesso: f e m m i n a m a s c h i o – Come essere umano (Mensch) non compare –" (ibid., 180). Italian is furthermore according to Bazlen a language that lacks "Stimmung" (see Montale's already-quoted "Lettera a Bobi"). As Assenza suggests, "Italian language appears to Bazlen as lacking of emotional tonalities and shades; it does not suggest emotions, it does not have the symbolic-allusive character of the German one" ("Lettura e creazione", 389). In this regard, see also Bazlen's letter to Papini of January 13<sup>th</sup> 1924: "Molti dei concetti erotici fondamentali [tedeschi]: Stimmung, Schwärmer, etc., sono intraducibili; (l'italiano che ha cercato di esprimerli, der letzte Germane in Italien, è finito in manicomio)" (in ibid., 390).

<sup>891</sup> See De Savorgnani, *Bobì Bazlen*, 129. In this regard, de Savorgnani also points out that the German Bazlen was mostly exposed to during the school years was primarily a literary one, and the very language spoken by the Austrian component of Trieste was a particular German variety spoken in the city; on the other hand, Bazlen's Italian conserved, even in the written form, the characteristics of a spoken, informal, conversational language, influenced by both dialect and German.

<sup>892</sup> See ibid., 133.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>894</sup> See ibid., 132-133.

the scarce opportunities Bazlen had to speak German after leaving Trieste, and therefore to the fact of being exposed to it mostly through a literary language<sup>895</sup>. Furthermore, in the novel Bazlen nonchalantly varies the register of his writing, allowing the coexistence of spoken forms with aulic, specialistic, and antiquated ones<sup>896</sup>. The two German publishers reacted differently to the linguistic eccentricity of the novel: Akzente's edition, as De Savorgnani points out, was edited in a less conservative way than Wieser Verlag's, which often conserved the peculiarities of Bazlen's language, thus interpreting them as stylistic choices.<sup>897</sup> In the Italian edition the non-homogeneity of Bazlen's language was resolved and necessarily tempered by Calasso's translation.

#### 1.4. Phantom-Writings

As said above, we have not been able to examine the manuscripts of *Note senza testo* and *Il capitano di lungo corso*. We are nevertheless led to believe that the role and impact of Calasso's editorship had to be weighty. He in fact selected the materials among Bazlen's posthumous papers, translated them, and finally gave a book-form to writings in all likelihood not thought or destined to publication, and of whose problematic nature Calasso was obviously well aware. We in fact read from his introduction to Bazlen's *Scritti*:

There is no opus here, but only a collection of notes which were put together by others in order to form a book. Bazlen managed to slip through any net so effectively, that he thwarted also the attempt to tie some writings to his name. I would actually say that this is the most convincing reason to publish these writings: the certainty that no effort will be

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<sup>895</sup> See *ibid.*, 133.

<sup>896</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>897</sup> See *ibid.*, 133-134.



sufficient to make of this phantom-work [*opera fantasma*] the work of Roberto Bazlen.<sup>898</sup>

Bazlen's *Scritti*, as 136<sup>th</sup> volume of the Biblioteca Adelphi, subsequently became an exemplary specimen of the "single books" of the publisher: an experiment of knowledge, a written evidence of an intellectual and existential experience, a fragmentary and open work which in these characteristics themselves finds its reason to be and its originality.

It does not surprise that *Il capitano di lungo corso* and *Note senza testo* have often been interpreted primarily as a valuable documentation for the understanding of Bazlen's figure rather than as writings with the status of works. As we have seen, de Savorgnani describes *Il capitano di lungo corso* as "the project of a book, rather than a book"; Riboli argues that the fragmentary nature of the manuscript and the incompleteness and lack of structure of the narration lead to the conclusion that the value of Bazlen's novel is to be recognized "not so much in the literary quality of the work, but rather in the general observations that it allows to make"<sup>899</sup>. Even though in all likelihood Bazlen did not intend to publish his papers (and in this choice is indeed recognizable his "will not to accord to his own writings the status of work"<sup>900</sup>), they nevertheless were eventually printed, and attributed to him. Their dignity of "works" was recognized by some critics and by the publisher, according to whom Bazlen's writings are "phantom-works", but still works. They are quintessentially posthumous, with the complete set of problems connected to such a nature.

It is on the other hand true that Bazlen's writings attract the reader first of all

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<sup>898</sup> Calasso, "Da un punto vuoto", 18.

<sup>899</sup> Riboli, *Roberto Bazlen editore nascosto*, 41.

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

because of the fascination for their author. As Damiani suggests, Bazlen's figure in fact "stands out more vividly" than his writings, but "only because in the singularity of his existence we better grasp the physiognomy of that alterity of being and language for which we cannot find words, and which in Bazlen's papers is only lightly marked by the rare points of a mental map"<sup>901</sup>. His writings and their reception are thus fundamentally tied to his biographical and existential experience, and, as we will see, their form and contents encourage such an interpretation. The biographical datum and the hagiography developed around it actually help to enlighten the fragmentary and at times cryptic nature of these writings which find their originality and uniqueness notably in their incompleteness and openness, and in the betrayed or impossible anonymity of a writer who did not intend to tie his name to them.

Regarding the appropriateness of the posthumous publication of Bazlen's writings, Solmi argues:

In spite of the declared intention of his will of destroying everything before his death, the care with which [Bazlen] preserved his notebooks and drawings might also induce to think of a different intention, or of a gleam of ironical hope. The fact that he left to chance such traces, signs, concretions – such markedly enigmatic evidences of a "transit" –, suits rather well his taste for life documents and diaries, for that "unfinished" that was according to him much more revealing than finished and "constructed" works.<sup>902</sup>

Solmi thus acknowledges both the legitimacy of Adelphi's operation and the dignity of work of Bazlen's posthumous publications, and so does Assenza, who points out that "Bazlen, as a matter of fact, left us a novel which he did consign to a bonfire", a novel on which he worked for twenty years, until the last days of his life, and which he greatly

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<sup>901</sup> Damiani, "Roberto Bazlen", 76.

<sup>902</sup> Solmi, "Nota", in *Lettere editoriali*, 270.

care for<sup>903</sup>. Foà and Dorfles recalls that Bazlen used to read to them passages from the novel<sup>904</sup>, and so does Lucia Drudy Demby, who recollects that Bazlen used to read to her excerpts from the anti-Odyssey of his captain in a trattoria named “Ulisse”, and that he had “an almost uterine relationship with the novel”<sup>905</sup>.

Bazlen’s started to compose *Il capitano di lungo corso* during his therapy with Bernhard, concurrently with an analytical diary and with several watercolors, Indian inks, and pencil drawings whose subjects at times involve the themes and the characters of the novel. The (unfortunately untraceable) diary was entrusted to Radogna, who though did not hand it over to Foà with the rest of Bazlen's papers<sup>906</sup>, and arguably represents one of the most interesting documents that Bazlen left<sup>907</sup>. The mentioned drawings were also probably realized as part of his analytical treatment<sup>908</sup>. The composition of *Il capitano di lungo corso* seems as well to originate from this experience, and, as we will see, it is

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<sup>903</sup> Silvia Assenza, *Il confine nella letteratura* (Acireale-Roma: Bonanno Editore, 2012), 133-134.

<sup>904</sup> See Foà’s account Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 134; see also Dorfles, “Quando l’intellettuale”: “Ricordo ancora alcuni squarci del favoloso romanzo che Bobi, quando già abitava in via Margutta, mi aveva letto nella versione originale tedesca, e che erano accompagnati da curiosi disegni tra l’ironico e il surreale”.

<sup>905</sup> Lucia Drudy Demby’s account can be found in La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 116.

<sup>906</sup> Radogna was primarily worried that the diary, which contained references to Bazlen's sentimental life, could hurt Ljuba Blumenthal's feelings (see Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 126).

<sup>907</sup> In this regard, see Foà’s account in *ibid.*, 135: “Siamo in molti a pensare che la cosa più interessante che Bobi possa aver lasciato di scritto sia il suo diario: è probabile, cioè, che il suo mondo, il suo modo di vedere le cose venga fuori da lì (come anche nelle sue lettere) meglio che altrove”.

<sup>908</sup> In this regard see Adriana Ricca, “I disegni di Roberto Bazlen: Materiale clinico e strumento critico”, *Letteratura e arte* 11 (2013): 55-56: “Nella prima fase della terapia bernhardiana veniva chiesto al paziente di raccontare i propri sogni durante la seduta ma se questi era un cosiddetto ‘uomo di linguaggio’, se cioè era un intellettuale abituato a manipolare il pensiero tramite il linguaggio, gli veniva chiesto di disegnare il loro contenuto. [...] Il corpus dei disegni bazleniani [...] non ha altro aspetto se non quello di materiale clinico di enorme importanza per un’analisi delle opere in chiave psicanalitica. [...] Di certo disegni e acquerelli sono il primo momento di contatto tra la parte conscia di Bobi e il suo inconscio e, analizzati in ordine cronologico, presentano una complessità sempre maggiore: segno questo di un avvicinamento progressivo a una sintesi tra elementi che in un primo tempo erano scissi e frammentari”. On the same topic, see the entry of December 25<sup>th</sup> 1944 of Majnoni's diary: “[...] è venuto Bazlen coi suoi disegni. Dice che sta liberando delle sue ossessioni. Ed in effetti ossessionati sono. Molto Freud” (“*Sopravvivere alle rovine*”, 267).

possible to interpret the novel has the “narrative elaboration” of the psychoanalytical path pursued by Bazlen in those years<sup>909</sup>. In our case, we will rather consider the role played by Bazlen's psychoanalytical experience and interests as a fundamental component of his intellectual and existential experience, which, stripped of any personal detail, in the novel seems to become a paradigmatic one. As La Ferla suggests, in *Il capitano di lungo corso* we in fact recognize Bazlen's poetic will of testifying his “vision on the contemporary set of problems on the individual”<sup>910</sup>: the “object-subject” of his writing is “the contemporary man, or rather the contemporary intellectual”, and the main character of his novel might be interpreted as “an existence offered as a paraphrase of an age”<sup>911</sup>.

In the coming pages, following the path of the main character of *Il capitano di lungo corso*, we will mainly focus on the themes of seafaring and shipwreck as elaborated in the first part of the novel and in the fragments that follow it, and we will try to show how, through the parody of Ulysses' journey, the sailing of Bazlen's captain problematizes and questions the same idea of knowledge of which the hero of the *Odyssey* traditionally represents the emblem. In doing so, we will also address the fragments of *Note senza testo*, of which, as Damiani writes, the novel represents first of all “a perfect and elusive figuration”<sup>912</sup>. The themes of the aphorisms of *Note senza testo* (the negation of the absolute value of reason, tradition, and identity; the refusal of metaphysics and religious thought; the elevation of chaos to regenerative and creative

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<sup>909</sup> See La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 129.

<sup>910</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>911</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>912</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 82.

value) seem in fact to find in the unfinished novel an “allegorical form”<sup>913</sup>, and evident and coherent organization. On the other hand, being *Il capitano di lungo corso* the most consistent fragment of Bazlen's writings and the only text in which he partially systematizes his thought, the novel might provide a scaffolding for the study and interpretation of the at times obscure aphorisms, on which we will focus in the final part of this chapter.

## 2. Anti-Odyssey

### 2.1. Sailings

In *Il capitano di lungo corso* myth is reinterpreted in the direction of a problematization of tradition and modernity through the portrait of the intellectual and psychical crises of the archetypical characters of the novel, in whose angst and vicissitudes is felicitously and often hilariously transposed Bazlen's radically nihilistic meditation on the crisis of twentieth-century Western reason and culture. In the novel this crisis is problematized primarily through the description of the intellectual and existential route of its main character, an archetypical twentieth-century man whose path also describes a personal psychoanalytic process, and thus seems to ask to be read as the evidence of a deeply private experience.

The story of the Captain<sup>914</sup>, at least for the completed part of the novel, is readable

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<sup>913</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 141.

<sup>914</sup> As we will see, all the characters of the novel are named after their professions, positions, or peculiar

as an overturned and demythicized Odyssey. The Captain (“der Schiffskapitän”; in Calasso’s translation: “il Capitano”), just like Ulysses, roams the seas, while his wife, just like Penelope, awaits him at home, sewing a dress for him. The Wife (“la Moglie”; in German: “die Frau”, thus also “the Woman”), though, does not display the marital faithfulness of Penelope: she in fact starts spending time with her suitors at the Tavern, where she smokes cigars, she plays cards with the One-eyed man (“der Einäugige”; in Calasso’s translation: “il Monocolo”), she drinks schnapps with the Pockmarked-man (“der Blatternarbigen”; “il Butterato”), and she makes love with the One-legged-man (“der Einbeinige”; “il Gambadilegno”). On the other hand, the Captain, unlike Ulysses, is not struggling to find his way back home. His travels are actually getting longer, his stopovers in the harbors shorter, for he seems able to find peace only when he sails, far from his home and wife, away from the solid ground. His wanderings are not motivated by the wrath of a God (in the demythicized seas in which the Captain sails there are no gods, and religious knowledge, as we will see, seems to the Captain to be nothing but an unsatisfactory promise of consolation), but by his own angst. The Captain roams the seas because of a personal crisis, sprung by a trivial conjugal misunderstanding: his wife sewed for him a pair of red trousers, and he (disciplined and organized man who exclusively wears blue uniforms in the winter, white ones in the summer, and a black suit for weddings and funerals) has come to the conclusion that she had never known or understood him (as we learn from Bazlen’s notes, these red trousers, with a leg shorter

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physical traits. Calasso, in the Italian translation, chose to preserve the capital letters in their names; embracing his choice, we here do the same.

then the other, foreshadow the adultery of the Wife with the One-legged-man<sup>915</sup>). The conjugal crisis yet represents only the sparkle for a deeper and primarily intellectual and existential one, for both the Captain and the Wife.

The incipit of the novel reads: “The house of the Sea Captain was old and cozy. There were hortensia plants at the windows, a canary sung in the cage, his wife sat at the sewing machine, a dog played with a bone in front of the door”<sup>916</sup>. Two pages into the novel, the initial idyllic situation is already compromised. Back home after one of his trips, the Captain in fact finds a neglected house: the sewing machine is dusty, all the clocks have stopped, the canary is dead, all the light bulbs are burnt out, and the dog on a chain is barking with hunger. Because of the misunderstanding involving the red trousers and the Captain’s ever-longer travels, the Wife has started spending more and more time at the tavern. “My wife has become a stranger”<sup>917</sup>, the Captain ruminates, and finally leaves for good, with the purpose to never go back home again. His grudge against his wife is though just a pretext, for his wanderings seem to actually be motivated by an intimate restlessness.

The Captain, like the Dantesque Ulysses, is drawn by an “inextinguishable thirst for knowledge”<sup>918</sup>. He is a well-informed, cultured, and experienced man who in his countless travels has met and talked with many people, and has acquired and read many precious and unknown books. Nevertheless, he is not satisfied, and can not find peace.

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<sup>915</sup> See *Capitano*, 169: “I pantaloni troppo corti erano una prefigurazione del Gambadilegno”.

<sup>916</sup> *Ibid.*, 23: “La casa del capitano di lungo corso era vecchia e confortevole. C’erano piante di ortensia sulle finestre, nella gabbia cantava un canarino, sua moglie sedeva alla macchina da cucire, davanti alla porta un cane giocava con un osso”. For reasons of accessibility, in the footnotes we will quote Bazlen’s novel from Calasso’s Italian translation.

<sup>917</sup> *Ibid.*, 25: “Mia moglie mi è diventata estranea’ pensò fra sé il Capitano”.

<sup>918</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 141.

This situation is set at the very beginning of the novel:

The Captain did not live much at home. He was almost always at sea, where he used to sit in his spacious cabin, studying nautical charts, busy with his measuring instruments, or reading little-known books of which he had followed the traces in several harbors. Otherwise he sat on the deck, exploring the horizon for long hours with his telescope. When he arrived at a harbor he did not know yet – but they were so few! –, he would start to wander aimlessly, speaking with the fishwives at the market, tasting unknown wines in hidden taverns, rifling through dusty junk dealers in winding and dark alleys. Back on board, he had seen everything, annotated everything, he had made his own idea of anything, and in his cabin he opened the packages with the plants and the stones and the books and the bottles of wine and the wooden statuettes. But, for some reason, it never was the right thing, and therefore he grew more and more restless.<sup>919</sup>

Even the aesthetic emotions experienced by the *flâneur* are precluded to him, who, “after all, already knew everything”<sup>920</sup>. Never satisfied with what he has seen, with what he has brought back, and with what he has learned, the very experience he has of the world seems to be the cause of his angst, and journey after journey and harbor after harbor, the turmoil inside of him keeps growing.

More and more reserved and silent, the Captain focuses on making order in his life. He believes that the cure to his angst must be found in tidiness, organization, and study. He makes plans to impose to himself some discipline. He studies science and

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<sup>919</sup> *Capitano*, 23-24: “Il Capitano viveva poco a casa. Era quasi sempre per mare, e allora sedeva solo nella sua grande cabina, studiava le carte nautiche, armeggiava con i suoi strumenti di precisione, leggeva libri poco noti di cui aveva seguito le tracce di porto in porto – altrimenti stava sul ponte, ed esplorava per lunghe ore l’orizzonte con il suo cannocchiale. Se arrivava in un porto che non conosceva ancora – ma erano tanto pochi! – si metteva a vagare senza meta, chiacchierava al mercato con le pescivendole, assaggiava vini sconosciuti in bettole nascoste, andava rovistando, per viuzze tortuose e oscure, in polverosi negozi di rigattieri. Quando tornava a bordo, aveva visto tutto, aveva preso nota di tutto, si era fatto una sua idea di ogni cosa, e nella cabina apriva i pacchetti con le piante e le pietre e i libri e le bottiglie di vino e le statuette di legno. Ma per una ragione o per l’altra non era mai la cosa giusta, e così diventava sempre più inquieto”.

<sup>920</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



religion, thus modern physics and “the Holy book”<sup>921</sup>. He organizes his belongings (he has everything he owns on his boat), and gets rid of the useless or superfluous objects. He decides that he needs a new calendar (which, as Assenza suggests, might be read as his will of recreating a new time<sup>922</sup>); that he needs to remove from the frame the portrait of his wife; that he needs to finish the books he left halfway through (“unread books are chains that tie you to the past”<sup>923</sup>); that he must tend the uncared business, because, “until the past is settled, it is unwise to think about the future, and starting from today we really fix the past”<sup>924</sup>. All his wishful intentions are though sabotaged by distractions, frustration, erotic daydreaming, and, more generally, by his muddle-headedness and bad conscience. Reorganizing his cabin (“one sweep the cabin, and the macrocosm becomes shining”<sup>925</sup>, the Captain persuades himself) he in fact deliberately avoids to look under the desk.

As Blumenberg writes, “humans live their lives and build their institutions on dry land. Nevertheless, they seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphoric of the perilous sea voyage”<sup>926</sup>. The Captain’s sailing indeed testifies of his will of confronting himself with his angst and to deal with his subconscious. If the harbor, as the Captain's only contact with external and social reality, might be read as the

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<sup>921</sup> See *ibid.*, 39: “Era la storia del computo degli anni, il Libro Sacro che i re usavano leggere, messo insieme da \_\_\_\_\_, durante il suo esilio a \_\_\_\_\_, con la lista delle dinastie e dei re e dei nobili, con tutte le loro imprese e i loro veri nomi, iscritti nell’anno della loro morte. E il Capitano lesse della creazione del cielo e della terra con tutte le loro stelle; di come i padri dei padri erano venuti dall’altra parte del mare, [...] delle grandi disgrazie, le inondazioni, le epidemie, gli incendi, le carestie, le devastazioni delle cavallette [...]”; the list goes on, until it is interrupted by the Captain’s erotic daydreaming. To the “Holy book” are also dedicated pages 165-166 of the appendix.

<sup>922</sup> See Assenza, *Il confine nella letteratura*, 137.

<sup>923</sup> *Capitano*, 49: “i libri non letti sono catene che legano al passato”.

<sup>924</sup> *Ibid.*, 47: “finché il passato non è a posto, non è consigliabile pensare al futuro, e da oggi in poi si mette veramente a posto il passato”.

<sup>925</sup> *Ibid.*, 52: “si spazza la cabina e il macrocosmo diventa splendente”.

<sup>926</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 7.

signifier of what he runs from<sup>927</sup>, “the tendency of the Captain to retire in his cabin represents [...] his inclination to retreat from the world”<sup>928</sup>, as well as his resistance to dealing thoroughly with the forces of the sea, which can be read as the figure of an ungovernable subconscious. The compulsive urgency to make order in the cabin seems to ask to be interpreted as the Captain's need of making order of the things that his reason and his ego can no longer organize or make sense of, and his refusal to look under the desk seems to illustrate his reluctance to reckon with the hidden contents of his unconscious. The new things that the Captain keeps bringing back to the cabin – to his own private place, in which he has almost secluded himself as a reaction to the impossibility of making sense of the world – can no longer satisfy his curiosity and thirst of knowledge, nor can find their own place in such an autarkic and chaotic space. As La Ferla argues:

It so increasingly take shape, in a parodistic tone, the merciless portrait of an intellectual that perfects a way 'to get rid of the risk', not only through the ostentation of a knowledge that fortifies itself through itself, but above all through the controlled inclusion of the new within his own safe place – being it a room, a home, a cabin – where he ritually goes back and, almost without effort, builds for his own use 'his own idea on anything'.<sup>929</sup>

After the umpteenth long sailing, the Captain decides to spend a few days on dry land to appease the discontent of his weary crew. They moor in a harbor where the Captain intends to meet with an old friend, a wise Oriental captain, and where he plans to visit a previously daydreamt gypsy prostitute. Once disembarked, the alienated Captain

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<sup>927</sup> So La Ferla argues in *Diritto al silenzio*, 122.

<sup>928</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 179.

<sup>929</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 111 (the first internal quote is from Cacciari, *Dallo Steinhof*, 220; the second from *Capitano*, 112).

heads for the brothel, but when he finally reaches it, he finds out that the Gypsy (“die Zigeunerin”; “la Zingara”) is already occupied with his helmsman. The Captain leaves and starts wandering about the city, suffering for the mark of Cain that is burning in his forehead, and ruminating on his wife’s infidelity and ingratitude and on his own desire of strangling the Helmsman. Burning with an “abstract fury” and with a “despair with no object”<sup>930</sup>, he finally takes shelter from the rain in a tavern. Once drunk, he finally feels “extremely wise”<sup>931</sup>, and disconnectedly meditates: “It wasn't [his Wife's] fault; periods of transition are always confused, the systems dissolve, Europe is endangered, the problems of our age weigh heavily on everyone. All right; at least he was in a dry place, he was protected in there, it was warm in there; after all, everything else was weightless; he would have never gotten on board again”<sup>932</sup>.

Nevertheless, the following day the Captain is on board again, peacefully waiting for the approaching Oriental (“der Orientalen”; “l’Orientale”), but all it takes to bring him to a new state of psychological prostration and confusion is the serene and satisfied whistling of the Helmsman (“der Steuermann”, “il Timoniere”). Befuddled by anger, even the idea of meeting the wise Oriental now irritates him (“it was easy for him, with such a different education – for him that even had an Oriental helmsman”<sup>933</sup>). He cannot stand the dry land anymore, and decides to immediately set sail. He though still cannot find peace, not even in his ship. Completely paranoid, he is growing suspicious of his

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<sup>930</sup> *Capitano*, 43.

<sup>931</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>932</sup> *Ibid.*: “Non era neppure colpa di lei, i periodi di transizione sono sempre confusi, gli ordinamenti si dissolvono, l’Europa è in pericolo, la problematica pesa su tutti. Bene, per lo meno, che stava lì all’asciutto, lì era protetto, lì faceva caldo, in fondo tutto il resto era senza importanza, non sarebbe più tornato a bordo”.

<sup>933</sup> *Ibid.*, 46: “La tranquillità del capitano orientale lo aveva già innervosito, per lui era facile, con un’educazione tutta diversa, lui che ha perfino un vero timoniere orientale”.

crew members, and especially hates the Helmsman, who is strong, charismatic, and breezily virile. Every attempt of order and every new project lead the Captain to new crises, until he decides to set the route for a great journey, for a great adventure during which he will sail in search of a mermaid for him to marry:

Wasn't he a sea captain? how could he have been so stupid to think of settling for a woman who lived on dry land? Everything derived solely from this; a truly deep comprehension was a priori excluded; sea-women are there exactly for men who live on the sea, dry-land-women were forbidden to him; [...] this one – by God! – would have certainly never sewed red trousers for him.<sup>934</sup>

The days pass, and the Captain does not even come out of his cabin anymore. In the cabin now an insane disorder reigns, and the ship has no more any guide or route:

And the sun set and the sun rose on the sea, and a boat roamed aimlessly on the sea, and on the boat there was a cabin, and in the cabin two rolled carpets and a bed, and on the bed a sea captain was lying, rolled up on himself; he did not shave anymore, he did not wash anymore, his saliva dripped on the blankets – he was completely intent on hearing the song of the Siren. Maybe it was not a song – it was like being carried, like a shelter, a happiness; it was the appeasement of an unknown hunger; it was so beautiful, maybe it was death; he could not go back anymore, it was the only escape from the Helmsman. And the Siren sang.<sup>935</sup>

If in Kafka's "The Silence of the Sirens"<sup>936</sup> the mythical beings renounce to singing in favor of an even more fearsome weapon – precisely their silence –, the prosaic

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<sup>934</sup> Ibid., 48: "Non era forse un capitano di lungo corso, com'è che aveva potuto essere così stupido da pensare di contentarsi di una donna che vive a terra, tutto è venuto fuori soltanto da questo, una comprensione veramente profonda era esclusa a priori, le donne del mare sono lì apposta per gli uomini che vivono sul mare, le donne di terra gli erano vietate [...], questa qui, perdio, non gli avrebbe certo cucito dei pantaloni rossi".

<sup>935</sup> Ibid., 58-59: "E il sole tramontò e il sole sorse sul mare, e sul mare vagava senza meta una nave, e sulla nave c'era una cabina, e nella cabina c'erano due tappeti arrotolati e un letto, e sul letto giaceva un capitano di lungo corso arrotolato su se stesso, non si faceva più la barba, non si lavava più, la sua saliva sgocciolava sulle coperte, era tutto teso per udire il canto della Sirena. Forse non era un canto, era un sentirsi portare, un rifugio, una felicità, era il placarsi di una fame sconosciuta, era troppo bello, forse era la morte, non poteva più tornare indietro, era l'unica salvezza dal Timoniere. E la Sirena cantò".

<sup>936</sup> "Das Schweigen der Sirenen", written in 1917 and first published in 1931.

song of Bazlen's mermaids turns out to be nothing but a mundane and unsettling one through which clichéd coeval women types offer themselves to the Captain with lines such as: “Loving and surrendered I offer you my lips for the first kiss, and there are no longer misunderstandings between you and me, and from now on we will eternally live together, in a well lit apartment with central heating”<sup>937</sup>; or: “and I am the communist with a briefcase under my arm, and as soon as the signs of a certain sexual agitation arise in me, please let's take care of the business in the most possible clean and practical way”<sup>938</sup>; or, again: “I am fat and vulgar and I am the great whore, and I look for fleas in my pubes, and I offer my ass for you to kiss [...] – my song is warm as a warm warm swamp; there's no more sea, there's no more sky, just a moment, just a moment, listen to the song, I am singing your life, for where's the boundary between song and life...?”<sup>939</sup>.

As we learn from the final paragraph of the chapter, the song the Captain heard was nothing but the fruit of his delirium. After the last words of the Siren (“where is the boundary between song and life...?”), we in fact read: “But apparently there was a boundary, and the Captain apparently had reached that boundary; the hoot of the ship's siren pierced his flesh, there was a sudden crush, the Captain found himself in the water”<sup>940</sup>. As we learn from the notes of the incomplete chapter “Schiffskapitän,

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<sup>937</sup> *Capitano*, 59: “Tenera e abbandonata ti offro la bocca per il primo bacio, e fra noi non ci sono più malintesi, e da oggi in poi noi vivremo eternamente insieme, in un appartamento luminoso con riscaldamento centrale”.

<sup>938</sup> *Ibid.*, 60: “e io sono la comunista con la cartella sotto braccio, e appena si manifestano in me i segni di una certa inquietudine sessuale, noi sbrighiamo la faccenda, per cortesia, nel modo più pulito e pratico possibile”.

<sup>939</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61: “e io sono grassa e volgare e sono la grande puttana, e cerco le pulci fra i peli del mio pube, e ti offro il mio culo da baciare [...] – il mio canto è caldo come calda calda palude, non c'è più mare, non c'è più cielo, un momento ancora, ascolta il canto, ti canto la tua vita, perché dov'è il confine fra canto e vita...?”.

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid.*, 61: “Ma a quanto pare un confine c'era, e il Capitano a quanto pare era arrivato a quel confine, il

Schiffbruch” (“Sea Captain, Shipwreck”; in the Italian edition: “[Naufragio]”), during a tempest the ship had in fact crashed on a coral reef, and the “song” heard by the Captain was not the one of an eventually reached mermaid, but the hoot of the ship's siren.

Following the shipwreck scene, the fair-copy section ends with the four-page long chapter “Walfisch” (“Whale”; in the Italian edition: “Balena”), in which we find a blindly drunk Captain telling his vicissitude to the mocking patrons of a tavern of an eventually reached fishermen’s town, to whom he deliriously narrates of his engagement with a mermaid, and of having been swallowed by a whale, who eventually spit him out. At the end of the chapter we find him sober again, heading towards a wood and disdainfully mumbling about the previous day: “those fellow cannot even imagine what’s like in the belly of a whale [...]. A whale is a ship, but everything is confused, the engine room and the hall are jumbled – maybe others can find their way about – but a sea captain has lived all these things separately, and all he can feel now is the stench”<sup>941</sup>. Bazlen could only complete the novel up to this scene, after which, according to the fragments and notes of which the remaining part of the published novel consist, the plot could have taken different directions.

The following unfinished short chapter “[Naufragio]” summarily describes the subsequent destiny of the Captain until his homecoming. We thus learn that the news of the shipwreck arrived to his hometown, and of the initially indifferent reaction of his wife

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fischio della sirena della nave gli penetrò nella carne, ci fu uno schianto improvviso, il Capitano si ritrovò in acqua”.

<sup>941</sup> Ibid., 65: “quelli lì non riescono neppure a immaginarsi come sia nella pancia di una balena [...]. Una balena è una nave, solo che tutto è confuso, la sala macchine e il salone e le cabine sono mescolati alla rinfusa – forse altri ci si ritrovano – ma un capitano di lungo corso ha vissuto tutte queste cose separatamente, e tutto quello che ora si sente è il puzzo”.

to his alleged death. We have further information on the shipwreck, and we discover that finally a billow casted the Captain on a coral island (this version seems to be a variant of the story of the whale, but, as we will see, Bazlen's notes suggest an equivalence between the symbolism of the whale and the one of the island), denying him thus even the chance of an actual death by water:

I cannot even dissolve into you, oh tiredness! oh sea! until now I have looked far and I haven't seen the sea; until now I have studied the charts and I haven't known my blood; now I know the fishes and the seaweeds and the blood-jellyfishes; oh salt of the sea! o salt of the blood! and now, in the middle of the blue sea, I am bound to go round a red disk, continuously, in circles, until I will die of hunger and thirst.<sup>942</sup>

After 7 days, a naturalist rescued him, cured him and finally brought him back to the firm land. Here, penniless and homesick, the Captain keeps crying his misfortune and his losses:

And now I'm here, a poor sea captain, my boat smashed, my crew – which used to obey me – drowned; the trunks of my cabin – with my fine uniforms, white for the summer, blue for the winter – have been swallowed by the sea, and with them also my black suit – now I cannot even go to weddings and funerals –; my leg is wounded, my shirt is torn, my dress is ragged; if I only had those red trousers!, but they are at home in the black chest. I want to go home, my wife has bruises on her body, her breath smells, and she has a hoarse voice. I will close my eyes, I will hold my nose, I will stop my hears, but I want the trousers, I want the red trousers.<sup>943</sup>

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<sup>942</sup> Ibid., 68: “Non posso neppure dissolvermi in voi, o stanchezza, o mare, finora ho guardato lontano e non ho visto il mare, finora ho studiato le carte e non ho conosciuto il mio sangue, ora conosco i pesci e le alghe e le meduse del sangue, o sale del mare, o sale del sangue, e ora, in mezzo al mare azzurro, sono costretto a girare su un disco rosso, continuamente, in tondo, fino a morire di fame e di sete”.

<sup>943</sup> Ibid., 68-69: “E ora sono qui, povero capitano di lungo corso, la mia nave si è sfracellata, il mio equipaggio, che mi obbediva, è annegato, i bauli della mia cabina, con le mie belle uniformi, bianche per l'estate, blu per l'inverno, sono stati inghiottiti dal mare, e con essi anche il mio abito nero, ora non posso più andare a matrimoni e funerali, la mia gamba è ferita, la mia camicia è stracciata, il mio vestito è a pezzi, oh avessi almeno quei pantaloni rossi, ma sono a casa nella cassapanca nera. Voglio ritornare a casa, mia moglie ha dei lividi sul corpo, ha il fiato che puzza, e la voce rauca. Chiuderò gli occhi, mi tapperò il naso, mi turerò le orecchie, ma voglio avere i pantaloni, voglio i pantaloni rossi”.

The last paragraph of the chapter sketchily narrates the wanderings of the Captain until his return to his homeland: “And already from the distance he saw the dog playing with a bone at the front door of his home, and he thus decided not to shut his eyes; he approached his home, and the perfume of the oleanders reached him from the windows, and he decided not to hold his nose; and a canary sung, and he decided not to stop his ears”<sup>944</sup>.

## 2.2. Close to Death, but Terribly Learned

The description of the shipwreck is concise, but the many notes and fragments that follow it suggest that Bazlen considered it central and that he arguably planned to substantially integrate and expand it. From them we in fact learn that Bazlen's captain, once thrown into the water, suddenly realizes that it was not the mermaids what he had been looking for – all along what he had been craving for was a shipwreck:

At last he had found it, the new life – the shock of the cold water was very strong, and it was the only thing he could think of – what he did not think of, but that he nevertheless did, was to start swimming vigorously – after the long, long lying, it was almost a sporting pleasure to see how he managed to move forward with each movement – he suddenly was happy; he had finally realized it: what he had been looking for all his life was a shipwreck – this was the great liberation...<sup>945</sup>

The Captain can get rid of his past and of his belongings only now that he finds even the

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<sup>944</sup> Ibid., 69: “Già di lontano vide che il cane stava giocando con un osso davanti alla porta della sua casa, e allora decise di non chiudere gli occhi, si avvicinò alla casa e fu verso di lui il profumo degli oleandri dalle finestre, ed egli decise di non tapparsi il naso, e un canarino cantò, ed egli decise di non turarsi le orecchie”.

<sup>945</sup> Ibid., 70: “Finalmente l'aveva trovata, la nuova vita – lo choc dell'acqua fredda era molto forte, e questa fu l'unica cosa che gli venne in mente – la cosa che non gli venne in mente, e che però fece, fu di mettersi a nuotare con energia – dopo essere stato tanto a lungo disteso era quasi una gioia sportiva vedere come riusciva ad avanzare sempre meglio con ogni movimento – improvvisamente si sentì felice; ora c'era arrivato: quello che aveva cercato per tutta la sua vita era il naufragio, era questa la grande liberazione...”.



possibility of his own death indifferent: “One could expect at this point great revolutions within his conscience, but there was no trace of them – perhaps the great transformation was only that he was now nothing but a physical pain pierced by slivers of consciousness”<sup>946</sup>. The shipwrecked remains of his life – and with them his desire of accumulation, order, and organization – are floating around him. The exhausted Captain finally gives up:

more and more tired and weakened, he was so exhausted that he gave up swimming – he did not want to keep swimming, tiredness was beautiful, the sea was beautiful – just no more swimming, just no more ships, JUST BEING CARRIED (that damn Oriental, it was all his fault); to be dissolved in exhaustion, to be dissolved in the sea – and the quieter he got, the more agitated the sea became, and when he stopped swimming, the wave; ouch, the Captain said.<sup>947</sup>

The Captain's ship has sunk, all the crew members are dead, and all his belongings has been lost and are now floating around him. He – who used to know everything about the seas and the harbors, who could not be surprised by anything, who collected books and pursued a knowledge which could not grant him real wisdom, nor a cure for his angst – he can find peace only now, in the extreme consequences of the shipwreck, in the chance of a physical and psychological dissolution. He now can reach “the point in which / one is no more”<sup>948</sup>:

*Enfin seul* – it entered the Captain's head; he smiled. In spite of that, imperturbable as always, he started swimming ahead. He had hated the

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<sup>946</sup> Ibid., 72: “Ci si poteva aspettare, adesso, grandi rivolgimenti nella sua coscienza, ma non ce n'era traccia – forse la grande metamorfosi consisteva solo nel fatto che lui era tutto un dolore fisico trapassato da schegge di coscienza”.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid., 74: “sempre più esausto e privo di resistenza, talmente stanco che rinunciò del tutto a nuotare – non voleva continuare a nuotare, la stanchezza era bella, il mare era bello, soltanto non nuotare più, soltanto non guidare più una nave, LASCIARSI PORTARE (quel maledetto Orientale, tutta colpa sua) dissolversi nella stanchezza, dissolversi nel mare – e quanto più tranquillo diventava lui, tanto più si agitava il mare, e quando smise di nuotare, l'onda; ah, disse il Capitano –”.

<sup>948</sup> Ibid., 76: “il punto in cui / non si è più”.

ship so much; it was so beautiful that all the books were dissolving in the water. Everything was obvious and consequential. He had always known it, known and wanted it; that time, when he refused the red trousers – that was the first step in preparation of the shipwreck –; how far back we must go – half a life, with pain and hatred and dreams and work and pride –, how many things one must go through to achieve a fine, plausible, elaborate, well-crafted shipwreck [...]. Now everything was in order, falling into the water was part of the program [...] – and now no more Sirens – the only ones, the only real ones were the ones on the paintings of the brothel’s lounge. Now only: Tiamat, Tiamat! to finally create a new cosmos; he swam, and felt fine; at last his muscles were moving after the long stasis – the ship and the harbor and the home were so obscene; now he had the sea, and he also had a program.<sup>949</sup>

We though discover that, sailing towards a shipwreck, the Captain was actually looking neither for death nor for a psychological dissolution (we in fact read: “Death is not a solution, is just the end of our lamentable art, it is the liberation towards a petty stillness [...] – liberations are not always solutions”<sup>950</sup>). The Captain in fact keeps swimming with all the energy he has left towards a red point on the horizon, which eventually reveals itself as a distant island. He knows he will survive and will be back to the solid ground, but only once he will be completely exhausted, emptied<sup>951</sup>. He now has a plan – although, again, an apparently silly and delirious one:

[...] he had the sea, and he also had a program, and then the providential

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<sup>949</sup> Ibid., 76-77: “*Enfin seul*, passò per la testa del Capitano, sorrise. A parte questo, impassibile come sempre, cominciò a nuotare con tutte le sue forze. Come aveva odiato la nave, com'era bello che tutti i libri si sciogliessero nel mare. Era tutto ovvio e consequenziale, lo aveva saputo sempre, sempre, e lo aveva anche voluto, quella volta, quando aveva rifiutato i pantaloni rossi – quello era stato il primo atto di preparazione al naufragio – quanto indietro bisogna risalire, la metà di una vita con sofferenza e odio e sogni e lavoro e orgoglio, attraverso quante cose bisogna passare per arrivare a un bel naufragio plausibile, elaborato, curato [...] Ora tutto era in ordine, il tonfo in acqua faceva parte del programma [...]. E ora niente più sirene, le uniche, le uniche reali sui quadri del bordello. – Ora soltanto Tiamat, Tiamat, per creare alla fine un cosmo, nuotava, e si sentiva bene, finalmente i muscoli si muovevano dopo la lunga stasi – e che indecenza la nave e il porto e la casa, ora aveva il mare, e aveva anche un programma”. Tiamat, in Mesopotamian mythology, is the primordial goddess of ocean and chaos.

<sup>950</sup> Ibid., 75: “la morte non è una soluzione, è solo una fine della nostra lamentevole arte, è la liberazione verso una quiete meschina [...] – le liberazioni non sono sempre delle soluzioni...”.

<sup>951</sup> See *ibid.*, 77: “Finché non sarà esausto, non verrà gettato sulla riva – lui lo sa, e continua a nuotare meccanicamente”.

solution, the happy end – unknown on an unknown shore, the hero who re-emerge from the sea, the aborigines bring him the fruits of the fields (where else should fruit come from, from asphalt?), and somewhere, in the inland, there are goldmines and diamonds fields (and the laundresses).<sup>952</sup>

The Captain “lives the death by water... than is dragged by the current”<sup>953</sup>. Finally, the sea, with a big wave, throws him to the shore of the unknown island.

Among the materials for the shipwreck scene, we find an isolated note in italics: “*the Captain was close to death, but he was terribly learned*”<sup>954</sup>. At this point of the narration, the Captain – completely exhausted, alone in the middle of the ocean, his crew dead, the wreckage of his boat all around him – is finally close to death, *but*, we learn, he is extremely cultured, extremely well-informed. The employment of the adversative conjunction between the two clauses describes an incoherent relation. In the tension created by this unlikely opposition, is maybe recognizable the expression of the peak of the existential and psychical crisis of the Captain, who is finally refused even the possibility of a mystical dissolution into the sea, which would have required the sacrifice of his own will and the renunciation of the world. The shipwreck will ultimately reveal itself as the longed solution to an organized, bourgeois life, as a virtuous moment which will grant him the chance of a new beginning. It required, though, to put everything at stake. This is especially evident in the mermaids’ episode.

Unlike Ulysses, who, guided by rational objectives and by a set direction, wants

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<sup>952</sup> Ibid., 77: “ora aveva il mare, e aveva anche un programma, e poi il felice scioglimento, lo *happy end* – ignoto su una costa ignota, l'eroe che esce dal mare, gli aborigeni gli portano i frutti dei campi (e da dove dovrebbero venire i frutti, dall'asfalto?), e da qualche parte, nell'interno, ci sono miniere d'oro e campi di diamanti (e le lavandaie)”.

<sup>953</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>954</sup> Ibid., 75: “il Capitano era vicino alla morte, ma era tremendamente colto”.

to hear and enjoy the mermaids' song but does not allow himself to be turned away from his route, the Captain is willing to completely lose himself. Looking for the mermaids, he is actually looking “for the unknown and unmeasurable”<sup>955</sup>, and he radically puts his own self in question, for he unconsciously knows that only this painful and dangerous experience can grant him a chance of rebirth, of radical transformation. Once back home, he will in fact confess to his wife: “my life began only when I started to go after the Sirens’ song”<sup>956</sup>. The Mermaids promise knowledge to Ulysses, who, knowing how dangerous is to listen to their song, ties and restrains himself. The Captain, on the other hand, is open to all the possible consequences of his research, even if they could lead to his death or to the complete dissolution of his ego. We read in *Note senza testo*, under the title “Antiulisse”: “Listening, tied, to the mermaids' songs: the lack of risk of the petite bourgeois starts here”<sup>957</sup>.

Ulysses can enjoy the mermaids' song without the mortal risk of being caught, of getting lost. His stance is analogous to “the experimental position of modern man”<sup>958</sup>, who experiments only within the limits of his personal safety<sup>959</sup>. Listening, tied, to the mermaids’ songs, Ulysses avoids the risk of being touched by beauty, and just “studies the laws of beauty”<sup>960</sup> – and this experience, Bazlen argues, signs the birth of criticism<sup>961</sup>.

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<sup>955</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 143.

<sup>956</sup> *Capitano*, 139: “la mia vita è cominciata soltanto quando mi sono messo a seguire il canto delle Sirene”.

<sup>957</sup> *Note senza testo*, 210: “Ascoltare legati il canto delle Sirene: qui comincia la mancanza di rischio del piccolo borghese”.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid.

<sup>959</sup> See de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 144.

<sup>960</sup> *Note senza testo*, 214: “Ulisse – eliminato il rischio – studia le leggi della bellezza”.

<sup>961</sup> See *ibid.*: “Ulisse e la Sirena: e così nasce la critica, e presto si tirò fuori che le sirene di X cantavano peggio delle sirene di Y, e le sirene lo vennero a sapere, e vollero cantare ancora meglio, e così succede che tutte le sirene sono stonate”.

For the Captain, on the contrary, the mermaid's song is not a simply enjoyable aesthetic experience. The prosaic song of the mermaids – which is generated by his own delirium, and against which he is completely defenseless – leads him to a chance of rebirth, but this chance is offered to him only once he is brought on the verge of death, only once he has learnt what Bazlen describes in one of his aphorisms as “the art of dying every second”<sup>962</sup> – namely the art of getting rid of his own past and his own self, for only this art allows continuous rebirths and continuous change.

Ulysses wants to reach the shores of his homeland; we twentieth-century men, just like the Captain, are driven by an opposite desire: “we are covered black in the soot of our homeland, and we want always and again the depths of the seas”<sup>963</sup>. Only this “death by water”<sup>964</sup> – which is a spiritual death, a surrender to an unknown destiny – allows the Captain to surpass his intellectual and existential crisis. This death, for Bazlen’s Anti-Ulysses, is propitiated exactly by the mermaids, which do not promise him beauty or knowledge: their only seduction is of being “the daughters of chance”<sup>965</sup>. They are monsters that need to be faced and to whom one need to abandon himself, and who will eventually grant a new self-awareness. As Assenza argues, the song of Bazlen’s sirens, “which is poetry and literature, is not separated from life, it does not allow itself to be ensnared by illusion, music, myth”<sup>966</sup>. Although prosaic and mundane, the song of these

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<sup>962</sup> Ibid., 181: “L’arte di morire ogni secondo – / (capire che ogni secondo è contro la trasformazione degli altri)”.

<sup>963</sup> Ibid., 216: “[...] Odisseo vuole la riva della sua patria – noi tutti siamo neri della fuliggine della nostra patria, e vogliamo sempre di nuovo la profondità del mare –”.

<sup>964</sup> *Capitano*, 81.

<sup>965</sup> See *ibid.*, 58: “quanto più si fanno calcoli, tanto più ci si allontana dalle Sirene, le Sirene sono figlie del caso, questa volta si sarebbe affidato al mare, il mare forse lo avrebbe spinto nella direzione giusta”.

<sup>966</sup> Assenza, *Il confine nella letteratura*, 139.

“Mud Sirens”<sup>967</sup> still is creation: it represents the chance of transformation from which, according to Bazlen, Ulysses defends himself. Actually, the song heard by the Captain grants him a chance of transformation exactly because it is mundane and unsettling. According to Bazlen “becoming aware” is a creative process, and not the result of a work of digging and awakening: “it is the shaping of a non-form (not of an unknown and latent form in us)”<sup>968</sup>. The very “redemption of the world” is according to Bazlen “a creative process starting from everything we are given, not a renunciation to a (disturbing) part of what we are given”<sup>969</sup>.

While Ulysses, trying to go back to Ithaca, uses his intelligence and trickery to dominate his own destiny, the Captain's research drags him towards a solution into the sea – solution that becomes the figure of the dissolution of his own self-defenses, which seems to be the necessary premise for the creation of a new self-awareness. If Ulysses imposes his own will over nature and even over gods, the shipwreck allows the Captain to get rid of his will of giving direction to his life, of the discipline he imposed to himself, and of the need of organizing knowledge and experience. If Ulysses, during the war and subsequently during his journey back home, is assisted by Athena (the goddess of wisdom, order, strategy), the Captain recognizes in Poseidon (the god of the sea and of the storm, and therefore of changes) the ally that can help him to achieve the longed-for shipwreck.

We read in Bazlen's *Note a piè di pagina*: “the one who has in front of him a

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<sup>967</sup> *Capitano*, 61.

<sup>968</sup> *Note senza testo*, 190: “Che il prendere coscienza è nuova creazione e non opera di scavo e risveglio: viene data forma a una non-forma (e non a una forma ignota latente in noi)”.

<sup>969</sup> *Ibid.*, 193: “La redenzione del mondo è un processo creativo a partire da tutto ciò che è dato, non la rinuncia a una parte (disturbante) del dato, per guadagnarsi la benevolenza dei superiori”.

(conscious) goal cannot be transformed – before Ulysses, the absence of finality, the swaying, therefore Poseidon, the god of swaying, is his enemy – and Minerva (this snobbish social climber) his protectress<sup>970</sup>. According to Bazlen, only the one who has not set himself a goal can be granted with a chance of transformation, and Poseidon becomes the Captain's protector exactly because he helps him to loose everything in the exhaustion and helplessness that follow the shipwreck. The subsequent cruise within the belly of the whale, as Diego Bertelli suggests, grants the Captain the possibility to keep sailing without a course<sup>971</sup>, with no actual control on his own direction. La Ferla writes:

if the Ulysses of the Odyssey is a Ulysses that has discovered the great defenses of the ego, Bazlen's Ulysses is a Ulysses who, on the contrary, during his journey acquires the awareness of how these defenses have become hypertrophic and of how they are, at the same time, “the threat that prevents from achieving the real shipwreck”.<sup>972</sup>

Before the shipwreck, the Enlightenment ego of the Captain tried to find a direction for his existence through order, knowledge, domination; after the shipwreck, the Captain seems to have learned that “strict order is not a solution – only order in movement is!”<sup>973</sup>.

Bazlen started writing *Il capitano di lungo corso* in 1944, the same year in which Onofri's *Manoscritto* is set, and in which Bazlen's alter ego Ans' crisis and his feeling of being signed by the mark of Cain (symbol of curse and isolation) are so described:

[Ans] roams around, and looks pained. He says: “Like Cain: marked in the forehead. I feel like Cain”. And he touches his forehead, and it actually looks like he has a mark, there, between the wrinkles. [...] “I cannot stand

<sup>970</sup> Ibid., 209: “Chi ha davanti agli occhi uno scopo (conscio) non può trasformarsi – prima di Ulisse, l'assenza di finalit , l'ondeggiare qua e l , perci  Poseidone   il suo nemico, il Dio dell'ondeggiare – e Minerva (questa snob arrivista) la sua protettrice...”.

<sup>971</sup> See Diego Bertelli, “Al fondo della scrittura: L'inizio e la fine nella letteratura del Novecento” [Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2011], 241.

<sup>972</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 112.

<sup>973</sup> *Note senza testo*, 212: “Ordine rigido non   soluzione – ordine in movimento, s !”.

it anymore”, he cheerfully said. [...] “I feel sick. Something so private and intimate is happening deep inside of me [...], something that had never happened to me before. I actually don’t know what it is. But I feel sick”.<sup>974</sup>

Bazlen’s letters and notes testify that 1944 was a particularly painful and crucial year for him, and that his “critical age” was indeed 42<sup>975</sup>. We have also seen that in 1944 Bazlen arguably started his therapy with Bernhard<sup>976</sup>, and that *Il capitano di lungo corso* might have been composed (together with the above-mentioned psychoanalytical diary and drawings) in support of the therapy. Furthermore, the Captain interests and adventures parodistically mirror Bazlen’s ones (Bazlen and the Captain, for instance, share a deep interest for books and a bad conscience towards modern physics<sup>977</sup>; they both are “married” to distant wives, and lead eventful sentimental lives which eventually always bring them back to them<sup>978</sup>). The completed part of *Il Capitano di lungo corso* might thus actually be seen as the transposition of the crisis and of the path followed by Bazlen in those years. It seems in fact to describe what he realized in that period, namely “that around 42 is about time to start living”<sup>979</sup>. As his notes suggest, this age might indeed be

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<sup>974</sup> Carpi, *Manoscritto*, 240-242: “[Ans] girovaga qua e là, ha un’aria sofferente. Dice: ‘Come Caino: segnato in mezzo alla fronte. Mi sento come Caino’. E si batte la fronte, sembra davvero che abbia un segno, lì in mezzo, fra le rughe. [...] ‘Non ne posso più’, disse allegramente. [...] ‘Sto male. Mi sta accadendo qualche cosa, proprio in fondo, qualche cosa di così privato e intimo [...] che non mi era accaduto mai, prima. Non so bene neppure io. Ma sto male’”.

<sup>975</sup> One of the notes of *Note senza testo* (178) reads: “Morti o crollati nella mia età critica (42 anni), nella mia situazione [...]”.

<sup>976</sup> See Foà’s account in Carotenuto, *Jung e la cultura italiana*, 133.

<sup>977</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 208: “Noi tutti, cattiva coscienza davanti alla fisica moderna (unica via permessa)” (originally in Italian); see also *ibid.*, 210: “Per finire... e resta un vago disagio di fronte alla fisica moderna”. Bazlen’s interest for modern physics is testified also by Foà: “Dalla sua lunga frequentazione di Jung era uscito con un forte interesse per il mondo orientale, e anche per l’astrologia e per quel che poteva capirne della fisica moderna” (Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 20).

<sup>978</sup> As La Ferla points out, the importance of the biographical datum and the parallelisms with Bazlen’s actual experience are particularly evident in the notes of which the second part of the novel is composed (see *Diritto al silenzio*, 153).

<sup>979</sup> See Bazlen’s letter to Voghera of December 28<sup>th</sup> 1951, in *Tracce del sapiente*, 35: “pensa che quasi tutta la cultura che in un certo modo ci ha determinato o espresso in questi ultimi secoli, è stata fatta da gente che non ha superato la crisi dei 42 anni; i pascal, spinoza, kierkegaard, ecc., ecc. – e che ora è



interpreted as the midway of the journey of a man's life<sup>980</sup>, but, according to Bazlen, it nevertheless is not an age in which one should take stock of his own life; it rather is the age in which real life should begin, because, as we read in one of his *footnotes*, "this is a world of death – we used to be born alive, and little by little die. Now we are born dead – some manage, little by little, to become alive"<sup>981</sup>.

The completed part of *Il capitano di lungo corso* seems thus to ask to be read as the poetic transposition of an intimate realization, within which the Captain's sailing and shipwreck are the figures of psychological and cognitive experiences, the necessary premises for a new, real life. Bazlen so describes the Captain's plunge into the water: "Now everything was in order, falling into the water was part of the program, and even if he didn't know it, he could say where he was; it was the end of the prologue"<sup>982</sup>. The quest for the mermaids ("the daughters of chance") is the precondition for entering the belly of the whale, or for being cast on a desert island – variants which, as we learn from Bazlen's notes, are equivalent:

Isle = belly of the whale  
 was he on the isle or  
 was he in the belly of the wave  
 or was the isle the belly of the whale?<sup>983</sup>

La Ferla suggests that the whale, as an "archetype of transformation", is to be interpreted

giunto il momento in cui verso i quarantadue anni bisognerebbe finalmente cominciare a vivere".

<sup>980</sup> In *Note senza testo* (178), immediately following the above mentioned note on his "critical age", we read: "Il prossimo redentore: oltre 84 anni".

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid.*, 181: "È un mondo della morte – un tempo si nasceva vivi e a poco a poco si moriva. Ora si nasce morti – alcuni riescono a diventare a poco a poco vivi".

<sup>982</sup> *Capitano*, 77: "Ora tutto era in ordine, il tonfo in acqua era parte del programma, e anche se non lo sapeva, poteva dire dove si trovava, era la fine del prologo".

<sup>983</sup> *Ibid.*, 169: "Isola = pancia della balena / era sull'isola o / era nella pancia della balena / o l'isola era la pancia della balena?". As we learn from another note, the sea itself has the same function of the whale and of the isle: "[...] la lotta col grande mostro marino: il grande mostro marino era il mare stesso..." (*ibid.*, 76).

as “the dark and subterranean place of the unconscious, or as the [Jungian] Great Mother which symbolically embodies the possibility of a synthesis between conscious and unconscious”<sup>984</sup>. According to Bazlen psychotherapy is “marsh and sacrifice”<sup>985</sup>, and does not admit renunciation, escape, desertion, or straining<sup>986</sup>. Exactly like the belly of the whale, inside of which it is

“dark... dark... dark... [...] black! And you are so alone, so alone, so alone [...] and all around everything that has been, that is, and that will be spins and stirs, and everything reeks [...]. You are spit out only if you crawl out, you can crawl out only if you are spit out, [...] if you miss that moment – you know – that single moment [...] you carry on sitting in the darkness, and you don't know if you will be spit out again, if you will crawl out again... You are desperate, and the worst thing is that you actually don't want to leave the belly of the whale at all [...]. After all it is warm, after all you are protected, and you just need not to slither when you are spit out; but you have a bad conscience, and you know that you need to do it; and you are pushed, you are irresistibly pushed, and you stay there sitting, paralyzed by fear, and you pray the good God, you hope not to be spit out [...]” and he started crying bitterly... [...] “the reek is indeed the most beautiful thing in there... [...] the reek in there is the world before it started to entertain the idea of needing to be redeemed; everything reeks in perfect harmony, there is everything in there... [...] I am telling you, that one day this world will be spit out, one day this world will crawl out, no, it will not crawl out, it will be spit out”<sup>987</sup>.

<sup>984</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 140.

<sup>985</sup> *Note senza testo*, 190: “L'unico arnese concettuale necessario per ogni psicoterapia: P a l u d e e s a c r i f i c i o”.

<sup>986</sup> See *ibid.*, 200: “Psicoterapia: palude, superata solo mediante sacrificio (non rinuncia, non fuga, non abbandonare, non strappare)”.

<sup>987</sup> *Capitano*, 63-65: “Scuro... scuro... scuro... [...] nero! E uno è così solo, così solo, così solo [...] e intorno gira e si agita tutto ciò che è stato ciò che è e che sarà, e tutto puzza [...]. Sputati fuori si viene soltanto se si striscia fuori, strisciar fuori si può soltanto se si viene sputati fuori, [...] se si perde quel momento, capite, quell'unico momento [...] si continua a star seduti nell'oscurità, e non si sa se si sarà di nuovo sputati fuori, se si potrà di nuovo strisciare fuori... Disperati, e la cosa peggiore è che in realtà non si vuole per niente uscire dalla pancia della balena [...]. In fondo è caldo, in fondo si è protetti, e basta non sdrucchiolare quando si viene sputati fuori, ma si ha una cattiva coscienza, e si sa che bisogna farlo, si è spinti, si è spinti irresistibilmente, e si sta lì seduti, paralizzati dalla paura, e si prega il buon Dio, si spera che ancora non sputi [...]’ e cominciò a piangere amaramente... [...] ‘il puzzo lì è proprio la cosa più bella... [...] il puzzo là dentro è il mondo prima che gli venisse l’idea di dover essere redento, tutto puzza in perfetto accordo, lì c’è ancora tutto... [...] Ma io vi dico che un giorno questo mondo sarà sputato fuori, questo mondo un giorno striscerà fuori, no, non striscerà fuori, verrà sputato fuori”.

The shipwreck forces the Captain to face his unconscious, and to subsequently surrender to an unknowable destiny. Exactly this capitulation, as we learn from Bazlen's notes, will allow the Captain to come to terms not only with his own ego and angst, but also with his old life (with his personal relationships, with his thirst of knowledge, with his social role), that is with the world he was escaping from. The shipwreck grants him a way out from an existential *impasse*, and does so eluding any attempt of mediation between irreconcilable instances.

Bazlen planned, after further adventures, to make the Captain go back home to the Wife, who, as Assenza suggests, also is a “shipwrecked person”, but one who had not actually looked for a shipwreck<sup>988</sup>. Her metamorphosis is propitiated by the time spent at the tavern, from which she gradually distances herself after the news of the alleged death of her husband. She eventually starts taking care of the house again, and finally decides to fix the uneven red trousers she made for her husband, and to sew also a red jacket, in case someone would find his corpse (“when he was alive he didn't want to wear the red trousers; now he is dead and he will be forced to wear them, after all it's never too late; and thus he will end up being buried completely in red – it serves him right”<sup>989</sup>).

In the return of the Captain and in his reunion with his wife we have another major difference with the Homeric model: if Ulysses and Penelope, once reunited, are

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<sup>988</sup> See Assenza, *Il confine nella letteratura*, 136.

<sup>989</sup> *Capitano*, 28: “quando era vivo non voleva mettersi i pantaloni rossi, ora è morto e sarà obbligato a portarli, in fondo non è mai troppo tardi; e così finirà per essere seppellito tutto in rosso, gli sta proprio bene”.

just the same as before their separation<sup>990</sup>, the Captain and the Wife are deeply changed, matured. They accepted adventure, chaos, change, and their consequences; they are not exactly wise, but they are wiser than before, more self-conscious and free – and this, as Blumenberg suggests, is a typical motif of the shipwreck metaphors, according to which “what can be salvaged from the shipwreck of existence proves to be not a possession withdrawn, in whatever way, into interiority but rather the self-possession achievable through the process of self-discovery and self-appropriation”<sup>991</sup>. The Captain and the Wife are transformed both individually and in their relationship: unlike Ulysses and Penelope, they now know that “stiffen *faithfulness is not trust* (they both need to accept chaos)”<sup>992</sup>. Together with their own individuality, the Captain and the Wife had in fact to put into question also their relationship, and more generally, the very conventions of the society they live in.

We eventually read that the Captain – whose angst seems not to be vanished, but simply accepted – will keep sailing, at times with the Wife, and will continue to look for and run into more shipwrecks. The reality he lives in poses him in front of a state of continuous emergency – emergency which is so emptied of its exceptional nature to the point of becoming the norm. The shipwreck, as a cathartic moment of chaos and struggle, seems thus to be the figure of a regenerative psychological event that allows to deal with a state of perpetual crisis and existential laceration that does not admit mediation or reconciliation.

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<sup>990</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 211: “Lui [Ulisse] che per fedeltà a una donna viene cacciato continuamente in mezzo ad avventure, per sfuggire all'avventura, e non si rende conto di nulla di ciò che incontra nelle avventure, finché poi ritrova, non trasformato, la donna non trasformata”.

<sup>991</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 14.

<sup>992</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 211: “L'irrigidita *fedeltà non è fiducia* (tutti e due devono accettare il caos)”.

### 2.3. The Shipwreck of the Enlightenment Ego

In *Il capitano di lungo corso*, the myth of Ulysses is recreated and relived through a contemporary individual, and it is employed in the first place as structure for the description of an intimate and existential experience. The choice of the mythical language, as La Ferla argues, represent in fact a means “to express psychic reality in all its vital essence”, and allows to avoid judgments, logical explanations, and transliterations<sup>993</sup>. In this perspective, as we have seen, the ocean can be considered the symbol of the subconscious, the harbor becomes “the only point of contact with external reality”<sup>994</sup>, and the will of the Captain of sailing without a set direction, leaving behind himself all certainties and all conventions, seems therefore to be the figure of his will to confront his subconscious. The circumstances in which *Il capitano di lungo corso* was written and the correspondences between the fragments of *Note senza testo* that address psychotherapy and many passages of the novel seem to corroborate the interpretation of *Il capitano di lungo corso* as the narrative elaboration of a psychoanalytic therapy. In the novel myth thus displays itself first of all as the language through which it is artistically possible to describe the human psychic apparatus. In the Twentieth century, through psychoanalysis, myths and archetypes reveal themselves also as fundamental and powerful languages in describing the connections between the individual psychical dimension and the cultural and collective one<sup>995</sup>. Myth allows thus Bazlen to address

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<sup>993</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 115.

<sup>994</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>995</sup> We have in the first chapter (pp. 87-89) already underlined the importance that Jungian theories had for Bazlen's formation and thought, and briefly addressed they key-concept of *principium individuationis*.

individual psychic reality in connection with the society and culture in which the personal destiny of his archetypical characters unfold.

*Il capitano di lungo corso* lacks of accurate geographical and temporal determinations (we can only infer that it is set in coeval Europe), and its characters are only sketchily characterized. They are in fact all named after their profession (“the Captain”, “the Helmsman”, “the Ship boy”, “the Innkeeper”), after their role (“the Wife”), or after their provenance (“the Oriental”) or peculiar physical traits (“the One-eyed man”, “the Pockmarked-man”, “the One-legged-man”). In German all substantives begin with capital letters, and Calasso’s choice of conserving the capitals in his translation corroborates the interpretation of the archetypical, exemplary function of the characters (function which seems furthermore to be confirmed by Bazlen’s notes<sup>996</sup>). La Ferla as well, underlining the elusive and symbolic function of the characters of the novel, agrees with this allegorical interpretation. Bazlen, she writes, “lingers on places, situations, and characters only for the brief time indispensable for their signification<sup>997</sup>. His characters are “stylized figures” that do not describe or evoke real people<sup>998</sup>, they are “sensorial nucleuses which completely lack of biographical, psychological, or sociological consistence”<sup>999</sup>.

The Captain can therefore be interpreted not as *an* intellectual, but as the

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<sup>996</sup> See for instance *Capitano*, 145-146: “Chi è la moglie? Non si sa neppure se è grassa o magra, bionda o bruna. Non hai qualità, se un romanziere ti volesse descrivere, nessun lettore saprebbe a cosa pensare. Sei uno schema, una formula, forse uno spettro, non la *vita* – (*se vi pare*)! Sei giovane o vecchia? So che hai i capelli grigi, ma sono tinti (neri) – sei grigia, sei nera? (è giusto che tu li tinga). Se per un po’ non li tingi, le radici diventano bianche, altro non so...”.

<sup>997</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 116-117.

<sup>998</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>999</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. La Ferla quotes here Alberto Destro, introduction to Rainer Maria Rilke, *Elegie duinesi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), xviii.

archetype of the twentieth-century intellectual (or maybe even as the archetype of the very “Man of the Twentieth century, who is the result of thousands years of history”<sup>1000</sup>). The Captain's angst, impasse, and research seem to be the figures of the crisis of the twentieth-century man, who – as it has been demonstrated by the “masters of suspicion”<sup>1001</sup> – not only is deprived of rationality itself as a means of knowledge and progress, but who has also to recognize that his “ego is not master in its own house”<sup>1002</sup>. We can thus interpret the crisis of the Captain and his incessant but futile urge to make order in his cabin as an attempt to organize knowledge through means that are no longer effective. Knowledge as integration of new elements in the preexisting system reveals itself in fact impossible for the anguished Captain, who, in spite of his attempts, experiences the impossibility of recognizing himself as the ordering center of reality. In the light of the allegorical nature of Bazlen's unfinished novel and of its existential afflatus, the centrality of the seafaring and shipwreck themes and of the Homeric model acquire particular pregnancy.

Addressing Hans Blumenberg's *Shipwreck with Spectator*, Steven Rendall points out that the paradigm of “life as a sea voyage” is per se “a model open to multiple possible actualizations”<sup>1003</sup>. The sea has in fact always represented for men the realm of the indeterminable and of the ungovernable, and therefore an ideal place where to

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<sup>1000</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 141.

<sup>1001</sup> Regarding the “three masters, [who] seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud”, see Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 32.

<sup>1002</sup> Sigmund Freud, “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), 143.

<sup>1003</sup> Steven Rendall, introduction to Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 1.

investigate and problematize the theme of the man at the mercy of outer and inner uncontrollable forces. In philosophy and literature, the seafaring metaphor has thus been often employed to tackle the theme of the limited control that man's will and powers have over his own fate and the forces that govern it. The meaning carried by the metaphors of shipwreck itself is determined by two prior assumptions concerning the seafaring metaphor: "first the sea as a natural given boundary of the realm of human activities and, second, its demonization as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one's bearings"<sup>1004</sup>.

As Blumenberg argues, the nautical metaphors underwent substantial developments in the course of Western thought. In antiquity seafaring was seen as a "transgression of boundaries", that is as a perilous adventure that man undertook beyond the bounds of civilization and "the sphere of determinable forces"<sup>1005</sup>. The negative connotation of the metaphor persisted in the Middle Ages, and was transcended only in Renaissance, when, with the rehabilitation of curiosity, the transgressive essence of the metaphor survived, but with a positive connotation, within which seafaring and the risk of shipwreck to it connected became obstacles to face and overcome in order to achieve a greater goal. In the Renaissance, in fact, "the ancient imperative of self-preservation and the concomitant effort to put the natural world at a distance give way [...] to 'self-assertion' as the project of mastering nature in order to realize human aspirations"<sup>1006</sup>. Subsequently, with Enlightenment, shipwreck becomes "the price that must be paid in order to avoid that complete calming of the sea winds that would make all worldly

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<sup>1004</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 8.

<sup>1005</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>1006</sup> Rendall, introduction to Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 2.



commerce impossible”<sup>1007</sup>. Finally, at the end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche gave to Pascal's formula “you are embarked”<sup>1008</sup> a precise “twist”<sup>1009</sup>. We read in *The Gay Science*, under the title “In the horizon of the infinite”:

We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us – indeed, we have gone further and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. [...] Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom* – and there is no longer any “land”<sup>1010</sup>.

As Blumenberg observes, according to Nietzsche in modernity the metaphors of embarkation itself “includes the suggestion that living means already being on the high seas, where there is no outcome other than being saved or going down, and no possibility of abstention. [...] The next metaphorical step is that not only we are always already embarked and on the high seas but also, as if this were inevitable, we are shipwrecked”<sup>1011</sup>. If being shipwrecked is per se “something like the 'legitimate' result of seafaring”<sup>1012</sup>, in modernity it becomes “the almost 'natural' permanent condition of life”<sup>1013</sup>.

The seafaring and shipwreck topoi find a most powerful signifier in the figure of Ulysses, who, as Piero Boitani maintains, represents “an archetype of myth which comes

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<sup>1007</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 29.

<sup>1008</sup> “[...] you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter [Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003], 66).

<sup>1009</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 18.

<sup>1010</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books, 1974], 180-181.

<sup>1011</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 19.

<sup>1012</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>1013</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

to constitute a consistent cultural *logos* in [Western] history and literature”<sup>1014</sup>. According to Francesca Gruppi, the myth of Odysseus can in fact be categorized as what Blumenberg describes as “fundamental myth” (*Grundmythos*), that is a radical and foundational myth able to embrace totality; a myth whose significance potential can be used and implemented by the age that chooses to speak about itself through the revival of this particular myth<sup>1015</sup>. The “sign” of Ulysses<sup>1016</sup> in different ages acquires different meanings, and the trajectory of his myth – which represents the very “‘archeology’ of the *European* image of man”<sup>1017</sup>, and which, as any myth, is “subject to change under the pressure of history”<sup>1018</sup> – shows that his figure, just like the seafaring metaphors to which is inextricably connected, is also susceptible to multiple actualizations.

Antiquity pictured Ulysses as “the paradigm of knowledge of the world and of himself through suffering”, as “the supreme engineer and craftsman of *tekhne*”, as “a master of rhetoric [and] a model of poetry”<sup>1019</sup>. In the Middle Ages Ulysses was still seen as “the embodiment of virtue and wisdom and the noble pursuer of knowledge”<sup>1020</sup>, but, alongside this interpretation, there was the one that regarded him as the figure of a trickster<sup>1021</sup>. The Dantean interpretation of Ulysses (in *Inferno* XXVI) still accommodates both acceptations, and also anticipates the Modern outlook on his figure, according to

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<sup>1014</sup> Piero Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses. Figures of a Myth*, trans. Anita Weston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>1015</sup> See Francesca Gruppi, “L’Ulisse di Blumenberg. Tra motivi antropologici, storia della ricezione e metaforologia”, *estetica. studi e ricerche* 3.2 (2013): 138-139.

<sup>1016</sup> See Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses*, 4: “Ulysses is a sign because he expresses a sense without denoting a meaning”.

<sup>1017</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>1018</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>1019</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>1020</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>1021</sup> See *ibid.*, 38.

which Ulysses, because of his “limitless hunger to know”, stands as “the symbol of a purely human *philo-sophia*”<sup>1022</sup>. With Romanticism, Ulysses’ wanderings become an alternative or a cure to existential tedium. As Boitani writes with regard to Ulysses’ incarnation in Christopher Columbus in Giacomo Leopardi’s *Operette morali*<sup>1023</sup>: “the journey undertaken may well yield no fruits, but [...] it keeps boredom temporarily at bay, gives life value, and makes precious things which would otherwise go unconsidered”<sup>1024</sup>. That is to say that seafaring at least keeps the restless man “off the streets”<sup>1025</sup> – as in the case of Melville’s Ishmael, a further possible incarnation of the Homeric hero<sup>1026</sup>. In the Twentieth century, according to Boitani, “the limit has been reached”, and readers and writers are finally “sick of [Ulysses] and his endless wanderings”<sup>1027</sup>. This does not entail that his appearances in literature become more sporadic; on the contrary, they are “proportional to the number of times modern writers and critics have proclaimed the death of literature and the end of myth”<sup>1028</sup>.

In the Twentieth century thus Ulysses is no more “a figure of the suffering that culminates in success”<sup>1029</sup>: his figure rather offers an ideal ground on which the Western notions of man, knowledge, and literature can be questioned and problematized. From

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<sup>1022</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>1023</sup> Boitani refers here to “Dialogo di Cristoforo Colombo e Pietro Gutierrez”.

<sup>1024</sup> Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses*, 113.

<sup>1025</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1026</sup> “Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off – then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can” (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick: or, The Whale* [London: Penguin Books, 2003], 3).

<sup>1027</sup> Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses*, 144.

<sup>1028</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>1029</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 76.

Kafka's silent sirens, to “the Odyssey of triviality” of Leopold Bloom<sup>1030</sup>, to the “worn out by experience” Captain Ulysses of Alberto Savinio<sup>1031</sup>, the twentieth-century modernist actualizations of the adventures of the Homeric hero overturn the mythical dignity of his figure, and with it the tradition to it connected. T. S. Eliot so describes the use of myth made by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, which allowed the Irish writer to create a piece of art in spite of the “obsolescence” of the novel form:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. [...] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. [...] Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.<sup>1032</sup>

The mythical method allows the reader to recognize the framework and the thread of the well-known myth or of the evoked piece of art, and at the same time permits fragmentation, parody, and all kinds of deviations from the main thread or plot. According to de Savorgnani, the use that Bazlen makes of myth in *Il capitano di lungo corso* is analogous to the one described by Eliot: being essential part of the reader's cultural background, myth might evoke emotions and associations of thoughts that the author can give for granted, and also free him from “the necessity of constructing a plot, of narrating a story”<sup>1033</sup>. Furthermore, myth provides the modern writer with valuable

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<sup>1030</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>1031</sup> According to Alberto Savinio's introductory “justification” to *Capitano Ulisse*, the Homeric hero is in fact “l'uomo più corroso dall'esperienza” (Alberto Savinio, “La verità sull'ultimo viaggio. Giustificazione dell'autore”, in *Capitano Ulisse* [Milano: Adelphi, 1989], 19).

<sup>1032</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”, in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 177-178.

<sup>1033</sup> De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 151-152. Regarding Bazlen's familiarity with Joyce's writings, see *Scritti*, 173-174, note 1, and his letter to Foà of June 28<sup>th</sup> 1951, in which, addressing an unpublished Italian translation of *Ulysses*, he writes: “non l'ho avuta in mano che mezz'ora, e capirai che non posso dir

material and an ideal field for a confrontation with tradition.

Bazlen knows that “western mythology gives us the characters of the drama, not the drama”<sup>1034</sup>. Therefore, in *Il Capitano di lungo corso*, the mythical model of the *Odyssey*, although being a constant reference, can be completely overturned. The tone of the novel is anti-heroic, and its transfigured Homeric characters lack any ambition of epic dignity. They in fact speak a prosaic language and have everyday problems that lead them to preposterous existential crisis which are usually faced through naïve psychological self-analysis. The Captain, far from being a hero of endurance and a master of cunning and rhetoric, is a deranged and disoriented man, whose only clear goal is to leave his homeland, and whose words and actions leave his crew bewildered<sup>1035</sup>. The Wife, far from waiting for him as the faithful and persevering Penelope, yields to wine, cards, and adultery – to a fate which, according to Bazlen, is however more dignified than the one of her model: “Penelope, the most sterile woman in the world: destroying during the night what has been done during the day (which, naturally, is always the same thing) is the

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nulla; ci vogliono ore ed ore per giudicare soltanto poche pagine. – però, poiché alcuni capitoli dell'Ulisse li conosco piuttosto bene, m'ero reso conto che era una traduzione coscienziosissima” (Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore. Collection: Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani. File: Bazlen).

<sup>1034</sup> *Note senza testo*, 188: “La mitologia occidentale ci dà i personaggi del dramma, non il dramma”.

<sup>1035</sup> In this regard, see for instance how the Captain informs the crew of his decision of sailing in search of the Mermaid: “Era tutto frizzante, radunò l'equipaggio, era la prima volta che teneva un discorso ai suoi uomini: disse che aveva in progetto un grande viaggio, che sarebbe stato il viaggio più decisivo che avessero mai fatto insieme, che riconosceva di essere stato talvolta un po' rude con loro, perciò chiedeva scusa a tutti, in fondo era soltanto un uomo anche lui, ma in quegli ultimi tempi aveva capito veramente molte cose, e così aveva in mente tutta un'altra meta, di più non poteva dire... anche il mondo era sulla soglia di una nuova epoca, presto tutte le nazioni si sarebbero unite, sarebbe cominciata, per così dire, una nuova fase nella storia del mondo. E una volta che lui avesse raggiunto la sua meta, loro avrebbero avuto doppia paga [...]. I marinai non sapevano bene come ci si deve comportare in simili casi e guardavano imbarazzati a terra” (*Capitano*, 51-52).

stupidest thing one can do; Penelope is *the* housewife”<sup>1036</sup>. In Bazlen’s *Anti-Odyssey*, Circe is a gypsy prostitute, the Suitors are crippled, the mermaids become ungraceful and prosaic “Mud Sirens”<sup>1037</sup>. As de Savorgnani argues, Bazlen re-narrates the myth of Ulysses with the purpose of debunking it, and thus emphasizing, instead of the epic and heroic elements, the grotesque, banal, and trivial aspects of the vicissitudes of his *Anti-Ulysses*<sup>1038</sup>.

The Ulysses of whom the Captain is the parody is though not necessarily only the one of the *Odyssey*. Ulysses is “Bazlen’s most handled archetype”<sup>1039</sup> exactly because his figure, in his historical transformations and interpretations, stands for him as a symbol of the “scelrotization of existence”<sup>1040</sup>, as an emblem of the dead end met by Western civilization (which, as Bazlen writes, is “the only civilization that speaks of itself as a goal. All the others are central civilizations”<sup>1041</sup>). As said above, an entire section of “Quaderno E” of *Note senza testo* is dedicated to Homeric hero, about whom Bazlen writes: “that form of life of which the petite bourgeois represents the degenerative instance starts with Odysseus”<sup>1042</sup>. Bazlen’s “perplexity towards Homer”<sup>1043</sup> and his intolerance against any “respectable Homerism”<sup>1044</sup> is on the other hand often expressed

<sup>1036</sup> *Note senza testo*, 209: “Penelope, la donna più sterile: distruggere di notte quello che si è fatto di giorno (che naturalmente è sempre la stessa cosa) è quanto di più stupido ci sia, Penelope è la donna di casa”.

<sup>1037</sup> See *Capitano*, 61: “[...] donne, salamandre, arpie? Sono le Sirene del fango, e il loro gemere è il mio canto [...]”.

<sup>1038</sup> See De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 149.

<sup>1039</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 80.

<sup>1040</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 113.

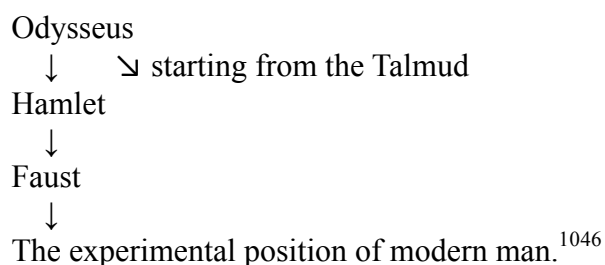
<sup>1041</sup> *Note senza testo*, 184: “Gli Europei si sentono occidentali, non centrali. Unica civiltà che parla di sé come di una meta. Tutte le altre sono civiltà del centro”.

<sup>1042</sup> *Ibid.*, 210: “Con Odisseo comincia quella forma di vita di cui il piccolo borghese rappresenta il fenomeno di degenerazione”.

<sup>1043</sup> See Bazlen’s letter to Foà of February 18<sup>th</sup> 1963, in *Lettere editoriali*, 331: “[...] e qui siamo di nuovo alle prese con la mia perplessità davanti a Omero”.

<sup>1044</sup> See Bazlen’s letter to Foà of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1959 (in *ibid.*, 290), in which Bazlen, addressing José

also in his correspondence, where he for instance argues: “The problem is that any Homerism, in a moment in which man has not a profile anymore, looks to me – thinking big and within the bounds of what is happening and that, whether we like it or not, is the only current creative job – criminal and reactionary”<sup>1045</sup>. According to Bazlen is possible to even trace a precise genealogy that from Ulysses leads to the modern Western epistemological approach:



Ulysses is according to Bazlen “the non-transformed / the curious one”<sup>1047</sup>, and stands as a symbol of the Western modern intellectual: “Ulysses does not create order, he creates direction – hence for a long time intellectuals have been living following a clear line – but the clear line lies on chaos”<sup>1048</sup>. Bazlen’s captain is able to overcome his crisis only after he has accepted chaos and has recognized the speciosity of the route he had chosen (he in fact eventually realizes that even the the Mermaids were nothing but a “smuggled”

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Orabuena's *Gross ist deine treue*, argues: “Tutto ha l'esemplare semplicità di long long ago, ed è scritto con l'analogamente esemplare modestia; un menschlich [umanamente] rispettabile omerismo, ridotto ai minimi termini”.

<sup>1045</sup> Ibid.: “Il male è che ogni omerismo, in un momento in cui l'uomo non ha più profilo, mi sembra, molto in grande e pensando nei termini di quello che sta succedendo e che volere o non volere è l'unico compito creativo attuale, criminale e 'reazionario”.

<sup>1046</sup> *Note senza testo*, 209: “Odisseo → dal Talmud in giù /Amleto → Faust → La posizione sperimentale dell'uomo moderno”.

<sup>1047</sup> Ibid., 209: “il non trasformato / il curioso” (originally in Italian).

<sup>1048</sup> Ibid., 213: “Ulisse non crea ordine, crea direzione – perciò da tanto tempo gli intellettuali vivono seguendo una linea chiara – ma la linea chiara è nel caos”.

goal<sup>1049</sup>). The Captain is granted a chance of rebirth only after being forced to deal with his own hypocrisy and to acknowledge the shortcomings of his own desire of knowledge, only once he realizes that he needs “to really go adrift”<sup>1050</sup>.

The extreme consequences of the shipwreck finally force the Captain to acknowledge the impossibility of a mediation between incompatible instances. Before the shipwreck, what seemed to be at stake for the Captain was reason itself. Knowledge intended as research, accumulation, and rational organization, did not allow him to come to an intellectual or existential solution to his angst, nor did the experience of the world guided by that kind of knowledge. The rational route chosen by Ulysses could not work for the Captain. He, as an Anti-Ulysses, followed an opposite and non linear route which led him to call into question and to put at stake his life, his mental health, and all his beliefs, within a path in which the existential datum and the epistemological one are fundamentally entangled.

As we have seen, once thrown into the water the Captain just starts furiously swimming. He knows that he needs a direction, that he can not swim in circles, and he therefore heads East, “towards the Oriental”<sup>1051</sup>. The direction chosen by the shipwrecked Captain and the frequent allusions to the envied and avoided wise captain from the Far East seem to indicate the possibility of a mystical dissolution into the sea (of the

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<sup>1049</sup> See *Capitano*, 83: “Ora doveva di nuovo farsi spingere senza meta, ma era un'altra cosa, prima si era pur sempre contrabbandato una meta (le Sirene), ma ora si trattava di andare veramente alla deriva – vita o morte”.

<sup>1050</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1051</sup> See *ibid.*, 71: “nuotava verso oriente, incontro all'Orientale – dopo aver nuotato verso il sole, socialismo – ma lì c'era la notte, e alla fine, nonostante tutto, nuotò verso il sole – giustizia del simbolo, nuotare verso la notte, accettazione della morte, coscientemente nella notte”.



“acceptance of death, consciously in the night”<sup>1052</sup>), but even this spiritual turn is denied to him. His attitude towards the Oriental suggests that the option of reacting against the decadence of Western culture embracing an Eastern spirituality is in fact according to Bazlen also not feasible.

La Ferla argues that the Oriental represents for the Captain “a sort of daily and unavoidable superego”<sup>1053</sup>. The Captain at the same time follows and avoids his friend, who seems to have the role of forcing him to look inside of himself, and who is “bearer of ethical and existential values that, although appealing for their intrinsic alterity”, are not embraceable by the Captain, for “they don't belong to his own culture”<sup>1054</sup>. La Ferla suggests that in this choice Bazlen seems to accept the Jungian conception of the conflict between different spiritualities according to which “it would be ridiculous for a Westerner to behave as an Oriental, and vice versa”<sup>1055</sup>. Still, if the guide of the Oriental can not lead to a conversion, it nevertheless fosters the birth of a new awareness which La Ferla again describes through Jung's words: the biggest and most important problems of life are essentially insoluble, and they will never allow to be resolved, but just surpassed<sup>1056</sup>. In *Il capitano di lungo corso*, the shipwreck represents the event or the moment in which the insoluble problems are left behind, in which they are definitively abandoned in the past. “Everything that has already been, I can't stand it no more”<sup>1057</sup>, Bazlen writes among his notes, and again: “more shipwrecks in the same place – But no

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<sup>1052</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1053</sup> La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 131.

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1055</sup> See *ibid.*, 131. La Ferla quotes here Carl Gustav Jung, *La saggezza Orientale* (Torino: Boringhieri 1983), 70.

<sup>1056</sup> See *ibid.* La Ferla refers here to Carl Gustav Jung and Richard Wilhelm, *Il segreto del fiore d'oro*. (Torino: Boringhieri 1971), 23-24.

<sup>1057</sup> *Capitano*, 170: “Tutto ciò che è già stato non lo sopporto più...”.

Captain goes back – and it is fair that it has to be like this... one shouldn't be shipwrecked where others have been shipwrecked before... True life means: inventing new places where one can be shipwrecked [...] – This doesn't mean that no captain saved himself... but (to us) they became helmsmen”<sup>1058</sup> – that is to say mere pilots who follow an already set route.

A parallel reading of *Il capitano di lungo corso* with *Note senza testo* allows to interpret the experience of the shipwreck as an existential solution to the checkmate imposed to Man by the modern condition. Bazlen sees the shortcomings of positivist thought, which knows nothing, he writes, about “dissolution into chaos”<sup>1059</sup>. At the same time he fears the results of a wisdom not accompanied by science, which would result in turning psychology into mere moralism<sup>1060</sup>. “A real shipwreck is when everything dissolves into water, when there is not a good enough ground where one can cast anchor – still, there must be an anchorage”<sup>1061</sup>; but, as one of Bazlen’s aphorism reads, “the anchor of humanism has sunk into shit”<sup>1062</sup>. As we will see, according to Bazlen, Western modernity does not allow anymore to unreservedly accept Enlightenment principles, nor, accepting Jung's advice, to adopt Eastern doctrines. What is left is the creative and therefore virtuous result of an unresolvable conflict:

the fact that each and every form, in his highest possibility of fulfillment,

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<sup>1058</sup> Ibid.: “altri naufragi nello stesso luogo – Ma nessun capitano torna indietro – è anche giusto che sia così... non si deve mai naufragare lì dove sono naufragati altri... Vera vita vuol dire: inventare nuovi luoghi dove poter naufragare... [...] Questo non vuol dire che nessun capitano si sia salvato la vita... ma (per noi) sono diventati dei timonieri...”.

<sup>1059</sup> See *Note senza testo*, 185: “*Putrefactio*: [...] Evoluzione, pregiudizio sdolcinato dell'Ottocento, che non sapeva nulla della dissoluzione nel caos e voleva 'abolire' la morte”.

<sup>1060</sup> See *ibid.*, 183: “Il pericolo di una saggezza senza scienza: la psicologia diventa moralismo”.

<sup>1061</sup> *Capitano*, 108: “[...] il vero naufragio è quando tutto si dissolve in acqua, non c'è terra abbastanza buona per gettarci l'ancora – eppure deve esserci un ancoraggio”.

<sup>1062</sup> *Note senza testo*, 220: “L'ancora dell'umanesimo è affondata nella merda”.

lasts only a second – the incessantly creative – but this is impossible, because form rises from chaos – and so does disgregation, which allows the birth of a new form – / Only the one who accepts disgregation can be creative, there is also the creativity of the negative – it pertains to man to do nothing, to live, the art not to defer [*dilazionare*] death.<sup>1063</sup>

The myth of Ulysses, although being the most developed and pregnant one, is not the only myth parodied in *Il capitano di lungo corso*. From the fragments that follow the completed part of the novel, we learn that the path of the Captain, only briefly sketched in the chapter “[Naufragio]”, should have in fact been far more winding. As we have seen, after being shipwrecked, the Captain was swallowed and eventually spit out by a whale (similarly to the biblical prophet Jonah), and was eventually cast on an unknown isle, where he met an aborigine named “Thursday afternoon” (with a parody of the myth of the *homo faber* at the center of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*). From the fragments and notes of “Quaderno B”, we learn that after leaving the fishermen's town, the Captain should have ventured in a wood, where he should have met the Maiden of the Woods (“das Waldmädchen”; “la Fanciulla del Bosco”). The wood and the Maiden, which seems to symbolize the option of an uncorrupted and natural life, should have been eventually spoiled respectively by the nearby Gray City (“Graue Stadt”; “Città Grigia”) and by the Gray Young Man (“der graue Jüngling”; “il Giovane Grigio”). The Captain should have subsequently moved to the Gray City (in which is parodied of the myth of progress<sup>1064</sup>),

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<sup>1063</sup> Ibid., 212: “Verso il culmine – il fatto che ogni forma, nella sua suprema possibilità di compimento, dura solo un secondo – l'ininterrottamente creativo – ma questo è impossibile, perché la forma sorge dal caos – e così la disgregazione, che fa parte del fatto che nasca una nuova forma – / Solo chi accetta la disgregazione è creativo, c'è anche la creatività del negativo – è dell'uomo potere non fare nulla, vivere, arte di non dilazionare la morte”.

<sup>1064</sup> See *ibid.*, 97: “Gli abitanti / La popolazione non era allegra e semplice. E gli stranieri erano tristi e doppi. / C'erano: / l'uomo che sputa su tutto per strada / l'uomo che chiude la finestra prima di bastonare i suoi bambini / la donna gracile che trascina due valigie alla fermata dell'autobus... / l'uomo

and would have tried to become a Gray Man himself (and would have thus literally prostitute himself<sup>1065</sup>). He though would have finally only learned to “despise [the Gray Men] without a bad conscience”<sup>1066</sup>, and would have realized that “all life on the ground is wrong”<sup>1067</sup> (only at this point the Captain would have also recognized that “anything is better than gray”, and, once back home, he would have subsequently accepted the red dress sewed by the Wife<sup>1068</sup>). In the Gray City the Captain should have also met the “Burgomaster's Daughter” (“die Tochter des Bürgermeisters”; “la Figlia del Borgomastro”), who, like the Siren and afterwards the Maiden of the Woods, would have guided him in a way that, according to de Savorgnani, parodies the guides of Dante's *Divine Comedy*<sup>1069</sup>. Finally, in other fragments, Bazlen also parodies Plato's Allegory of the Cave (in the episode of “The Death of the Innkeeper”<sup>1070</sup>) and the legend of the Holy Grail (in the notes for “The Road to the Castle”<sup>1071</sup>).

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che ha paura dei raffreddori / il filosofo con le emorroidi / il nonno che dà appuntamento alla figlia di sua nipote / e uno si affaccia alla finestra e guarda una strada dove non succede mai niente... / la donna che compra dei sonniferi nella farmacia notturna / e la domenica sbadigliavano”.

<sup>1065</sup> See *ibid.*, 107: “si prostituisce, e racconta delle storie per mangiare?”.

<sup>1066</sup> See *ibid.*, 99: “Ora conosco la città degli Uomini Grigi, che lavorano durante la settimana e la domenica hanno le loro gioie e i loro compleanni [...] – ora non ho più bisogno di avere una cattiva coscienza – ho vissuto la loro vita, devo proprio aver avuto una cattiva coscienza e così ho vissuto la loro vita, ora li posso disprezzare senza cattiva coscienza”.

<sup>1067</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99: “Non ho sbagliato assolutamente nulla, ma è sbagliata tutta la vita di terra”.

<sup>1068</sup> See *ibid.*, 136-137: “Finche non avrai dei vestiti nuovi, dovrai contentarti del vestito rosso’. Lei buttò li queste parole con tono piuttosto garbato, e senza prendere neppure un'aria trionfante. ‘Rosso è comunque meglio che grigio’. ‘Qualsiasi cosa è meglio che grigio’ disse il Capitano, lo disse con tono garbato, ma la frase mancava comunque di tatto. Volle rimediare e racconto quanta nostalgia aveva avuto di quei pantaloni. ‘Vedevo davanti a me ogni cucitura di quei pantaloni. Credo che saprei riconoscere ogni cucitura’”.

<sup>1069</sup> See de Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen*, 173. The parallelism between Dante's guides and the Captain's ones is in our opinion not so plain, but the role of guidance assigned by Bazlen to the female characters of the novel is manifest, and so expressed by the author in a note: “Via serpentina da donna a donna / La guida: la Moglie lo ha spinto verso il mare / la Sirena lo ha messo al mondo / la Fanciulla del Bosco lo ha condotto nella Città Grigia / la Figlia del Borgomastro gli ha dato il coraggio di continuare il viaggio” (*Capitano*, 147).

<sup>1070</sup> See the unfinished chapter “Morte dell'oste”, in *ibid.*, 129-134.

<sup>1071</sup> See the fragments collected in the chapter “La via verso il Castello”, in *ibid.*, 153-155.

In *Il capitano di lungo corso* all these Western myths reveal themselves to be nothing more than demythicized fragments, or wreckages of an exhausted civilization which are not dissimilar from the fragments shored against the ruins of T. S. Eliot's modernist masterpiece<sup>1072</sup>. But if Eliot closes *The Waste Land* with an invocation to “the Peace which passeth understanding”<sup>1073</sup>, to Bazlen's Captain this solution is not offered. According to Bazlen, Eliot's “death by water” results in an actual drowning, while his captain survives<sup>1074</sup>, for his death by water is rather a cathartic bath which allows him to distance himself from the shipwrecked materials of a worn-out civilization, and to embrace a new conception of his own self (“Collapse of us European, of our world”<sup>1075</sup>, Bazlen writes among the notes for the chapter “Fahrt” [“Journey”; “Viaggio”]; and again, among his aphorisms: “throw Europe and America and Russia overboard, until we are left alone”<sup>1076</sup>). Bazlen's Captain is a parodistic revival of the Western wandering man (from Ulysses to Dante, from Aeneas to the Wandering Jew), but he is a man with no destination, who roams among the wreckages of Western foundational myths with no hope of a promise land, and whose experience has only taught him the value of inevitable and endless shipwrecks<sup>1077</sup>.

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<sup>1072</sup>“These fragments I have shored against my ruins [...]” (T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 430).

<sup>1073</sup>The quotation is from Eliot's commentary to the last verse of the poem: “Shantih shantih shantih” (ibid, 433).

<sup>1074</sup>See *Note senza testo*, 196: “La tragedia degli Ebrei: che passano il Mar Rosso asciutti (si gettano immediatamente nel Mar Rosso, presi dal panico). A piede asciutto sul fondo del mare (Eliot – annega – il mio capitano – si salva)”.

<sup>1075</sup>*Capitano*, 161: “crollo di noi europei, del nostro mondo” (originally in Italian).

<sup>1076</sup>*Note senza testo*, 183: “Buttare a mare Europa e America e Russia, finché non si resta soli”.

<sup>1077</sup>We in fact read among the notes for the chapter “Città Grigia”, under the title “La persecuzione del destino”: “e alla fine ascolta di nuovo il canto delle Sirene – e cade di nuovo in acqua, – la stessa cosa deve ripetersi sempre negli strati più diversi prima di essere superata (ma gli strati sono in numero finito?)” (*Capitano*, 108).

Bazlen therefore, through his *Anti-Ulysses*, does not just parody the coeval bourgeois ideology and individuals, but also what he considers the ascertained failure of the project behind them (“The problem with the perfect man of the Renaissance: the world went ahead, the concept did not”<sup>1078</sup>), and he does so with no particular sourness or concern<sup>1079</sup>. In *Il capitano di lungo corso* there is in fact neither nostalgia for nor contestation of a tradition which has been decreed moribund (“Whatever does not want to die, needs to kick the bucket”<sup>1080</sup>). Bazlen’s solution, both philosophically and poetically, does not exhaust itself in the criticism or in the parody of the premises of coeval culture and thought, but aims to go beyond them. His solution is personal and radical, and, as we will argue, involves the very form of his unfinished novel.

#### 2.4. The Boundary between Song and Life

The chapter “[Naufragio]” (the last chapter of the completed part of *Il capitano di lungo corso*, and the one with which the novel begins to crumble) is according to the narrator “the end of the prologue”<sup>1081</sup>, and includes the invocation to Tiamat<sup>1082</sup>, the goddess of ocean and chaos. Before the shipwreck, the calendar indicated January 1<sup>st</sup>, and the Captain and the two carpets were “rolled up” (“arrotolati”) in the cabin<sup>1083</sup>. The shipwreck – as the dramatic event that grants “the perpetual and metamorphosing

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<sup>1078</sup> *Note senza testo*, 186: “Il problema dell'uomo perfetto del Rinascimento: il mondo è andato avanti, ma non il concetto”.

<sup>1079</sup> See *ibid.*, 231: “Allora l'Occidente è in cocci... i cocci portano fortuna...”.

<sup>1080</sup> *Ibid.*, 181: “Ciò che non vuole morire deve crepare”.

<sup>1081</sup> *Capitano*, 77.

<sup>1082</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>1083</sup> See *ibid.*, 57-58.

alternation of order and chaos”<sup>1084</sup>, and thus the dissolution of a worn-out form in order to create a new one – forces the Captain out of his cabin, and also allows the great carpet to finally be unrolled (the last note for the chapter in fact reads: “Let's slowly unroll the great carpet”<sup>1085</sup>). As Assenza suggests, Tiamat grants the restoration of the primordial chaos which precedes creation, and the unrolling of the carpet represents the weaving of a new world<sup>1086</sup>. The outcome of the shipwreck represents therefore for the Captain the creation of a new cosmos and of a new set of possibilities, which are offered to the narrator as well. Among the fragments that follow the chapter, we read:

Here's the first great difficulty for the narrator – for there is a man swimming in the water, and what should one tell in these instances? That he is getting tired, and what he is thinking [...] – and the narrator's thoughts as well are only fragments, splinters. And between the embarrassment of a *monologue intérieur*, which does not fit at all with the tone, and the embarrassment of an intrusion of the author, he choses the latter – what else could he do? [...] Of course a certain number of pages must be placed between the shipwreck and the isle... There must be *distance*, and the sea was *distance* – and therefore the trick of the author that narrates [...], which quickly ends, then Poseidon intervenes – because the author has actually never fallen into water (yet), but, as an old *routinier* of shipwrecks – what did not cross his mind... [...] and at the end there are borders and iron curtains between you and books – but [...] the sea is here, and the thoughts are mine – / and, of course, all reservations are gone, you swim, or rather, to be exact, you are carried – and in my sea a sea captain is swimming, iodine in the water, he is now breathing well again.<sup>1087</sup>

<sup>1084</sup> Bertelli, “Al fondo della scrittura”, 239.

<sup>1085</sup> *Capitano*, 77: “Srotoliamo lentamente il grande tappeto”.

<sup>1086</sup> See Assenza, *Il confine nella letteratura*, 142-143.

<sup>1087</sup> *Capitano*, 75-76: “Qui la prima grande difficoltà per il narratore – perché c'è un uomo in acqua che nuota, e che cosa si deve raccontare in questi casi – che diventa sempre più stanco, e quali pensieri ha [...] – e anche i suoi pensieri sono soltanto frammento, scheggia. E fra l'imbarazzo di un *monologue intérieur*, che non è per niente adatto al tono, e l'imbarazzo di un intervento del narratore, sceglie quest'ultimo, che altro resterebbe da fare? [...] fra il naufragio e l'isola ci deve pur essere un certo numero di pagine... *Distance* ci deve essere, e il mare era *distance* – e di conseguenza il trucco dell'autore che racconta [...] che finisce presto, poi interviene Poseidone – perché l'autore non è (finora) mai caduto concretamente in acqua, ma come vecchio *routinier* di naufragi – e cosa mai non gli è passato per la testa... [...] e alla fine ci sono confini e cortine di ferro fra te e i libri – ma [...] il mare è qua e i pensieri sono miei – / e si sa, tutte le riserve sono esaurite, si nuota, ma più esattamente si

According to the narrator, his own intrusion should be only a “parenthesis” after which the narration and the right “tone” could be resumed<sup>1088</sup>. Nevertheless, at this point, the completed part of the novel is already over.

The fair-copy section of *Il capitano di lungo corso* comes to an end in the midst of the description of the shipwreck of the main character, after which Calasso decided to place Bazlen's notes and fragments for the continuation of the novel. These 90 pages develop the novel's most recurrent and fundamental themes and symbols, include fragments with variants and further details on the narration of the fair copy and on the destiny of the secondary characters, and show different and sometimes inconsistent possibilities for the evolution of the story. To the shipwreck of the Captain corresponds thus the shipwreck of the narration. The novel itself at this point in fact seemingly refuses to be reduced to a closed, consistent form, and the following fragments take the form of the wreckages of the interrupted narration. In the volume *Scritti, Il capitano di lungo corso* is immediately followed by *Note senza testo*, whose aphorisms seem to represent ulterior wreckages that develop and dialogue with the themes of the novel, and which show an even more fragmentary and extemporary form.

Damiani observes that “the failure of *Il capitano di lungo corso* – just like the shipwreck [of its main character], which is described as a ‘finally recovered new life’ and a ‘great liberation’ – is the paradoxical result of an excess of completeness and

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viene portati – e nel mio mare ora nuota un capitano di lungo corso, iodio nell’acqua, ora respira di nuovo bene”.

<sup>1088</sup> Ibid., 75.



elusion”<sup>1089</sup>. Diego Bertelli basically agrees with Damiani, and, encouraged by an aphorism from *Note senza testo*, defines Bazlen’s writing as a process of “de-scription”<sup>1090</sup>. Bazlen writes among his *footnotes*: “The only solution is unutterable, indescribable – until that point there is nothing but the problematic joy of the increasingly tighter de-scription [*de-scrizione*] – and yet the (consciously lived) temporary entails that this joy has to be denied”<sup>1091</sup>. According to Bertelli, Bazlen’s “de-scription” has to be read etymologically, therefore as a “narrower copy of a previous writing”, and, in Bazlen’s specific case, as “a procedure through which writing finds a new text while losing the previous one, in a progressive circle of destruction and creation”<sup>1092</sup>. As we have seen, according to Bazlen “each and every form, in his highest possibility of fulfillment, lasts only a second”<sup>1093</sup>, and therefore “to destroy” actually “means to create”<sup>1094</sup>.

Bazlen’s novel arguably fails precisely because of this process of de-scription and rewriting, through a “shipwreck of writing” that, as La Ferla argues, eventually realizes also at the micro-structural level the thematically described event<sup>1095</sup>. After the Captain’s shipwreck in fact Bazlen’s previously uniform writing begins “to crumble in segments, or rather, in possibilities”<sup>1096</sup>, which the narrator is no more able or willing to organize in a

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<sup>1089</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 82; the internal quotations are from *Capitano*, 70.

<sup>1090</sup> See Bertelli, “Al fondo della scrittura”, 237.

<sup>1091</sup> *Note senza testo*, 189: “L’unica soluzione è indicibile, indescrivibile – fino a quel punto non c’è altro che la problematica gioia della de-scrizione sempre più stretta – eppure il provvisorio (vissuto coscientemente) porta con sé che questa gioia venga negata”.

<sup>1092</sup> Bertelli, “Al fondo della scrittura”, 237-238.

<sup>1093</sup> *Note senza testo*, 212.

<sup>1094</sup> *Ibid.*, 186: “Ora distruggere vuol dire creare: può essere distrutto solo ciò che sta fra noi e le nostre possibilità creative”.

<sup>1095</sup> See La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 135.

<sup>1096</sup> *Ibid.*

consistent form. As we have seen, according to Blumenberg, in literature and philosophy the metaphors of shipwreck usually includes the presence of a spectator who observes the event from a position of safety, and this spectator embodies theory. In modernity, though, “there is no secure shore from which the spectator may calmly view the distress of those at sea”<sup>1097</sup>. Blumenberg also observes that the experience of the shipwreck, “as seen by a survivor, is the figure of an initial philosophical experience”<sup>1098</sup>. Bazlen however does not grant neither to the Captain nor to his narrator such an abstract experience, and he finally lets his main character, his narrator, and the very form of his novel to be swept away by the consequences of what we have recognized as a dramatic but at the same time auspicious event. Bazlen seems however not to be particularly distressed by the failure of his novel, as if these series of shipwrecks had been a cathartic moment for him as well (he in fact writes to Foà on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1951: “I have been busy with trying to shipwreck the sea captain, which I managed to do some days ago, and now I feel remarkably light-hearted”<sup>1099</sup>).

Bazlen’s novel is shipwrecked together with its main character precisely when the latter reaches “the boundary between song and life”<sup>1100</sup> – namely the problematic or impossible relation between representation and existence, between art and life. There is no formulated answer to the Mermaid’s question: “where is the boundary between song

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<sup>1097</sup> Steven Rendall, introduction to Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 3.

<sup>1098</sup> Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 12.

<sup>1099</sup> See Dedenaro, *Per Roberto Bazlen*, 16: “Caro Luciano, come vedi dalla busta, le intenzioni [di darmi sue notizie] esistevano da lungo – naufragate, particolarmente perché ero occupato a far naufragare il capitano di marina, ciò che mi è riuscito giorni or sono, ed ora mi sento considerevolmente erleitert (alleggerito) – e per farlo naufragare ho anche messo in chiaro cosa cantavano le sirene (quelle vere, non quelle della coca-cola), e per farlo ascoltare, il canto delle sirene, ci voleva che il timoniere pigliasse una blenorragia, e dunque ci voleva qualcuno che gliel'attaccasse, dunque la zingara, ecc. – come capisci, sono stato occupatissimo”.

<sup>1100</sup> *Capitano*, 61.

and life?”, only the shipwreck of the Captain, which will propitiate chaos and subsequently a new creation. The fact that the narrator cannot answer to the Mermaid’s question, which seems to concern the crisis of the poetical subject, seems to indicate that according to Bazlen there is no possible answer to such a question. This crisis, as any crisis, cannot be resolved, but just surpassed, and Bazlen seems to try to do so through the shipwreck of the main character, of the poetic subject, and of the novel itself.

Beyond aphoristic paradoxicality, Bazlen really believed that in his times it was “no more possible to write books”<sup>1101</sup>. He writes to Pellegrini on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1949: “European artistic creativity ended with the generation of 1885; everything that the following two generations have done is the result, I believe, of a humanistic misunderstanding, and was done with no actual necessity (real necessity cannot lead, at the moment, to artistic expression), and with no substance”<sup>1102</sup>. He therefore often displayed contempt for the writers obsessed with the “work”. “The fact itself that he needed to create “the work” speaks against the vitality of this individual”<sup>1103</sup>, we read among his notes; and again: “This is the prologue, maybe we cannot write but prologues – there is the age of the prologues, the age of the work, the age of the epilogues. / (but our moribunds were not able to epilogue)”<sup>1104</sup>. Bazlen, Calasso writes, grew up exactly

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<sup>1101</sup> *Note senza testo*, 203.

<sup>1102</sup> *Ibid.*, 185, note 1: “Comprendo sempre meglio le ragioni per le quali la creatività artistica europea è finita con la generazione dell’85; tutto quello che è stato fatto dalle due generazioni successive è frutto, mi sembra, di un malinteso umanistico, ed è fatto senza vera necessità (la vera necessità non può portare, attualmente, all’espressione artistica), e senza sostanza”. Bazlen makes similar remarks in the already-mentioned letter to Foà of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1948 (see Chapter II, note 546).

<sup>1103</sup> *Note senza testo*, 220: “già il fatto che abbia avuto [bisogno] di creare l’opera parla contro la vitalità di questo individuo”. See also Bazlen’s letter to Montale of February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1930 (in *Lettere a Montale*, 388): “Ricordami a tutti, con affetto proporzionalmente inverso alla loro produzione letteraria”.

<sup>1104</sup> *Note senza testo*, 208: “Questo è il prologo, forse non possiamo scrivere che prologhi – c’è l’epoca dei

“among these epilogists non resigned to their part”<sup>1105</sup>, but, unlike them, he accepted or even welcomed the consequences of the impasse which he so describes in a note: “Until Goethe: the biography absorbed by the work / From Rilke on: life against the work”<sup>1106</sup>.

According to Calasso, Bazlen’s aphorism describes “the irreversible and mysterious transformation” of the work underwent at the end of the Eighteenth century<sup>1107</sup>, which, as Gino Broazzoduro suggests, resulted in the impossibility of conceiving anymore the work as a “totalizing and unifying structure [...] still confident of being capable of dominating the phenomenology of life and therefore of organically representing it”<sup>1108</sup>. Such a transformation goes hand in hand with the acceptance of “the unsolvable modern division between the ego and the reality that it pretended to represent”, and with the awareness that the ego is therefore no more a reliable “demiurgic entity capable to sensibly recreate the world”<sup>1109</sup>. The ego now rather recognizes itself as a “non univocally determined entity”, as a “center of feelings and perceptions which is

prologhi, l’epoca dell’opera, l’epoca degli epiloghi. / (ma i nostri moribondi non hanno saputo epilogare)”.

<sup>1105</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 18.

<sup>1106</sup> *Note senza testo*, 184: “Fino a Goethe: la biografia assorbita dall’opera / Da Rilke in poi: la vita contro l’opera”.

<sup>1107</sup> See Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 18-19: “Il processo che si condensa in questo passaggio ha origini e conseguenze lontane. La coazione all’opera, proprio nel punto in cui raggiunge la massima intensità, proprio quando l’opera si svincola da ogni dipendenza, rivela anche la meschinità del suo presupposto: vedere l’opera sotto la categoria del suo risultato e in particolare come la proiezione di un soggetto in un oggetto. Ciò segna la rovina dell’opera; l’ombra del *kitsch*, fino allora astutamente occultata, si trasforma nel corpo dell’arte. L’opera perde il suo statuto perché, a rigore, essa non è risultato, non è proiezione, non è attribuibile a un io. Due concezioni opposte, che avevano convissuto a lungo in un equivoco legame, si scindono ora senza rimedio: l’opera come *trasformazione di un materiale* si oppone all’opera come *proiezione in un oggetto*. Nella tradizione alchemica ancora le due concezioni erano connesse: l’*opus alchymicum* era al tempo stesso accelerata maturazione dei metalli e anche proiezione, esercizio demiurgico. Nel moderno, invece, queste due possibilità – ormai scisse – vanno incontro ciascuna a una contraddizione mortale: l’opera come trasformazione di un materiale non dovrebbe fissarsi mai; l’opera come proiezione, una volta caduto il potere vincolante del canone della proiezione – e cioè la retorica –, resta affidata alla volontà del singolo io, emancipato e misero, la trappola più temibile”.

<sup>1108</sup> Brazzoduro, “Roberto Bazlen”, 10.

<sup>1109</sup> *Ibid.*

continuously modified by experience and by the contact with the world”<sup>1110</sup>. If we interpret the Captain as an archetypical contemporary intellectual, Bazlen’s novel thus portrays what la Ferla describes as “a clear parable of the at the same time esoteric and metaphysical process which, from literature as representation of reality, leads towards life itself, and therefore to the end of literature”<sup>1111</sup>. Accordingly, the fact that the novel remains “intentionally unfinished” and open can be interpreted “as an explicit denunciation of the ethical failure of any work whose meaning lies merely in being ‘the projection of a subject into an object’”<sup>1112</sup>.

Over the years Bazlen nevertheless kept rewriting his novel and annotating on it (not necessarily, we presume, with the intent of completing it), through that process of “de-description” identified by Bertelli, which allowed him to keep circumscribing the object of his writing – object that, as Damiani suggests, “is always at the bottom, at the boundary, and beyond literature”<sup>1113</sup>. While denouncing the impossibility of conceiving writing as a means to create a closed form that can order, explain, or exhaust reality, Bazlen seems therefore to still highly value the creative and cognitive potential of writing. As Bertelli writes, “the utmost sacrifice of ‘dying every second’” is thus accepted by the Captain and by Bazlen as well as a necessary means not to die<sup>1114</sup>. Every new work cannot be but “the invention of a new death”<sup>1115</sup>; still, according to the above-described process of de-description, every new death possibly allows new dissolutions and

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<sup>1110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1111</sup>La Ferla, *Diritto al silenzio*, 109.

<sup>1112</sup>Ibid.; the internal quotation is from Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 19.

<sup>1113</sup>Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 76.

<sup>1114</sup>See Bertelli, “Al fondo della scrittura”, 238.

<sup>1115</sup>*Note senza testo*, 170: “[...] ogni nuova opera è solo l'invenzione di una nuova morte”.

creations. Going back to the Mermaid's final and unanswered question: in *Il capitano di lungo corso*, life itself seems to shatter and to finally sabotage the song (the representation), and together with it the form of Bazlen's only attempted novel. Nevertheless, on the elusive "boundary between song and life", the poetic fragments of the unfinished novel still manage to offer a precipitate of the experience that they arguably intentionally fail to represent.

### 3. The Art of Dying Every Second

There's probably no contribution on Roberto Bazlen that does not include the already mentioned aphorism: "I believe it is no more possible to write books / Therefore I don't write books – / Almost all books are footnotes swollen into volumes (*volumina*). I only write footnotes"<sup>1116</sup>. Moving from the ideas evoked in the aphorism, Cacciari's "A Dark Alley in the Old City" investigated Bazlen's "'philosophy' of the footnote"<sup>1117</sup> suggesting a specific Nietzschean lineage of Bazlen's thought. Cacciari's article develops some intuitions expressed by Calasso in the introduction to *Note senza testo* (volume which takes its title precisely from the above-mentioned aphorism), essay which, although anti-academic and non strictly theoretical, in the non abundant secondary bibliography dedicated to Bazlen, represents one of the sharpest contribution for the understanding of the cultural and philosophical premises of his thought and work. The

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<sup>1116</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>1117</sup>Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 172.

two critics – describing Bazlen as “posthumous” (Cacciari), “post-historical”, or “taoistic” (Calasso) – agree on seeing the reason of Bazlen's elusion of the “work” as a result of a radical suspicion towards traditional humanistic values in favor of a post-humanistic approach.

Bazlen, Calasso writes, was a “post-historical man, of which no cultural framework or environmental reconstruction will be able to do justice”: he “omitted the axioms, disregarded the game rules of thought – and never declared of wanting to respect them. His rigor obeyed to other commands”<sup>1118</sup>. For this impossibility of reducing him to any cultural framework and of understanding him by means of humanistic measures, Cacciari includes him in his gallery of *Posthumous People* – among those men with “too many rationales to be able to confirm them”<sup>1119</sup> whose forefather is to be recognized in Nietzsche:

Nietzsche talks about [the posthumous people] in *The Gay Science* (365) and later in the *Twilight of the Idols*. They pass through closed doors when the lights are out. Other people may reach out to them, but their hands pass right through them. This is not their only disguise. Indeed, they possess endless stores of masks and alibis. Posthumous people have too many alibis to be satisfied with simple truth. [...] Posthumous people go through an infinite number of masks without ever staying with any of them. And 'this cause fear', it is their *Unheimliches*, their uneasiness.<sup>1120</sup>

According to Cacciari, posthumous people are eternally nomadic beings, always stranger to their homeland and times. They are not untimely, since the term “untimely” carries “the possibility of becoming timely”: posthumous people “are absolutely protected from

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<sup>1118</sup>Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 15.

<sup>1119</sup>Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 5. In Cacciari's gallery find place, among others, Hofmannsthal, Musil, Joseph Roth, Wittgenstein, Kubin, Kraus – all Mittel-European intellectuals and artists of the turn of the century who, obsessed with language and troubled by unresolvable conflicts, were able to express a radically modern thought.

<sup>1120</sup>Ibid., 4.

the risk of expectation. They cannot be reached, they cannot be understood”<sup>1121</sup>. They are “the hikers in Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* who seek to understand how things of the world proceed and who silently collect and maintain their multiple voices”<sup>1122</sup>. They obtain their lives with the death of their subject (“it is only after death that we will enter *our* life and come alive, oh, very much alive, we posthumous people!”<sup>1123</sup>), which is thus transformed “to the dimension of an absence ('we, the posthumous people') that is clearly heard, while it criticizes, deconstructs, and shreds that idea of substance in which the kingdom of the subject resides”<sup>1124</sup>. After the end of the subject they are “the only ones to survive, as mere phantasms”<sup>1125</sup>. Bazlen seems to describe this posthumous condition in his already mentioned aphorism: “It is a world of death – we used to be born alive, and little by little die. Now we are born dead – some manage, little by little, to become alive”<sup>1126</sup>.

Homeless and necessarily non-actual, to the posthumous people seems to be dedicated the aphorism 377 of *The Gay Science*:

*We who are homeless.* – Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honorable sense: it is to them that I especially command my secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*. For their fate is hard, their hopes are uncertain, it is quite a feat to devise some comfort for them - but what avail? We children of the future, how *could* we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition: as for its 'realities', we do not believe that they will *last*. The ice that still supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that

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<sup>1121</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>1122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1123</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 321.

<sup>1124</sup> Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 4-5.

<sup>1125</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>1126</sup> *Note senza testo*, 181.



breaks open ice and other all too thin “realities”.<sup>1127</sup>

Posthumous people are the heroes of Musil, who, as Claudio Magris argues, “proceed in a rectilinear odyssey with no end and no way back, in a continuous interrogation and experimentation of the world, which continuously makes them become other and different from themselves”<sup>1128</sup>. This “Odyssey with no Ithaca” is according to Magris the very condition of the contemporary man, who constantly needs to move “towards new interpretations of being, who throws and projects himself ahead, changing his own physiognomy and nature, and without leaving children or heirs after himself”<sup>1129</sup>. An “Odyssey with no Ithaca” implies an Odysseus with no homeland, no direction, and no place to return to. As we have seen, the main character of Bazlen's unfinished and posthumous novel perfectly incarnates this Anti-Ulysses: he is a captain who is not looking for his way back home but, on the contrary, is craving for the open sea, for the sirens, and, ultimately, for a shipwreck. He is a torn man, and he seems to believe, as Bazlen does, that a route “with no goal is bad, non-creative, / with a goal is bad, bureaucratic”<sup>1130</sup>. In a journey with an impossible goal, the shipwreck represents for the Captain neither a solution nor an end, but a radical existential experience which, by putting into question all the certainties and conventions that are not anymore able to control his angst, may reveal itself as a cathartic moment and a chance of existential rebirth. If according to Nietzsche “the ice that still supports people today has become

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<sup>1127</sup>Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 338.

<sup>1128</sup>Claudio Magris, *Itaca e oltre* (Milano: Garzanti, 1982), 47.

<sup>1129</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>1130</sup>*Note senza testo*, 213: “Senza meta è male, non creativo, / Con meta è male, burocratico...”.

very thin”<sup>1131</sup>, in the opinion of Bazlen is the “veil of Maya” itself that has become “particularly worn-out”<sup>1132</sup>.

As Calasso argues, what for Bazlen had to be put into question and “brought to a definitive shipwreck” was the very Enlightenment Ego<sup>1133</sup>, and, we may add, the humanistic values as well. In the fragments that follow the completed part of Bazlen's novel, the option of modernity is depicted in the Gray City, where “the gray progress proceeded in its inexorable path: slaves had been freed, and they had at last become waiters. The breath of the new era could be sensed in the air (it was an era of utmost splendor)”<sup>1134</sup>. Bazlen so sardonically describes the degeneration underwent by humanistic values in this advanced and progressive society: “The city of the Grey Men had its customs and traditions. The universally human – the eternal values. Part of the population spent its time in front of a counter, the other behind it”<sup>1135</sup>. According to Bazlen, progress is nothing more than the evolution “from peasant idiocy to urban banality”<sup>1136</sup>, and the Gray Men's will to adhere to humanistic principles is thus by him described with plain sarcasm: “They attend meetings, day and night, and they work without a break... 'But what will they be doing?' the Captain asked... 'They are saving humanism', the other said... 'We'd really better not bother them then', the Captain

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<sup>1131</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 338.

<sup>1132</sup> *Note senza testo*, 233: “Il velo di Maya diventato particolarmente logoro” (originally in Italian).

<sup>1133</sup> Marcoaldi, “L'uomo che sapeva troppo”, 35.

<sup>1134</sup> *Capitano*, 98: “Nella città degli Uomini Grigi il progresso grigio procedeva nel suo corso inarrestabile: erano stati liberati gli schiavi, e gli schiavi finalmente erano diventati camerieri. Il soffio dell'epoca nuova si sentiva già nell'aria (era un'epoca di massimo splendore)”.

<sup>1135</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, “La città degli uomini grigi aveva i suoi usi e costumi. L'universalmente umano – i valori eterni. Una certa parte della popolazione passava il suo tempo davanti, una certa altra dietro uno sportello”. See also *Note senza testo*, 230: “Il corso del progresso sociale è inarrestabile e il sole della libertà getta già i primi raggi: abbiamo liberato gli schiavi e al loro posto abbiamo finalmente i camerieri”.

<sup>1136</sup> *Ibid.*, 233: “Progresso: dalla idiozia contadina alla banalità cittadina”.

said...”<sup>1137</sup>. In the Gray City is simplified what Bazlen describes as “the law of the persistence of values” , according to which “it is added value of civilization to anything that had the value of progress (and ostensibly also of civilization)”<sup>1138</sup>.

According to Bazlen humanism today cannot and must not be saved, since, from Christianity to Enlightenment, the value accorded to what is “human” is merely the result of a misunderstanding (as Damiani suggests, Bazlen’s “genealogy of morality” too is “of Nietzschean ancestry”<sup>1139</sup>). We read in his notes: “Christ has recognized the ‘universally human’, and that’s the only thing he preached, the only thing he suffered – since then, ‘the universally human’ is the precondition, the footing, the requirement – but it has no value”<sup>1140</sup>. Enlightenment itself is according to Bazlen a reduction of Christianity (“which already is a reduction of Platonism”) to the intellectual element<sup>1141</sup>. For Bazlen, as for his captain, Humanistic and Enlightened principles reveal themselves inadequate for the organization of knowledge in a unitary and coherent system with human reason as its axis. The lesson of the hermeneuticians of suspicion (especially Nietzsche and Freud) seems to represent for Bazlen a radically nihilistic starting point – a given which needs no more prove or comment.

According to Cacciari, Bazlen's *Note senza testo* represents “not only the first, but

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<sup>1137</sup> *Capitano*, 106-107: “[...] sono in riunione notte e giorno, e lavorano senza interruzione... ‘Ma cosa faranno?’ domandò il Capitano... ‘Salvano l’umanesimo’ disse l’altro... ‘Allora bisogna proprio non disturbare’ disse il Capitano...”.

<sup>1138</sup> *Note senza testo*, 186: “La legge di perseveranza dei valori: che a tutto ciò che aveva un valore di progresso (e verosimilmente anche di civiltà) viene aggiunto valore di civiltà”.

<sup>1139</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 80.

<sup>1140</sup> *Note senza testo*, 192: “Cristo ha riconosciuto lo 'universalmente umano', solo quello ha predicato, solo quello ha sofferto – da allora lo 'universalmente umano' è presupposto, base, necessità, – ma non ha valore”.

<sup>1141</sup> See *ibid.*, 193: “Riduzione del Cristianesimo (che era già una riduzione platonica) all'elemento intellettuale (Illuminismo)”.

the most important creative renewal of Nietzsche that contemporary Italian culture has known”<sup>1142</sup>. Bazlen's notes and aphorisms reveal a new critical perspective, which “involves reading, not interpretative teaching. It does not furnish the key to mastery of the work, but it shows the work, indicates it, and reveals it. These are glosses, comments, footnotes”<sup>1143</sup>. If Cacciari recognizes a Nietzschean model for *Note senza testo*, he also points out that Bazlen's writings show “a Nietzsche rewritten in the 'low' measure of the footnote, in which motifs remain hardly mentioned, stripped of any evangelical or prophetic pretense”<sup>1144</sup>. Bazlen, with his “‘philosophy' of the footnote” (which, according to Bertelli, represents the “final product” of the above-described process of de-scription<sup>1145</sup>) and with his renunciation to the *volumina*, manages to avoid the fetishization of the literary work and of language itself: “language is a precious and irreplaceable gift and at the same time limited, weak, always on the point of vanishing, delicate in its mechanisms”, Cacciari writes, and Bazlen's “philosophy of the footnote” succeeds in preserving it as “a weak and precious gift before the attack of the great intentions, the visions of the world, the judgments”<sup>1146</sup> – that it is to say before the attack of what Bazlen calls “*the love, the art, the immortal principles*”.

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<sup>1142</sup> Cacciari, *Dallo Steinhof*, 226: “Si tratta [...] non solo della prima, ma della più importante ripresa creative di Nietzsche che la cultura contemporanea conosca”. The translation from the Italian edition of the book is in this case ours, since the translation of the English edition (“He considers Nietzsche's first and most important renewal” [*Posthumous People*, 172]) does not seem satisfactory.

<sup>1143</sup> Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 171.

<sup>1144</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>1145</sup> See Bertelli, “Al fondo della scrittura”, 239-240: “La scrittura di Bazlen aspira così a delocalizzarsi dal testo per ridursi a nota a piè di pagina. La nota in quanto tale è l'avvenimento di un tale processo descrittivo. La continua aggiunta di nota a nota, moltiplicandosi nell'autoreferenzialità, esprime sempre più la riduzione di un testo che ha già ottenuto il bianco della pagina. L'assenza della scrittura è la forma più caotica a cui arriva 'l'elusione del testo' così come la nota a piè di pagina è l'espressione dell'ordine senza direzione. Con una differenza, però: ossia che il testo delle note si trovi sempre altrove [...]. Il testo assente è per Bazlen l'invenzione di un nuovo testo nella forma di una riduzione: il prodotto finale della de-scrizione è dunque la nota”.

<sup>1146</sup> Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 172.

The critique of humanistic values realized by Nietzsche – who, according to Heidegger was the last to experience “the homelessness of contemporary human beings from the essence of being's history”, and who, in the reversal of metaphysics, realized though within metaphysics, found the only way out from this homelessness<sup>1147</sup> – can be thus recognized as the ground from which Bazlen's thought moves (“people think they are eternal truths, while they are only adjectives”<sup>1148</sup>, Bazlen writes in an aphorisms that seems to display a clear debt towards the German philosopher). The critique of Nietzsche denounced the limits of human reason, values, and knowledge – limits that are, according to the philosopher, intrinsic to their being merely human. Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* is entirely dedicated to this critique: according to the philosopher, human intellect – produced by and limited to man, but nevertheless by men considered “as if it housed the axis around which the entire world revolved”<sup>1149</sup> – is “nothing other than an aid supplied to the most unfortunate, most delicate and most transient of beings so as to detain them for a minute within existence”<sup>1150</sup>. Intellect, “as a mean for the preservation of the individual”, deceives men about the very value of existence, and “shows its greatest strength in dissimulation” and deception<sup>1151</sup>. Every drive to truth cannot be but merely functional: men “are indifferent to pure knowledge if it has no consequences, but they are actually hostile towards truths which may be harmful and

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<sup>1147</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Letter on 'Humanism'”, in Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 257.

<sup>1148</sup> *Note senza testo*, 231: “La gente pensa che si tratti di verità eterne: si tratta solo di aggettivi”.

<sup>1149</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Second Edition, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2010), 764.

<sup>1150</sup> *Ibid.*, 764-765.

<sup>1151</sup> *Ibid.*, 765.

destructive”<sup>1152</sup>.

According to Nietzsche, the very conventions of language, thanks to which knowledge is produced and organized, are unreliable, because they are generated by a process of abstraction and generalization which entails the loss of the individual and real characters of the things that the words aim to describe: “Like form, a concept is produced by overlooking what is individual and real, whereas nature knows neither forms nor concepts and hence no species, but only an 'X' which is inaccessible to us and indefinable by us”<sup>1153</sup>. Truth thus, as the well-known Nietzschean passage declares, is nothing but

a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to a poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins.<sup>1154</sup>

The truths described by such a language cannot be but deceiving and unreliable. They reveal an understanding of the world as subdued to man, who considers himself as the measure of everything. Language can describe at best the relations between things and laws of nature, but it cannot grasp their real essence. Man, though, “forgetting that the original metaphors of perception where indeed metaphors, [...] takes them for the things themselves”<sup>1155</sup>.

On the other hand, according to Nietzsche, “the fundamental human drive” to

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<sup>1152</sup>Ibid., 766.

<sup>1153</sup>Ibid., 767.

<sup>1154</sup>Ibid., 768.

<sup>1155</sup>Ibid., 769.

form metaphors<sup>1156</sup> and the same deceptive character of language can reveal themselves as virtuous – but only at the condition of putting “art over life”: in this case, “all the expressions of a life lived thus are accompanied by pretense, by the denial of neediness, by the radiance of metaphorical visions, and indeed generally by the immediacy of deception”<sup>1157</sup>. This, according to Nietzsche, is possible only for the man of intuition, who despises the man of reason and his abstractions. The conceptual apparatus that serves to the man of reason as a mean for preservation, can in fact become for the man of intuition's liberated intellect

a mere climbing frame and plaything on which to perform its most reckless tricks; and when it smashes this framework, jumbles it up and ironically re-assembles it, pairing the most unlike things and dividing those things which are closest to one another, it reveals the fact that it does not require those makeshift aids of neediness, and that it is now guided, not by concepts but by intuitions.<sup>1158</sup>

Homelessness could so become a value – if in such a perspective were still possible to talk of values –, but only for the creative man, for the radically nihilistic man with a liberated intellect, whose creations are “intended to express sublime happiness and Olympian cloudlessness and, as it were, a playing with earnest things”<sup>1159</sup>.

Keeping in mind, as Heidegger made clear in his “Letter on 'Humanism'”, that speaking against humanism neither implies “a defense of the inhuman and a glorification of barbaric brutality”<sup>1160</sup> nor “to maintain that everything interpreted as a 'value' –

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<sup>1156</sup>Ibid., 771.

<sup>1157</sup>Ibid., 773.

<sup>1158</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1160</sup>Heidegger, “Letter on 'Humanism'”, 263.

'culture', 'art', 'science', 'human dignity', 'world', and 'God' – is valueless”<sup>1161</sup>, it is thus possible to recognize in what Cacciari describes as Bazlen's “posthumous” condition, a post-humanistic or anti-humanistic intellectual approach. Bazlen's anti-humanism is evident in his suspiciousness towards the conception of man as self-recognized paradigm of the world and of being, in his awareness of the limits of human intellect and language. “The exaggerated veneration of intelligence comes from the ages when it was difficult to be intelligent”<sup>1162</sup>, we read among Bazlen notes; and again: “he was so clever that he could not understand his housemaid”<sup>1163</sup>. If it is true “that one can only die of stupidity”<sup>1164</sup>, it is also true that intelligence is merely “a tool, and this tool ended up in the hands of stupids”<sup>1165</sup>. Bazlen's statements, as he himself clarifies, are not to be interpreted as a “stand against the brain”, but rather against “its hypertrophy at the expense of other qualities which are still savable, not more dangerous and, if integrated, precious”; intelligence's highest achievement is in fact “to understand its own limitation”, for “an intelligence that makes you frustrated and gangrenous is stupid”<sup>1166</sup>.

The playful disintegration proposed by Nietzsche in *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* is thus joyfully embraced by Bazlen, who feels uneasy “in front of anything that has a name”<sup>1167</sup>, and who, as we have seen, believes that “form rises from chaos”,

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<sup>1161</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>1162</sup> *Note senza testo*, 220: “L'esagerata venerazione per l'intelligenza viene ancora dai tempi in cui era difficile essere intelligenti”.

<sup>1163</sup> Ibid.: “Era così intelligente che non capiva la sua cameriera”.

<sup>1164</sup> Ibid., 232: “Si muore solo di stupidità”.

<sup>1165</sup> Ibid.: “L'intelligenza è uno strumento – e questo strumento è finito in mano agli stupidi”.

<sup>1166</sup> Ibid., 219: “Non presa di posizione contro il cervello, ma contro la sua ipertrofia a spese di qualità ancora salvabili, non più pericolose e, se integrate, preziose – La sua opera più grande, conoscere i propri limiti: una intelligenza che rende frustrati e incancreniti è stupida”.

<sup>1167</sup> Ibid., 186: “D i s a g i o di fronte a tutto ciò che ha già un nome”.



and that “only the one who accepts disgregation can be creative”<sup>1168</sup>. If not in describing and grasping the essence of things, language can still reveal itself valuable for its creative and ludic possibilities, therefore literature and language, as Cacciari writes, are treated in Bazlen's *footnotes* with patient irony: “In irony, language finds an affinity with its limits, learns to recognize them and become, *in* them, self-possessed”<sup>1169</sup>. Through detachment and irony Bazlen's radical suspicion against tradition, schools, histories, and arguments (especially against his own arguments, as Calasso underlines<sup>1170</sup>), reveals ultimately itself as a chance to approach language, literature, and culture as the “plaything” described by Nietzsche.

If addressing Bazlen's writings and thought Cacciari suggests a Nietzschean lineage, Damiani argues that the acknowledgement of the crisis of Western culture and of Enlightenment thought prompts the Triestine intellectual to actually go beyond the positions of the German philosopher in the direction of an even more radical – “for the very lack of any pessimistic aura” – nihilism<sup>1171</sup>. According to Damiani, in fact, “Bazlen's nihilism goes through Nietzsche to the end, to finally forget him”<sup>1172</sup>. We have more than once emphasized the continuity between Bazlen's intellectual positions and his existential experience, and also that this very aspect constitutes a fundamental theme of his anti-Crocian “papery legend”. We have also pointed out that Bazlen always refused for

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<sup>1168</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>1169</sup> Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 172.

<sup>1170</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 16.

<sup>1171</sup> See Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 80-81. Regarding Bazlen's paradoxical nihilistic optimism, see also *Note senza testo*, 202: “Così ottimista che realmente non escludo che, si dovesse ancora continuare a lungo così, cosa che non è affatto esclusa, io non possa essere a buon diritto, fra molti anni, ancora più ottimista”.

<sup>1172</sup> Damiani, “Roberto Bazlen”, 81.

himself the label of “intellectual”, and that, over the years, he increasingly displayed a marked impatience about writing. We would like here to argue that exactly in this (non merely speculative) impatience about literature might be recognized a fundamental reason of what Damiani describes as Bazlen's overcoming of Nietzschean nihilism.

Giorgio Colli recognizes an existentially unresolved conflict between Nietzsche's positions and his actual work and life. According to Colli, “in spite of any statement of principles, in spite of any exaltation of life”, in Nietzsche is appreciable a “spontaneous asceticism” (“[Nietzsche] is ascetic by birth, he averts his eyes from life in disgust. And his Zarathustra is also ascetic”<sup>1173</sup>). In spite of his exaltation of an action that exceeds literature and writing, the author of *The Birth of Tragedy* “only rarely perceived the pettiness of the literary act”<sup>1174</sup>, and has been “a man of letters in the most material and ridiculously total acceptance – an actual *homo scribens*”<sup>1175</sup>. After an intense ten-year activity on the German philosopher’s writings, the co-editor of the critical edition of Nietzsche's complete works finally argues:

If we extend the argument from thought to life, [...] if now, after Nietzsche, we judge Nietzsche with regard to the written expression, we find ourselves in front of a crucial question concerning his teaching about life, about his praise of life: what is the point of indicating Dionysian fulfillment, madness, play, against any abstraction and mummification, against any languishing and drained finalism, and in the meantime consuming life in writing – hence in comedy, disguise, mask, non-life?<sup>1176</sup>

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<sup>1173</sup> Colli, *Dopo Nietzsche*, 188

<sup>1174</sup> See the full passage in *ibid.*, 30: “Nietzsche [...] apprezzava un'azione che vada al di là della carta e del calamaio, eppure solo di rado avvertì la pochezza dell'agire letterario. Attraverso la sua scelta, prematura e perentoria, si precluse ogni altra espressione, imprigionò la sua persona in un cerchio magico. Lo psicologo divinatore dei fini e dei moventi dell'agire vide nebulosamente le cose più vicine a sé, cadde in equivoco sulle sue possibilità d'azione. La sua ambizione, la sua arroganza fu un'eccessiva umiltà, una sottovalutazione di sé”.

<sup>1175</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>1176</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

If Bazlen goes beyond Nietzsche and beyond the Mittel-European culture of crisis, he manages to do so by going beyond the discourse on and the rewriting of this crisis, moving from it as from a given which does not require further criticism or meditation, and accepting it in its intellectual premises and in its existential repercussions.

“The end of eternal values [is] the new eternity”<sup>1177</sup>, Bazlen writes in his notebooks. His Captain is therefore able to find a new life only when all his beliefs and assumptions are removed, only when he learns, by experiencing it, the regenerative and vitalizing power of chaos and madness. Montale recollects that Bazlen was “always punctual and sharp, in spite of his apparent disorder”<sup>1178</sup>, and report one of his paradoxical sayings: “to understand something, one needs to go mad, while keeping a cool head”<sup>1179</sup>. Chaos and madness are recognized by Bazlen as prerequisite for real life, and thus also for real art. “Goethe's perfection: not in the statuary clearness (what does that even mean?), but in the rhythmical balance between clearness and madness”<sup>1180</sup>, Bazlen writes about the beloved German poet; and again: “The harmony of Goethe's life: not an Apollonian one, but the most beautiful, the most rhythmical alternation of form and chaos”<sup>1181</sup>. As we have seen, for Bazlen “true life means: to invent new places where one can be shipwrecked”<sup>1182</sup>, and thus to learn “the art of dying every second – / (to understand that each and every second is against the transformation of the other

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<sup>1177</sup> *Note senza testo*, 183: “La fine dei valori eterni – la nuova eternità”.

<sup>1178</sup> Montale, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 2727.

<sup>1179</sup> *Ibid.*, 2730: “Per capire qualche cosa bisogna diventare matti tenendo la testa a posto”.

<sup>1180</sup> *Note senza testo*, 186: “La perfezione di Goethe: non nella chiarezza statuaria (che vuol dire?), ma nell'equilibrio ritmico tra chiarezza e follia”.

<sup>1181</sup> *Ibid.*, 188: “L'armonia della vita di Goethe: non apollinea: la più bella, la più ritmica alternanza di forma e caos”.

<sup>1182</sup> *Capitano*, 170.

ones)”<sup>1183</sup>. According to Bazlen history itself unfolds “through confusions (not through conflicts): conflicts are an order recognized in retrospect, from the perspective of the outcomes of chaos”<sup>1184</sup>. This does not imply that man is abandoned to chaos and chance, nor to negate history, because “history exist – [but] the value lies in going beyond it”:

history (let's allow ourselves this abstraction) comes into being (it is not a disembodied idea) through the historical part in us – the most transient, the most chthonian, the least crystallized one; the most we fully realize ourselves, the least we are available to “history”, and the least we take part to this immediate activity; what makes history are voracity, hunger for life, misunderstanding, the inadequate aspiration within ourselves: not the great gesture which wins through abdication, but the small gesture which wins satiating us. The ones who make history will never have the glory of transmutation – they will have nothing but the satisfaction of satiety, the self-satisfaction of having been able to assert themselves, the base exaltation of the realized vengeance; they will win on the level in which they have lived, and they will not breathe the great peace beyond vengeance and forgiveness – who makes history? the ones who push their way through in the street car, the ones who scream while the boat is sinking / – You see, dear X., we must pray the Lord for our dreams not to be realized, – what we have dreamed, we have had it already – each and every realization is repetition and routine.<sup>1185</sup>

Bazlen's thought and work were characterized by a constant tension towards the new and the original. He was persuaded that, “since there are only false routes [...], every

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<sup>1183</sup> *Note senza testo*, 181: “L'arte di morire ogni secondo – / (capire che ogni secondo è contro la trasformazione degli altri)”.

<sup>1184</sup> *Ibid.*, 202: “La storia si realizza attraverso confusioni (non conflitti): i conflitti sono un ordine visto a posteriori, dalla prospettiva dei risultati del caos...”.

<sup>1185</sup> “Appunti per una lettera (maggio 1944)”, in *ibid.*, 200-201: “Non si tratta – lo capisci – di negare la storia – la storia esiste – il valore consiste nel superarla – la storia (concediamoci quest'astrazione) si realizza (non è un'idea disincarnata) attraverso la parte storica in noi, la più caduca, la più ctonia, la meno cristallizzata – più ci realizziamo in pieno, meno disponibilità abbiamo per la 'storia', meno prendiamo parte a questa attività immediata – sono la voracità, la fame di vita, il malinteso, l'aspirazione inadeguata in noi che fanno la storia: non il grande gesto che vince abdicando ma il piccolo gesto che vince saziandosi – chi fa la storia non avrà mai la gloria della trasmutazione, non avrà che la soddisfazione della sazietà, l'autocompiacimento di essere riuscito a imporsi, la bassa esaltazione della vendetta realizzata – vincerà sul livello di dove è vissuto, e non respirerà la grande calma al di là della vendetta e del perdono – / – chi fa la storia? – quelli che in tram si spingono verso l'uscita, quelli che urlano mentre la nave sta per affondare – / – Vedi, cara X., pregare che i nostri sogni non si realizzino, – ciò che abbiamo sognato l'abbiamo già avuto – ogni realizzazione è ripetizione e routine”.

route leads to destination and all routes are right”, and therefore that “every path is the right one, and every path has to be blessed”<sup>1186</sup>. If every path is a new and blessed adventure, what has left behind has to be necessarily forgotten and surpassed, for “there are no lost paradises, only surpassed paradises”<sup>1187</sup>. Calasso therefore believes that the only definition which could capture Bazlen is “Taoistic” (“Man are not born only Platonist or Aristotelian, as Coleridge argued, but also Taoistic – like Bazlen”<sup>1188</sup>), definition that, although unconventional, seems extremely fitting. For Taoism, “being and becoming coincide”, and the reality of the world is valorized in all its expressions and its continuous and eternal mutations<sup>1189</sup>. In Taoism the only principle and the only goal is change itself, a never-ending change that according to Bazlen denies even death (we read from *Note senza testo*: “Laozi, the only one who does not die – he leaves”<sup>1190</sup>). Taoistic were thus Bazlen's intellectual continuous movement and agility (“woe to the one who believes that the spot in which he is in his path is the destination”<sup>1191</sup>), his irony against common thinking, his repulsion for everything rhetorical and scholastic, the curiosity and un-systematicity of his thought and choices – all of which were possible thanks to “a central empty point within him, which bears everything else”<sup>1192</sup>. Every support limits the movement, Calasso writes, but you “can not lean on an empty point”<sup>1193</sup>.

Bazlen's “centrifugal” thought and his “philosophy of the footnote” (which can be

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<sup>1186</sup> Ibid., 214: “ma poiché ci sono solo vie false [...] ogni via porta alla meta e tutte le vie sono giuste [...] / perché ogni strada è giusta e ogni strada va benedetta”.

<sup>1187</sup> Ibid., 229: “Non ci sono paradisi perduti, solo superati”.

<sup>1188</sup> Calasso “Da un punto vuoto”, 6.

<sup>1189</sup> See Massimo Raveri, “Taoismo”, in Giovanni Filoramo, Marcello Massenzio, Massimo Raveri, and Paolo Scarpi, *Manuale di storia delle religioni* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000), 393.

<sup>1190</sup> *Note senza testo*, 178: “Laotze, l'unico che non muore – se ne va”.

<sup>1191</sup> Ibid., 214: “Guai a chi crede che il luogo dove si trova nella sua via sia il termine”.

<sup>1192</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 16-17.

<sup>1193</sup> Ibid., 20.

extended also to his editorial work, if we consider it primarily as a way to indicate, recommend, and illuminate a literary work) were possible exactly thanks to this “central empty point” which, Cacciari agrees, allowed a deep, full listening:

The footnote is also an adventure, a risk. It gives itself to the text entirely. It is listening, ready for surprises, profoundly curious. It loves temptation, yet it is difficult to please. Apparently adventure is centrifugal, as Calasso has noticed, and it turns about an empty point, a pause, a silence. Because listening is full, it must create the void within itself. It must always return to this “interior” adventure, the kind most alien to Ulysses' “prudence”. The adventure is essentially concentration and immersion: to put all content (to tempt it) to the test of the interior void, to see if it can manage the silence. The arrow of the footnote is shot at the target, at the hearth of the archer himself. One comes alive when this exercise succeeds<sup>1194</sup>.

The interior void Cacciari describes allows an extremely exigent kind of listening which can be satisfied only by the quality that Bazlen called “first-timeness” (“Erstmaligkeit”, or, in Italian, “primavoltità”), and which, as Calasso writes, was the quality Bazlen looked for in his editorial choices as well<sup>1195</sup>. It is thus in the acceptance of “continuous movement, with no end or fixed direction”, and in the necessity of a constant “process of self-transformation”<sup>1196</sup> that we can recognize the reason of Bazlen's continual elusion of the work – elusion which, according to Calasso, is one of Bazlen's greatest discoveries and, paradoxically, a crucial part of his work<sup>1197</sup>. Far from representing a capitulation, Bazlen's “philosophy of the footnote” and his renunciation to the *volumina* express their vitality in their very freedom of not being limited in any closed (dead?) form.

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<sup>1194</sup> Cacciari, *Posthumous People*, 172-173.

<sup>1195</sup> See Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 72.

<sup>1196</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 20.

<sup>1197</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

## Conclusion

In *Il capitano di lungo corso*, the inhabitants of the modern and progressive Gray City “worship ashes, painters, and men of letters”, and “artists are easily distinguished by their flabby behind”<sup>1198</sup>. In Bazlen’s writings, editorial opinions, and private letters is recognizable an analogous contempt for artists, writers, and men of culture, categories among which he nevertheless had many of his closest friends, but of which, already in his youth, he decided not to be part. The paradoxicality of such statements and positions became a fundamental part of his hagiography, and a central motif of the fascination for his figure, which, as we have suggested, has often been interpreted as a quintessential embodiment of the choice of life over literature. This seems though to be a simplistic interpretation of his approach to literature and culture, which, emphasizing his non-bookish and anti-intellectual stances, belittles Bazlen’s long-life immersion in books and his insatiable intellectual curiosity. Calasso writes:

Some forced incompatibilities exist: the man of letters does not want to hear about Eastern wisdom; the unsatisfied man who pursues Eastern wisdom does not want to hear about literature; the erudite man does not want to hear about non-bookish experiences; the one who seeks non-bookish experiences does not want to hear about philology; the one who trusts scientific verifications does not trust mystical verifications; the one who honors mysticism abhors experimental research; the one who looks at modernity recognizes the barbarism of the past; the one who looks at antiquity sees degeneration in the present. [...] The one who does not obey to these norms is regarded as suspicious, facetious; he is an eclectic, a man

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<sup>1198</sup> *Capitano*, 102: “[Gli uomini grigi] amano la cenere, i pittori e i letterati. (Gli artisti si riconoscono dal didietro molle)”.

who sows confusion. Bazlen did not comply with any of these incompatibilities [...], no one like him could sow such a confusion.<sup>1199</sup>

During the research that preceded the writing of our dissertation, we have been warned by people who knew Bazlen and by scholars who wrote about him against trying to capture his figure in a biography or in an intellectual portrait, and we were able to subsequently appreciate the wisdom of such an advice. Trying to compose a thorough reconstruction of Bazlen's intellectual experience and positions would mean trying to restore the above-described confusion into order, and therefore to interpret them through categories and within boundaries that Bazlen nonchalantly but radically dismissed.

Pellegrini recollects to have never heard Bazlen “exposing – not even summarily – ideological systems or philosophies”; that he “did not believe in ideas, nor in religions”; that logical activity itself was according to him nothing more than a useful means “to orient oneself within immediate experience, which allowed evidence of scientific truths”<sup>1200</sup>. Pellegrini concludes: “I still today believe that the experience towards which all his energies were directed is not communicable; it was not subjective, but rather aimed to go beyond the limits of the subject”<sup>1201</sup>. Bazlen's writings seem to suggest that such an experience was not guided by a strictly-speaking mystical or spiritual afflatus, and that even his interest in religions was part of a dialectic path of knowledge within which everything that had been previously reached, appreciated, or even believed had to be constantly surpassed and canceled. Solmi suggests that Bazlen's influence (“his life teaching”) consisted more than anything else exactly into the invitation to “the removal

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<sup>1199</sup> Calasso, “Da un punto vuoto”, 16-17.

<sup>1200</sup> Pellegrini, “Ricordo di Roberto Bazlen”, 62.

<sup>1201</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



and questioning of [...] our conclusions: in an invitation to always keep the maximum spread of the compass-legs – even at the risk of overstepping their extreme circle”<sup>1202</sup>. This might also help to explain why apparently Bazlen only rarely felt the urge to fix his intuitions into writing.

Bazlen refused “to add”, to create a work, but, as particularly evident by his “pedagogical” work for coeval intellectuals and by his assistance to coeval writers, his presence nevertheless deeply affected the cultural reality in which he lived. In spite of his claims regarding the impossibility of artistic creativity and his professed contempt towards writers, Bazlen in fact is remembered primarily as a “cultural catalyst”, as an “intellectual talent scout”, as a discoverer of books and authors. His nihilism did not result in inactivity, sterility, or resignation. His very receptiveness for what have at times been perceived by coeval intellectuals as extravagant or eccentric themes and perspectives seems to spring from such a nihilism, within which the ascertainment of the dead end reached by European culture does not imply a fatal impasse, but rather fosters a change of direction and perspectives (as one of his aphorisms reads: “in the world of the unknown, one has to discover the continuity of the known – but, in the world of the known, one should read the adventure of the unknown”<sup>1203</sup>).

Eminently oral man, Bazlen did not leave any text that allow to thoroughly reconstruct his positions or intellectual experience. He destroyed most of his personal papers, including the better part of of the correspondence he received. The letters we were able to examine only partially help in the understanding of his positions and in the

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<sup>1202</sup> Solmi, “Nota”, in *Lettere editoriali*, 270.

<sup>1203</sup> *Note senza testo*, 214: “In un mondo dell'ignoto, scoprire la continuità del noto – ma, in un mondo del noto, leggere l'avventura nell'ignoto”.

reconstruction of his biography, mainly because of the limited periods they cover. His posthumously published writings represent certainly a most valuable material, but they are fragmentary, and furthermore partially available only in translation. The other private writings Bazlen left have been only partially published or made available to scholars. The documentation one can resort to at the moment when trying to reconstruct his biography, work, and thought is thus extremely partial, and any research that aims to offer a thorough portrait of his figure inevitably run the risk of flattening or betraying it.

The most identifiable traces that Bazlen left are the ones of his discrete but determinant influence, and it is exactly this influence that our dissertation tried to describe and analyze, in its interpretations, actualizations, and necessary betrayals, with the goal of being able, through them, to reach a deeper comprehension of his figure, thought, and legacy. Legacy which Bazlen ostensibly did not care about, but that nevertheless revealed itself vast and fundamental for twentieth-century Italian literature and culture, and which mostly manifest itself through what others were able to realize thanks to his maieutic activity.

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