

The metaphor of Ukrainian science “bleeding”

Dear Editor,

The editorial *Science in Ukraine is bleeding*, recently published in your journal *Bleeding, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology (BTVB)*,¹ brings to mind by a curious harmony of concepts, Paolo Nori’s book *Sanguina ancora. L’incredibile vita di Fëdor M. Dostoevskij*.² In English it would sound something like: *It’s still bleeding. The incredible life of Fyodor Dostoevsky*. What struck me was not only the shared concept of *bleeding*, but also the common Russian homeland of Prof. Komarov and Dostoevsky, assuming one still considers Ukraine as the *Little Russia* of the tsarist period.

The *bleeding* mentioned by Igor Komarov, the Ukrainian chemist quoted by Nature, is obviously a metaphor, just as it seems to be a *metaphor of metaphor* when you made it your own in your editorial through the Ukrainian scientist’s cry of pain, so that you wrote that *as scientists and clinicians supporting a journal devoted to bleeding, we cannot remain silent*.

Even Nori in the more recent *Vi avverto che vivo per l’ultima volta. Noi e Anna Achmatova* dwells on the absurdity of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on more than one occasion.³ In truth, using expressions that are not too severe or accusatory, but simply of dismay, Nori describes the conflict as something so absurd and meaningless that one cannot understand it. Nori’s most recurrent expression in this regard is, significantly and simply, *I feel like crying*.

The bleeding of which Nori speaks is also a metaphor. It is not bleeding from a war wound, from an act of destruction. On the contrary, it is the bleeding of a wound of the soul triggered by a *positive* event. The event is the reading of *Crime and Punishment* and in particular the moment when the protagonist, Rodiòn Romànovič Raskòl’nikov, asks himself *but am I like an insect or am I like Napoleon?*. A question that, adopted by Nori, leads him to look into the existential abyss that causes him a wound that, indeed, still bleeds – The same existential abyss, perhaps, into which this absurd war has thrown us all.

The act of denunciation of the Nature article and your BTVB Editorial, with their expression of international solidarity in the name of a science that has no boundaries and

cannot be circumscribed to a defined geographical territory, is comparable, by contrast, to the attempt – we would say almost childish – to censor all forms of Russian art after the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February last year, attempted censorship of which Paolo Nori himself was a victim. The nonsense of this attempt lies in the fact that science, like art, has no homeland, it is homeland itself, paraphrasing an expression by Anna Achmatova.

Science, as the capacity to know, to learn, is evoked by the image of the book. And it is significant that the Nature article opens with this very image. The books neatly stacked on library tables of the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kiev, look like evacuees in the underground bunkers of air-raid shelters who, in silent order, are waiting for the emergency to cease and to return to their homes, to their shelves. It makes one think of the hand that placed those volumes there, of the devotion with which those books were placed, one on top of the other, of the feeling of pity, almost as if they were people, of the love of knowledge, the love of the future, and therefore of hope, of the new generations to which those volumes are destined. And one sees in that passionate will, the hand of Guglielmo of Baskerville who risks his own life to save the books of the Benedictine abbey library from a fire in U. Eco’s famous novel *The Name of the Rose*.

The order and care with which the books have been arranged contrasts violently with the chaos and rubble left by the bombs. Bombs that have destroyed and unfortunately continue to destroy, homes, offices, hospitals, libraries, laboratories, research centers. Bombs that make us feel like insects and that continue to wound and bleed our rational human nature.

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REFERENCES

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2. Nori P. *Sanguina ancora. L’incredibile vita di Fëdor M. Dostoevskij*. Milano: Mondadori; 2021.
3. Nori P. *Vi avverto che vivo per l’ultima volta. Noi e Anna Achmatova*. Milano: Mondadori; 2023.