

Of fragments and footnotes: Absence and Invention of the Text in Roberto Bazlen.

Today I will refer to Roberto Bazlen as an author and to his writings as a *corpus*.

However, Bazlen never intended for his writings to have coherent literary unity. “Friends and enemies – Roberto Calasso claims – have regretted Bazlen’s continuous elusion of the literary work. But this sort of elusion has turned out to be one of his major discoveries. [...] there is not a literary work here, just a few scattered notes put together by editors in order to make a book. [...] our present attempt to tie his name to these writings turns out to be quite vain. [...]. The text of Bazlen’s *Note senza testo* has always been somewhere else.”¹

Calasso’s first concern in introducing Bazlen’s writings is to stress how his aversion to creating an explicitly literary work should not be read as the postscript to the Romantic cult for life, which cannot be shaped into a book. One might say, going along the lines of Edward Said, that Bazlen’s choice reflects the “terrifying freedom of individuality” of the twentieth century.² Nonetheless, the result is a selection of scattered notes taken out from a series of handwritten notebooks, translated from German into Italian, and collected into that *lieu de la protection*³ which is today an actual book.

“I believe – Bazlen states – that it is no longer possible to write books. That is why I do not write books. Almost all books are footnotes that have ballooned into volumes (*volumina*). I write only footnotes.”⁴ Bazlen’s sharp statement opens itself up immediately to opposite interpretations: on the one hand, the idea that “almost all books are footnotes” might be read as

¹ Roberto Calasso, Introduzione, in Roberto Bazlen, *Scritti*, Milano: Adelphi, 2002, pp. 10-1. The book contains also the *Note senza testo*. From now on, we will refer to it as NST.

² Edward W. Said, *Beginnings. Intention and method*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 235.

³ Jacques Derrida *La fin du livre e le commencement de l’écriture*, in *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Editions de Minuit 1967, pp. 30-1.

⁴ NST, p. 203

post-modern *avant la lettre*; on the other, one can take it as the witticism of an experienced intellectual. Wit is no doubt a specific trait of which Bazlen is fully aware: “They believe that what I say is for the most part paradoxical – thus I can assert, with pleasure and perfect coherence, that what the others say is for the most part not paradoxical.”⁵ This passage shows clearly Bazlen’s intellectual and human figure. Born in Trieste in 1902, where he lived until 1934, Bazlen considered it a place of oppositions, paradoxes and multiplicity: a city of approximations and incomplete human figures, with no creative culture and no national identity.⁶

Although Calasso discourages relating the “post-historical”⁷ character of Bazlen to the history of his city, Bazlen is no doubt a figure of oppositions, paradoxes and multiplicity. A character of approximations and incompleteness, Bazlen wrote and yet has been considered a “*non-scrittore* [non-writer].”⁸ He could not finish his main novel, *Der Kapitän*, and he himself became a main character in other writers’ novels.⁹ He believed in precursors and he became a model, “we do not have models but precursors.”¹⁰ He did not pursue any literary work and we have a book, a fixed form that Bazlen tried to avoid by all means. He once said: “Form is death;”¹¹ a death which is both cultural and physical. Bazlen’s idea of book is characterized by the role of chance: “Book: starting by chance, / and thus stressing chance, / narrating its uncertain position before it.”¹²

We are dealing here with an idea of book that is the erratic experience of chance as a creative means. In its opposition to death, the erratic experience of creativity stems from

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 233.

⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 242-55.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 15.

⁸ See Daniele del Giudice, in *Per Roberto Bazlen* (1995), pp. 33-9; Id., *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, Torino: Einaudi 1983.

⁹ See Valeria G. A. Tavazzi, *Lo scrittore che non scrive: Bobi Bazlen e Lo stadio di Wimbledon di Del Giudice*, available at <http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/fileservices/filesDISP/auctor%20tavazzi.pdf>

¹⁰ NST, p. 229.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 185. See also NST, p. 188.

¹² *Ivi*, p. 203.

Bazlen's cultural origins: "The fantasy of the Jew comes to an end just before death."¹³ Bazlen's attempt is thus to undo the book, to leave it to chance through a process of reduction which is the result of multiplicity. Thus, the erratic tendency of Bazlen's writing resembles that of the wandering Jew "for his own condition of precariousness, [...] the vagabond who reflects, the eternally restless Jew, the one who sees and looks at everything."¹⁴

Reduction represents what Bazlen calls "de-scrizione,"¹⁵ [de-description] which is, through the dash used by Bazlen, to be read etymologically: a narrower copy of a previous writing with the result of an absence. The making of *Der Kapitän* shows it clearly: "When, after his death – Luciano Foà states – I asked Fabrizio Onofri if he knew why the typewritten version of his novel had been so consistently reduced, Onofri recollected one night in which Bazlen said, making reference to his novel, that he had realized how a manuscript of 400 pages could be reduced to 80 with no harm."¹⁶ The absent text is for Bazlen the invention of a new text in the form of a reduction into smaller parts or fragments; it is the necessary product of Bazlen's de-scription as much as the *scholium* is the result of the copyist's activity while copying a text. The footnote becomes the metaphor of this process.¹⁷

Bazlen's desire, often repeated to his friends, to burn all of his writings after his death – so tragic as it might appear in the light of book-burning in the twentieth century – was never his actual intention; it clearly seems to have been a rhetorical device in the mould of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 196.

¹⁴ Riccardo Calimani, *Storia dell'ebreo errante. Dalla distruzione del tempio di Gerusalemme al Novecento*. Milano: Mondadori 2002, p. 9.

¹⁵ NST, p. 189.

¹⁶ *Per Roberto Bazlen* (1995), p. 17.

¹⁷ See Giulia de Savorgnani's idea of retrieving Bazlen's absent text, that to which he is adding footnotes in both his *Editorial Letters* and novel, is correct to the extent of clearing the necessary bonds among Bazlen's writings. But waiving the web of Bazlen's writings does not solve the textual plot, in G. De Savorgnani, *Bobi Bazlen: lo scrittore che non scrive?*, in *Bobi Bazlen sotto il segno di Mercurio*, Trieste: LINT 1998, pp. 123-214.

While avoiding *auto da fé* is evidence for Sergio Solmi of a care for his writings,¹⁸ the question of Bazlen's real intent defies definition. A "choice – Manuela La Ferla states – opposed to the literary Work,"¹⁹ but the word choice does not stress the complex relation of this "leggenda / cartacea"²⁰ to his writings; a relation which nourished over time the imagination of friends and acquaintances as well as the creativity of those who followed. He never expected to have disciples, as he had always refuted the figure of the master: "be not a disciple and you will help me be not a master [...] A master will be so if you would be my master."²¹

Contemporary literature has gained a certain degree of familiarity with short forms of expression²² developed from the Greek and Latin tradition of the apologue and that of the epigram (let us think about Federigo Tozzi's *Bestie*, Goffredo Parise's *Sillabari*,²³ and Eugenio Montale's *Xenia*).²⁴ Through the nineteenth and the twentieth century, short forms of writings, often shaped as fragments, become also literary (Charles Baudelaire, Franz Kafka, Ramón Gomez de la Serna, Edmond Jabès, Félix Fénéon), historical and philosophical (Friedrich Nietzsche, Alain, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Wilhelm Adorno, Maurice Blanchot) means of knowledge. Of particular interest for Italian literature is the posthumous publication, in the first half of the last century, of Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone* and Carlo Dossi's *Note azzurre*.²⁵ This

¹⁸ Sergio Solmi, *Nota*, in Bazlen (2002), p. 270. Lilla Cepak has also claimed Bazlen's awareness of his literary work. See *Per Roberto Bazlen. Materiali della giornata organizzata dal Gruppo 85*, ed. Roberto Dedenaro, Udine: Zanotto 1995, p. 62.

¹⁹ Manuela La Ferla, in *Per Roberto Bazlen* (1995), p. 48.

²⁰ Eugenio Montale, *Lettera a Bobi*, in *Diario del '71 e del '72, Tutte le poesie*, ed. Giorgio Zampa, Milano: Mondadori 1984, p. 465.

²¹ NST, pp. 222-3.

²² See *Teoria e storia dell' aforisma*, ed. Gino Ruozi, Milano: Mondadori 2004 and *La brevità felice*, ed. Mario Andrea Rigoni and R. Bruni, Venezia: Marsilio, 2006.

²³ See Cesare Garboli, *Amicizia*, in *I «Sillabari» di Goffredo Parise*, atti del convegno *I Sillabari* di Goffredo Parise, 4-5 novembre 1992, ed. Raffaele La Capria e Silvio Perella, Napoli: Guida 1994, pp. 105-17.

²⁴ See also G. Ruozi, *Scrittori italiani di aforismi*, 2 voll., Milano: Mondadori 1994.

²⁵ See R. Bruni, *La scrittura breve di Carlo Dossi*, in *La brevità felice* (2006), pp. 329-43 and G. Ruozi, *Libri fatalmente postumi. Riflessioni sullo «Zibaldone di Pensieri» e i «Pensieri» di Leopardi, i «Sudelbücher» di*

unpublished material, in the wake of Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, François de La Rochefoucauld's *maxims*, and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher* lays ideally the foundations of a series of private writings, within and outside Italy, which would be published after the death of their authors. Some other examples include Paul Valéry's *cahiers*, Joseph Joubert's *cahiers*, Emil Cioran's *cahiers* and Cesare Pavese's *Il mestiere di vivere*. In spite of the heterogeneous experience of further forms of the fragmentary in the mould of French Symbolism – In Italy, the explosion of writing into fragments through the reaction of Futurism; a poetics of fragments with the Vociani; and other specific examples of fragmentary writing, say, Giuseppe Ungaretti's *Cori descrittivi di stati d'animo di Didone*, Andrea Zanzotto's poetry, the heterogeneous experiences of the *Gruppo 63* – Bazlen's footnotes belong to that sort of private writing which takes into account both diaristic and aphoristic style: a diary of always fewer lines.

Through Anthony Grafton's investigation²⁶ we have become acquainted with quite a few notions of the nature of footnotes throughout history. Moreover, William Kurtz Wimsatt and Edward Said have specifically valued the role of footnotes as a free-standing form of expression in the twentieth century.²⁷ Still, a consideration is necessary, as Lilia Cepak, who quite ironically encountered Bazlen by reading Debenedetti's notes on the writer,²⁸ stressed the central role of the note – as central as that of the text – in Jewish culture. Both the *massôrâh* [tradition] and the *midrash* [investigation], whose ancient examples of the latter date back to the Talmudic practice,

Lichtenberg, i «Cahiers» di Joubert, in *Leopardi e il libro nell'età romantica*, ed. Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino, Roma, Bulzoni, 2000, pp. 319-337.

²⁶ Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote. A Curious History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1997.

²⁷ "Whereas notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author's *intention*, yet they ought to be judged like any other parts of the composition."²⁷ The "plus" of Bazlen is to free the footnote even from a textual role," in William Kurtz Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry and two preliminary essays written in collaboration with Monroe C. Beardsley*, New York: The Noonday Press 1964, p. 16. As "remarks" do not expose the text to disruption, Said debates with Anscombe's idea of the impossibility of creating unity through notes. (Reference is to the use of *Bemerkungen* in Wittgenstein. See Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe "On the Form of Wittgenstein's Writing", in *Contemporary Philosophy: A Survey*, vol. 3, ed. Raymond Klubansky, Firenze: La Nuova Italia 1969, pp. 373-378), Said wonders thus whether a text is just made of remarks, in E. Said (1985), pp. 224-5.

²⁸ *Per Roberto Bazlen* (1995), p. 59.

are strictly linked to the reading of the biblical text.²⁹ Thus, an “analyse thalmudique,” “word by word,” such as the one that Michael Löwy³⁰ carries out for Benjamin’s fragments on history, will also shed light on Bazlen’s, at least in the case of his neologism “*primavoltità*.”

*Primavoltità*³¹ [“first-time-ness”] is the action of doing, as if it were always the very first time. The word “volta,” [time] determines the central idea of circularity, which is not repetition: “each realization is repetition.”³² Repetition is Penelope’s main attribute, that of a sterile creativity which never “de-scribes” its purported purpose: “work for nothing.”³³ *Primavoltità* is, instead, both the moment and the point in which something happens for one time only and radiates in a circle, as the ripples created by a drop of water: the birth of a new cosmos. The concept of *primavoltità* explains the idea of a cultural “collective flood,” “along with us, the flood”³⁴ – which plays openly on Madame de Pompadour’s “*Après nous, le déluge*” – as anti-nostalgic and immediately present.

The flood, an image for the chaos through which order can be set over and over again is the action of *primavoltità*. By connecting circularity and linearity, Bazlen draws a connection to the symbol of the Tao: “Laotze is the only one who does not die – he goes.”³⁵ Bazlen’s *primavoltità* leads writing and avoids the “formality” of death by the “art of dying every single second.”³⁶ “Each form – Bazlen writes on – in its supreme possibility of being complete lasts only one second – uninterruptedly creative – but this is impossible, since form comes out of

²⁹ *The Jewish Study Bible*, Tanakh translation, New York: Oxford University Press 2004, p. 2079ss.

³⁰ Michael Löwy, *Walter Benjamin: Avertissement d'incendie. Une lecture des thèses «Sur le concept d'histoire»*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2001.

³¹ NST, pp. 229-30.

³² *Ivi*, p. 201.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 231.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 230.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 178.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 181.

chaos [...] creation of the negative.”³⁷ Chaos entails the negative as a process of destruction and creation: “To destroy means to create.”³⁸ The order is crucial here: destruction means creation, as the former word implies an idea of construction (*de + struĕre*). Bazlen does not give much consideration to creation itself. Creation is God’s decision over chaos. It is the act of beginning through which time starts and the human being is created: “A creation of the world lasts six days. God created the human being on the sixth day *because* five days before he had separated the light from the dark. Today the novelists begin on the fifth-sixth day.”³⁹

The one who narrates is to be a diminished God, “God made us the creator of his creation,”⁴⁰ since God could not pursue it: “On the seventh day God was out of breath.”⁴¹ Bazlen’s world starts with a loss. The result is a contradictory, perishable eternity for human beings who replicate the act of creation, the Word, in the form of stories. If the narrator was for Benjamin the man who could let the candlelight of his own life be consumed by the constant flame of his story,⁴² Bazlen’s point of view is quite less devotional: “Some guy lives and writes good poetry. But when that one does *not* live in order to write good poetry, how ugly is the good poetry written by the one who does *not* live in order to write good poetry.”⁴³

The value given to the experience of life goes along with that of writing. Life and writing are an openly creative experience with no aims and no directions. As much as the story told by the captain, Bazlen’s writing avoids directions, “each way is the wrong way,”⁴⁴ in order to have them all at once. Thus, the conclusion for the writer’s fragmentary writing as well as the

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 212.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 186.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 187.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p. 205.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Walter Benjamin, *Il narratore. Considerazioni sull’opera di Nikolai Leskov*, in *Angelus Novus*, Torino: Einaudi 1995, pp. 273.

⁴³ NST, p. 43.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 214.

fragments of the possible conclusions of the Captain's story (a story of a life and a life as a story) display a tension between chaos and order. This tension is of a nature that recalls Benjamin's interpretation of the relationship between Talmud and Tao in his essay on Kafka: the tension of a "nothing which alone makes it possible for something to be useful."⁴⁵ The lesson of both Talmud and Taoism makes the practice of interpreting reality, in terms of reading it and writing it, an erratic and never-ending experience of the unveiling of no-thing.⁴⁶ Is this an Eastern formula substituting for the Western Heideggerian *Holzwege*? I would like to stress a fundamental difference, which consists of Bazlen's enjoyment of being-off-the-beaten-tracks, as he had no intention of making reality an experience of unveiling truth.

Constant wandering led Blanchot to the idea of a distance between the Jew as a man of the origin, and his relation to the origin: "The Jew is the man of origins; he who relates to the origin not by dwelling but by distancing himself from it, thus saying that the truth of the beginning is in separation."⁴⁷ The place devoted to his wandering is the desert, an umbilical space of identity and otherness. The lack of references in the desert makes wandering through it a reflection of Bazlen's "chaotic order" of writing; the experience of being lost and that of being at home. This final contradiction brings in the essence of being Jewish according to Blanchot: "it is precisely this contradiction that makes the Jewish man a Jew."⁴⁸ "Vagabond"⁴⁹ and "established,"⁵⁰ the Jewish condition of wandering results to be the most familiar, as the Jewish

⁴⁵ See Walter Benjamin, *Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death*, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books 1969, p. 136. See also Bernd Müller, *Zwischen Thora und Tao*, in "Denn es ist noch nichts geschehen" *Walter Benjamins Kafka-Deutung*, Böhlau, Köln 1996, p. 205-219.

⁴⁶ O fan "empty point" speaks Calasso, in *Bazlen Scritti* (2002), p. 17.

⁴⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The indestructible*, in *The Infinite Conversation*, ed. Susan Hanson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1992, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/yale/Doc?id=10159486&ppg=162>
Copyright © 1992. University of Minnesota Press. All rights reserved, p 126.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

people “become a people through the exodus [...] to a place that is not a place and where it is not possible to reside.”⁵¹

Edmond Jabès, who tied the book to the desert through the concept of threshold: “One will not pass the threshold of the book, it is infinite desert,”⁵² bounds the experience of desert to that of the word. He says: “the only dwelling of the errant people, the only dwelling of the Jewish people is the word.”⁵³ On the contrary, Bazlen’s refusal of the book, sees in the bond of wandering and the word a tragedy: “The tragedy of the Jews: they pass the Red Sea dry. With dry feet at the bottom of the sea.”⁵⁴ The destruction of a cultural tradition goes through the element of water. The tragedy of the Jews is that of a people who pass the sea and keep their past alive. The Captain’s red jacket and pants, the form of the past, which he has to put on upon his arrival after being shipwrecked, represent the provisional state of the narrowing process of de-scription:⁵⁵ “Until you have new clothes, you’ve got to be happy with your red ones,”⁵⁶ his wife says. In the Captain’s mind, red clothes embody the idea of death. The final image of the shipwreck in the novel is the beginning of a new cycle of de-scription in which the Captain gets rid of both form and past:

Finally alone [...] impassive as usual, he started swimming. How he hated the ship, how beautiful it was that all the books would now dissolve into the sea. Everything was clear and consequential, he had always known it, he had also wanted it that time, when he had refused those red pants – that had been the first act of preparing his shipwreck [...] a pair of red, dry pants led him to a pair of blue, wet pants [...] Now everything was in order [...] Although he did not know, he could say where he was, that was the end of the prologue [...] Now, only Tiamat, Tiamat, in order to create at the end a cosmos.⁵⁷

⁵¹ *Ivi*, p. 126: “a people without a land and bound by a word.”

⁵² E. Jabès, *Le Soupçon Le Désert*, in *Le Livre des Ressemblances, II*, Paris: Gallimard 1978, p. 7. See also Id., *Du désert au livre*. Entretiens avec Marchel Cohen, Paris: Belfond 1980.

⁵³ Interview with Madeleine Chapsal, “L’Express,” (18 April 1963), pp. 33-4, quoted in Rosmarie Waldrop, *Lavish Absence: Recalling and Rereading Edmond Jabès*, Middletown: Wesleyan 2002, p. 187.

⁵⁴ NST, p. 196.

⁵⁵ Bazlen (2002), p. 189.

⁵⁶ *Ivi*, p. 136.

⁵⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 76-7.

The reference to Tiamat, the chaos goddess of the sea, makes shipwreck the experience through which writing can finally give birth to the new. Any attempt to write a book that is the story of someone's life ends up being the result of a Romantic sense of irony. The idea of such a book is an idea of sterile repetition:

«It all depends on those impossible pants--unpleasant, uncomfortable--that you forced me to wear ».
[...]
«What will you do then?».
«I do not know yet. I'll make up my mind later. All the seas are open... First of all, I want to finish my book ».
«What are you writing about exactly? ».
«It is my story... the story of a certain captain ».
«Is there more left?».
«Just... a few lines ».
«It won't take much time then».
«Who knows, maybe it will».
«I have got time».
«I make lines last longer».
«I have more time than you have».
«Who has more time?».
«We'll see. Is this conversation part of it?».
«Of course, and now there are just... a few lines left. But now stop it, otherwise the conversation will be too long. There will be lines in excess then. If we do not cancel them, the end will come right in the middle of a sentence».
They both laughed.
«Why do we ever make such silly conversations?».
«I guess, it is for a Romantic sense of irony».
...
The captain wrote the last line.⁵⁸

The erratic disposition of writing, which Elvio Guagnini pointed out to be typical of Bazlen ever since his first attempts at typing— a “disposizione al salto”⁵⁹ from one subject to the another —, turns out to be creative only as a chaotic, and thus ordered, experience of reduction, the expression of an anti-Apellian art in the form of notes collected in a ship-captain's log.

Nulla die sine linea, no day without a line. Historically, the word “diary” refers primarily to daily provisions and later on becomes a place for recording acts, names, and everyday

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 148-9.

⁵⁹ *Per Roberto Bazlen* (1995), p. 74. For an accurate reproduction of Bazlen's typing attempts of 1924, see Giuseppe Mercenaro, *Una amica di Montale. Vita di Lucia Rodocanachi*, Milano: Camunia 1991, pp. 32-4.

activities. What characterizes these registers is the conciseness of their content. A register holds synthetic information regarding other documentation. However, the so-called *registro* is not just a chronological *repertoire* of information, a private space to which one recurs daily; it indicates partial copies of historical documents.⁶⁰ The fragmentary nature of Bazlen's writing ties together these two main aspects, so that it displays itself as a place for collecting information on different subjects in a synthetic form, and a space for epitomizing. Since diary avoids any attempt to complete the page, both written and unwritten space are "insignificant" to the diary. "The interest of a diary – Blanchot states – is its insignificance."⁶¹ Is thus the diary "the supreme recourse to escape total despair confronting the act of writing,"⁶² as it appeared to be at the very beginning to Charles du Bos? Is diary the compensation for the missing work? Blanchot says that the diary is a hope-giving device, since it works as a confidant: "by uniting the insignificance of life with the nonexistence of the work [diary will raise] null life up to the beautiful surprise of art, and formless art to the unique truth of life—the interlacing of all these various motives makes the diary an undertaking of redemption: one writes to save writing, to save one's life by writing."⁶³

In the case of Bazlen, not only his footnotes, but his *Editorial Letters* and his novel as well, can easily be taken into account as reflecting the nature of the diary practice both in terms of reducing and copying previously read or written material. Whereas Lejeune sees "each entry of a diary [...] as a text itself, but as much as the order of the entries represents a system of variations, it could also be the place for apprenticeship, for evolutions,"⁶⁴ Bazlen's writing explores a radical system of reduction, which is here fragmentation. By reading the *Note senza*

⁶⁰ See Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, IV, Torino: UTET IV 1966, pp.328-9 e DELI, ed. Manlio Cortelazzo e Paolo Zolli 1999, p. 1338.

⁶¹ Maurice Blanchot, *Diary and Story*, in *The Book to Come*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2003, p. 185. See also Id., *L'absence du livre le neutre le fragmentaire*, in *L'entretien infini*, Paris: Gallimard 1969, pp. 421-636.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ivi*, p. 186.

⁶⁴ Philippe Lejeune, *Les brouillons de soi*, Paris: Seuil 1998, p. 317.

testo, the issue of shipwreck and the figure of Ulysses cover a consistent part of Bazlen's reflections. Shipwreck is the key element of Bazlen's unfinished *Der Kapitän*. If the writer's concern seems at first to be the issue of beginning, "this is the prologue; maybe we can only write prologues [...],"⁶⁵ it is a matter of fact that the novel could not be finished. Such an issue turns out to be a prejudice: "Prejudice: there must be an end; you speak of the end; now is at one time beginning and end: this is why it is beautiful."⁶⁶ The captain lives through his destiny of being shipwrecked. He is an anti-Ulysses, as he does not embody a head figure (*capitaneum e capite*) of authority and leading expertise. Since Bazlen's character shows how the process of leading turns out to be a deceptive device, as it is in the case of Ulysses: "Ulysses [...] creates direction [...] the clear line is in chaos."⁶⁷

Bazlen's head wanders, indeed, among textual multiplicity, as Luciano Foà shows by referring to a letter of June 28, 1950 where Bazlen illustrates an initially enthusiastic approach to writing: "I am writing many hours per day (Hopefully in ten years three books, not one, will pop up: all of the material goes consistently in three different directions)."⁶⁸ A few weeks after, writing grows in multiplicity and reduces itself in direction: "I believe that my three books are four – anyway, one of them progresses so smoothly,"⁶⁹ but in one other letter sent off almost one year after, March 21, 1951, the experience of writing a novel ends in a shipwreck: "Dear Luciano [...] I have been busy, I had to have my captain be shipwrecked [...] and now I feel remarkably light-hearted."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ NST, p. 77.

⁶⁶ *Ivi*, p. 222.

⁶⁷ NST, p. 213.

⁶⁸ *Per Roberto Bazlen* (1995), p. 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

As far as Bazlen's writings are concerned, they miss their own end, since there is not an end where there is no origin. The image of the absent text is not that of the "implicit text" enucleated by Nicolás Gómez Dávila, who employs what he calls a "pointilliste"⁷¹ technique in his writing. Absence invents the text in the sense that it finds it while being in the status of *primavoltità*. Blanchot seems to be the one who described absence in the most suitable way for Bazlen: "[...] the order of the book is required by what the book does not contain — by the absence which eludes the book. [...]. Whence the appeal to the fragmentary and the recourse to the disaster."⁷²

Thus, the experience of the shipwreck, and through it that of the Whale,⁷³ denies here the indication of the right way as it does in the story of Jonah. The belly of the whale is the "very comfortable, cosy, homelike" experience of absence;⁷⁴ it is the absent space where identity and otherness coincide within the circle of oppositions, that of destruction and of creation, where Bazlen's experience of *primavoltità* invent both life and writing by dying every single second: "Other shipwrecks in the same place – but no captain goes back – one must not be shipwrecked

⁷¹ Nicolás Gómez Dávila, *Escolios a un texto implicito*, Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura 1977, p. 11. See also Paul Valéry, *La caccia magica*, Napoli: Guida 1985. Dávila's definition recalls Valéry's idea of creativity as the only moment of non interruption of the text. Of an "ideal text" speaks Franco Volpi, *Il "pointillisme" aforistico di Gómez Dávila*, in *L'aforisma come genere letterario*, in *La brevità felice* (2006), pp. 371-8.

⁷² Blanchot (2003), pp. 99-100. It is of interest that Bazlen's controversial opinion on Blanchot could find agreement with the idea of "paradossalità inafferrabile [elusive paradoxicality]" of the relationship between the artist and the work of art, in Bazlen (2002), p. 306.

⁷³ Orwell remembers "[...] that everyone, at least every English-speaking person, invariably speaks of Jonah and the *whale*. Of course the creature that swallowed Jonah was a fish, and was so described in the *Bible* [...], in George Orwell, *Inside the whale and other essays*, London: Victor Gollancz LTD 1940, p. 177. For this reason, the philological care of Carlo Lorenzini, also known as Carlo Collodi, made him speak of a fish, a dogfish to be exact, whereas the Walt Disney Production preferred the comfort womb of a friendly-drown whale. The whale-interference, possibly stemming from Lucian's *True History*, does not work on Bazlen's imagination the way it works for Henry Miller in Orwell's essay: the captain results to be "a willing Jonah," where his will consists of feeling "no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, *accepting* [...]," in Orwell (1940), p. 178.

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, p. 177.

there where the *others* have been shipwrecked... true life means: to invent new places in which to be shipwrecked... every new work is just the invention of a new death.”⁷⁵

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⁷⁵ NST, p. 170.