

SIBILA PETLEVSKI: CORRESPONDENCE (excerpt from "Twilight State", the third novel in the "Taboo" trilogy)

*How things return to their starting point! How persistent, how malicious these ghosts of the past are!* - Viktor wrote. He dated it: *Lublin, November 22nd 1916, 2:40 AM*. He was in a state of fatigue; weary in spirit and exhausted from work. He sat at a desk in an office of the Psychiatry ward of Lublin army headquarters. For a while now - since that first operation he had to perform under fire, in the improvised conditions of a field hospital, up to the moment when he could start practicing his specialty in Lublin - he had a feeling that he was haunted by the faces from those years which he lived through - in his own words - "foolishly, arrogantly wasteful of time, as if he would live forever". The train brought fresh cannon fodder from the eastern front. *Delivery* - that's what Viktor called the newly arrived wounded. Whenever a larger "delivery" arrived, he would get involved. He considered it his duty; "roll up your sleeves, get out of the privileged position of the head of the psychiatric ward, and do the butcher's job as one should". There weren't many educated physicians among the psychoanalysts who gathered around Freud. He was in many ways an exception.

*I'm tired, tired, tired, like a heavy saddle is covering me. My eyelids are closing, and there is no merciful sleep. I haven't slept properly in weeks* - Viktor wrote down. *I thought the twilight period in which I still believed myself to be an artist was over. In a way, it is. Nothing can ever be the same again. But the curse returns. It was and remained. It's following me.* When he removed the white coat stained with blood, Viktor neatly buttoned it up and put it on the hanger. He didn't have it washed, and now the "filthy butcher's apron" had pride of place on a silly wooden hanger for the upper part of the uniform, which in peacetime would surely hold the pressed jacket of his dinner suit. He placed the hanger opposite the desk, in the position where a patient would usually find himself after opening the door and stepping into his office. First he began to laugh, and then he forgot about that "little play" he put on for his own amusement, and started writing. Just before four o'clock in the morning, when his eyes had gone completely blurry from fatigue, he looked up, and his doctor's coat still stood there like a headless man - he himself. At four AM, seeing an empty doctor's uniform, the discarded armor of his own doctor persona, wasn't the least bit pleasant.

*Is there any content in it... this role of humanist and physician?* - he wondered.

On the coat, the blood had once more, with a bureaucrat's dilligence, written the message of another senseless death, and at the sight of these blood stains, Viktor couldn't escape the impression - for quite some time he couldn't escape the horrific impression - that the canvas of his doctor's coat was a surface used by some utterly cunning, unidentified force - God or the Devil, whichever - to send him messages.

*Those aren't stains. No, those aren't lines either. It's writing.*

Finally, he could make out "a hand"; he thought that every other, minimally skillful eye could differentiate between a random form - a bloody arabesque of chance - and a deliberate intervention into randomness. It was writing. Those were signs. Perhaps even letters. There wasn't much chance that he could be mistaken on this issue, because Viktor was also an artist. As much as he wanted to forget this innate passion - he was, among all other things, an artist - and he was a better draughtsman than many of those who entered the Academy.

Endowed in all things, he proved with every life decision that overabundance can become a serious problem for a "serious man in a serious society". For some time now he copied the letters of the blood alphabet into his *Diary*, pretending he was merely doodling. He could never admit it to anyone. He could barely admit to himself what he was doing, in the small hours of the morning, after work; this "infernal calligraphy" and an incidental search for the key to this coded writing. Precisely - "incidental search" - because how could one believe a system could really exist where arbitrariness, absurdity, complete chaos of causes and effects were shown?

*Even this war, which put the "blood ink" into mass production, was and remained only a set of god-awfully banal reasons, dominated by the need for gain. Only Gain could give an alleged sense to the senselessness of war, and sell an infernal lie at the price of thousands and thousands of human lives. Only Gain could convince each of them personally - the smart and the stupid, the ignorant and the educated who think they know how to think - that at the end of their life journey they did not die in vain, but as the happy possessors of a great truth. I'd love to know: whose Gain?... Because whoever promised them immortality, they could only achieve it beyond consciousness, in the realm of collective sepulchral stupidity that makes sons continue precisely where their fathers left off. Am I perhaps engaged in correspondence with a force of cerebral inertia stronger than death itself? The blood letters - from whom did they come from, and for whom are they intended?*