

One Bone to Another:  
History, Homeland, and the Anatomy of Love

by

Milica Vukomanovic

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English, Film, and Theatre  
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To my great-uncle Blagoje

-The historian in the family-

## **CREATIVE THESIS**

### **ONE BONE TO ANOTHER\*: History, Homeland, and the Anatomy of Love**

**Milica Vukomanovic**

In his lively eyes  
Sorrow has closed  
Into a circle  
For the road has no ending  
And he must drag behind him  
The whole world

- Vasko Popa (Trans. Anne Pennington)  
From "Horse"

\* "One bone to another" is the title from a collection of Vasko Popa poems translated by Anne Pennington.

## SMALL BEGINNINGS

Muscle of darkness muscle of flesh  
It comes to the same thing

Well what shall we do now

We'll invite all the bones of all times  
We'll bake in the sun

What shall we do then

Then we'll grow pure  
Go on growing as we please

What shall we do afterwards

Nothing we'll wander here and there  
We'll be eternal beings of bone

Just wait for the earth to yawn

-Vasko Popa (Trans. Anne Pennington)  
"Underground"

*The street where I lived as a child in Serbia was called Vojvode Bojovica. This was rather impressive, for the street was far too small, far too obscure for such a name. Vojvoda Bojović was a true warrior in the modern sense of the word; he participated in the Turkish wars of 1876-1878, and he participated in the Balkan War of 1912-1913, where he received the rank of General for his success. He fought as the Commander of the First Army during World War I, where he heroically crossed the River Sava and took Srem from the north. Having fought for his country in three successive wars, he was granted the title of duke, or "vojvoda", which like the Latin derivative for duke, dux, means to lead. His efforts were the beginning of the defeat of Austro-Hungary in the Balkans. So it seemed very grandiose a name to grace a small neighborhood block, but during the war and after the war they changed the names many times.*

*When my mother was growing up on that very same street, there used to be Gypsy caravans that would pass, and a very old man who lived at the very end of the street. Being Roma he didn't have contracted employment, but picked up odd jobs around the neighborhood having gained the good reputation of being a hard and honest worker. He would help people unload their coal or fire wood that arrived in a large pile for the winter, helping to take it into the shed, lining the logs in neat steady rows, or shoveling the coal into smaller canvas bags. The work itself was very strenuous, and he in turn never asked for payment; people gave him what they could, usually in the form of winter preserves they had prepared. There would be an assortment of roasted red peppers in vinegar and garlic, pickled beets or cucumbers, pickled winter salad, homemade jams and marmalades from the fruit trees in the front garden, apricots, mulberries, and plums. He had however, a very remarkable gift: he could set bones.*

*The children who played in the street of Vojvode Bojovića were notoriously careless and would consistently fall and tumble hitting the unforgiving asphalt. They would dislocate or twist their young bones. Then, like an old remedy, their parents would take them to the old Roma man with his large and knowing coarse hands. He could feel where bones were misplaced, having a wonderful map in mind, an anatomical encyclopedia, and a surgeon's accuracy to set them right. Like in all other aspects of his interaction with the rest of the street's inhabitants, he never asked for anything and those people, who, recognizing his true gift, paid him what they could. He took my mum's small wrist in his grandfather hands, looking at her trembling face, the beginnings of twitching nose and tears, and keeping her eyes focused on his he contorted it back into place. The Gypsy caravans were common in my mother's youth, but by the time I played in that self-same street, there were no more bone-healers, only a quiet growing of discontent, whispering that in a few short years civil war would break out. None of us knew it of course; it is hard to see outside yourself. It was the summer of 1988.*

*When NATO bombed Niš in the 1990's, they destroyed the old concentration camp built in 1941 during the Nazi occupation of Serbia. It was preserved until then as a museum, but unlike Auschwitz, it lacked the facilities of gas chambers and incinerators. In Niš, the Germans simply shot them and buried them in a mass grave. They called the camp "Crveni Krst", meaning the "red cross", and in three years, thirty thousand people went through. Twelve thousand were executed in a place called Bubanj, while others were transported to other concentration camps. They went mostly after the communists, called "Partisans", but hesitated little in rounding up gypsies and civilians alike. For every German soldier killed in Niš, one hundred people had to die as a deterrent. They sent my great-uncle there, shortly after he refused*



*to work for them as a train engineer. There are many graves in Niš, Roman graves and Turkish graves, in the vastness of hollowed earth, it broke inside me to think that NATO bombed the dead of Cerveni Krst. That those bones were again broken by hatred and that somehow fighter pilots in foreign jets had annihilated my great uncle's existence. My mother could not speak when we passed the old concentration camp; the gates were completely blown off, the earth raw and brutalized. We stood there numb at the violation, frightened to look too closely, lest the earth had sprung back its twelve thousand dead.*

Natalia lived on the crossroads. The city was built on a road, on a pathway linking east and west, the road in her veins. The Niš Fortress Tvrđjava itself, built in 1719 with its polygonal foundation, has four major gates leading in four directions: Istanbul, Belgrade, Jagodina, Vidin. The Romans came, the Huns, the Templars, the Ottomans, the Austrians, and the Germans, riding through the center, kicking dust on the crossroads, for either glory or kingdom. As for Niš, it remained there, quietly surviving. In the house that had weathered any invasion, which sheltered her ancestors, she was the first to leave, the first to rip at the roots. Natalia carried each country on her back; carried the ocean and the rivers and transplanted that small piece of earth that marked her beginning. Her heart was heavy, and it will always be heavy, for her limbs were homeless and have been walking for years. She lived for that moment on the airplane, which existed beyond time and space, hovering over no-man's land. On a plane, Natalia hadn't left anywhere, nor had she arrived anywhere. She allowed herself to sleep suspended between iceberg clouds, between the moonlight on the ocean and a ripping red sunrise. Countries mattered little then. She belonged to no one; she was no one, simply breath and bone hovering thousands of feet in the air. But it was bringing her closer, the landscape creeping into view,

small shards of mountains peeking among the clouds, a port town, a quilted tapestry of farm land, wind turbines in the ocean off the coast of Scotland. The journey began before she realized it. Slowly, steadfastly, she had made preparations. She had carefully studied the possibilities in the safety of the unknown, in her wooden chair in front of her desk. She had filled out forms in a trance, going through the motion, but always that doubt that it could be taken away at any moment, like a lost letter. She had been sleepwalking the past few months, weeks, and now the journey had arrived, a presence in the air-cabin, taking space, taking space in her breathing, an arrhythmia in her heart. There was a strangeness that was not there before and she became aware of time, a countdown, an exclamation point at the end of her sentence. It had come all too soon, and yet she knew it was terribly important for she had labored to have it realized. It was something hidden from her conscious self, so she didn't understand why she had to go, nor why it had to be Glasgow, Scotland.

What made the journeys so laborious, she wondered as the plane landed. Was it the homesickness, the unfamiliarity, the risk that is always present? Was it a matter of having one foot at sea the other on shore, being stretched too thin across the Atlantic? No, it was that dreadful beauty that was capable of consuming everything. She remembered her history lessons well, and reflected, running the numbers in her head as followed. She considered the casualties in Serbia during World War I where 1 511 451 people died, twenty-eight percent of the entire population. Over fifty-five percent of men aged seventeen to sixty perished, seventy-seven thousand soldiers alone in passing the treacherous mountains into Albania. One hundred and forty thousand civilians died accompanying the army on their mission south to Corfu. But what did these numbers mean? She recalled a westerner traveling with the injured army into Albania on their way to Corfu, who recorded and presented to western powers the atrocities committed

by the Austro-Hungarian military against the civilian population. Rudolph Archibald Rice, a chemist, criminologist, and photographer followed the army through the snowy mountains and steep passes. He became so attached to Serbia, having lived through the war with its soldiers and civilians, that he decided to live there for the rest of his life. When he died in 1929, he asked for his heart to be buried in a famous battlefield.

Originally, the western Allies wanted to send the army to recuperate in Africa, but the Serbian commanders thought it too great distance. In 1916, they decided to send the soldiers to English-controlled Corfu, with English doctors and nurses, as well as some medical facilities. To reach Corfu, they had to pass the treacherous mountains down through Albania in the dead of winter. Their original plan to slip through Macedonia was made impossible when Bulgaria attacked them from the east. By the time they reached Greek territory, the army had withered, and the photographs taken by Rudolph Rice depicted skeleton men – protruding bones, hollowed eyes, jutting cheekbones. They were in fact so emaciated that when the English doctors saw them, they gasped in horror for the men hardly looked like the living. The army was suffering from Typhoid fever, and a smaller island called Vido was used as a quarantine island before the sick were able to enter Corfu. This was the first time either soldier or civilian had seen the ocean, which seemed so terribly beautiful and yet so devastatingly far from home. The homesick soldiers dreamt of Serbian fields when encountering the boundlessness of the ocean. Thousands died on the island of Vido, and lacking any other option, their bodies were thrown into the water. There, the ghastly sight of floating dead bodies, so far from home, gave the island the name “blue tomb”. That was the moment, the first time they saw the Ocean, she thought.

Michael walked up to the tenements at nine in the morning. The sky was dark with clouds, but the wind was swiftly moving them along showing great potential for a fine day. It was mild weather for autumn; the air held a freshness one could only find in very rainy countries. All the rain-soaked grass and bark was fragrant without being overpowering. He was looking forward to their little outing, because a familiar face in a foreign city moved him to a peace he had not felt since he had arrived. Natalia was friendly, and was so casual in her beauty that it seemed amplified. He never questioned their familiarity, or the seemingly illogical bond they had made in such a short time. He simply waited outside the front door of the building, kicking a few stones, until the door opened.

“Hello wife,” Michael said smiling down at her.

“Husband, I do hope you haven’t been waiting for a long time. I tried to keep watch out the window.”

“Not at all, shall we?” He gave her his arm. They had been playing house ever since they met. The ease of their initial meeting and all subsequent ones made them feel like they shared a history of memories they could no longer remember. They walked down to the bowling green, bright viridian. To their left was the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, which was undergoing renovations. It had striking Victorian architecture, painted subdued burnt sienna, with ornate molding and impressive height.

“Where would you like to go?” He asked taking her small hand in his. She laughed, as he was more than a foot taller than she was and had to lift her arm to reach his hand. She felt like she was a child being led a by doting parent. Michael had one of those very young and mischievous faces that did not fit somehow with his tall frame. He was handsome in his own

boyish way, or perhaps it was his ease that made him so young with no lines caused by suffering or regret. They turned down the bridge, so they could walk by the River Kelvin. The river was an earthy brown, and coursed through the entire city, running under beautiful bridges as well as hidden canals. In the park, small boats were tied next to the locks in view of the BBC building that was half-hidden from their view with foliage. There, they sat on the park bench soaking in the sun that they were warned by locals would disappear all too soon. Three tourists, cameras in tow were taking pictures of the gray squirrels in the park.

“American invasion, those squirrels,” Natalia said. “They’ve almost decimated the native red. Did you know it is legal to kill them, if you do it humanely? A foreign species taking the locals out. They really do hate them here.”

“That’s not the only kind of foreigner,” he replied.

“Michael, both your parents are English, I seriously doubt you have persecution to fear.”

“No, I know that,” Michael smiled. “But I hate how one word can betray you. An accent can either commend you or condemn you. You become either liked or hated by simply speaking. And you don’t have to say anything political, your accent betrays your origin, your history and people read into it what they wish. I see it all the time in the hospital.”

He became silent. Natalia knew what he meant more than he did. She never resented teachers who talked down to her or other parents who didn’t want immigrant children in their schools, convinced something was being taken away from their kids. She didn’t even mind when people spoke slowly to her thinking she was incapable of understanding. If anything, she looked brilliant in comparison, so she waited quietly for them to finish, smiled, and replied beautifully. It didn’t matter, she reasoned, the world has its share of bigots and brilliance. After all, nobody

chooses where they are born. But international relations weren't about fairness; they were about compromise. What was the compromise?

They were quietly sitting on the bench when a blue heron flew over their line of sight and gracefully landed in the river, sending deep green ripples across the surface. The city was throbbing with life that the river fed. This was partly, Natalia reasoned, because it ran under the city, into it, around it, was a part of it and yet something on its own. It was strong, because it didn't need the city, it was there long before St. Mungo converted the Celts into Christians, it survived the merchant city and tobacco shipping, and would survive whatever nuclear holocaust was likely to take us all out. There was a comfort in that. The river shaped how the city was built. Roads became serpentine, moving along with the city, becoming organic and binding the cityscape to the river's spine.

It was getting further along in fall, the trees seemed to have withdrawn into themselves, taking away the warmth with their snarled hands and scarred bark, turning away from Natalia as she walked near them. The week had passed so uneventfully, each day a lazy continuation of the last, so she had decided that it was fitting to leave town for a bit, go to Stirling, at the end of the week. Fortunately, Michael had likewise a rotten couple of days at the hospital where an elderly man, a regular, who was dying of a different malady each week, tormented him. He was certain he had familial Mediterranean fever, a genetic inflammatory disease native to the Mediterranean, insisting he could be a rare case. His knees were sore after all. Michael told him that he would have had his first attack by the age of seventeen. Mr. Spencer was quiet, and muttered something

as he plodded along the corridors of the infirmary heading towards the exit. Michael cursed “self-diagnosis” internet sites that fed the paranoia of people like Mr. Spencer.

“Oh that’s alright Michael, I’ve got a hypochondriac grandmother,” Natalia laughed. “She’s been dying for the past twenty years, and who knows how much longer than that in silence!”

“That’s not funny Natalia, they’re impeding us from helping people who are actually ill or injured.”

Natalia looped her arm in his and started leading him towards the hospital parking. She was smiling up at him, which led him to believe that she was up to either nonsense or no good.

“Alright Doctor, I have you’re greatest challenge to date, can you or can you not drive a shift?”

“Oh God, what monstrosity did you rent now... Natalia, you have clearly gone and stolen an Aston Martin. Christ!” Michael’s jaw dropped and he let go of Natalia’s arm.

“I didn’t steal it; I borrowed it from a mate at the Art School.”

“Art School kids don’t have Aston Martins.”

“No, but the Director does!” She threw him the keys, grinning like mad.

“Now, when you say ‘borrowed’, that does imply that the Director on some basic primitive level understands that you are taking away his baby, right?”

“Michael, we each have our gifts, it is best not to waste them”. It was a classic silver coupé with dark brown leather interior. “Now, we can travel in style”

*We took the M80 towards Stirling, and the sun seemed brighter because of the cold air. Arriving near noon, we headed towards Stirling Castle, in the city centre. We started at the "King's Knot", a garden at the bottom of Castle Hill. Looking up, the castle seemed to be emerging from the rock face, like some medieval gargoyle, sharp and gray against the sky; it was small wonder since the castle was built on a volcanic craig. The castle looked perilously perched with cliffs on three sides. Where was the thunder and lightening? There was something threatening about castles. In the White Tower in the Tower of London, I remember tracing fingers over a prisoner's last words that were either crudely etched if it was a quick death or beautifully scrolled if they were lamenting their end. In the Château de Chillon in Montreux, I traced my fingers where Byron had scratched his name when writing The Prisoner of Chillon: "May none those marks efface! For they appeal from tyranny to God." He wrote his name in unity with those who suffered the dungeons fate, he wrote to bind his fate to theirs, to feel more than the beauty of Lake Lemman lapping against the castle. That was the power of the place, but that was the cruelty of castles, each one was a criminal, each one murdered, tortured, each one represented the worst in us, the fear mongering and power of sluttish time. In between the tour groups that proceeded down to the dungeon of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Castle, I had twisted the clip of my Parker pen into a carving tool, and half-clinging to the pillar, as close as I could, I carved my name there with hundreds of others. It was a petition that surpassed the fate of the monk François de Bonivard, which filled the horror of the place with the hope of the living. What would Byron think if he could see all the names of strangers keeping his name company through centuries? Would they eventually wear away the stone, until the pillars where the monk and his brothers were chained existed no more, and only Lake Lemman would remain visible with its iceberg-clear waters reflecting the mountains. Byron's poem was a protest and that we*



*remember it still today gives hope that words can exist far beyond the frailty of our century if they are strong enough. And here we are today in Stirling, which meant quite literally "Place of strife". The castle itself was grandiose to be sure. It was filled with great halls, some portions of it in a copied French style, other parts medieval, while still others attempted some classical revival with statues of the Olympian gods. It contained within it beautiful tapestries. The famous Unicorn one was currently being historically rewoven, and there had been enough sieges, sixteen in fact, and enough murder outside as well as within to make the castle interesting. Still, it seemed lacking. It seemed dolled up in rouge; the cemetery so quiet in its existence, seemed far more real; more enduring with its Celtic crosses reaching for the heavens, ivy and crawlers taking them back within the nature of the land.*

*I feared the Castle itself meant little to the Scots. Stirling Bridge and Bannockburn was where their history lay. I quickened our tour, wanting to see the true markers of history, however humble and deceptively small, but tremendously important. I wanted to say that there was still electricity on the field of battle, and that I felt something, but it was diminished by the fact that the National Trust believes the grounds to be the Carse of Balquhiddelock, a mile and a half from the monumental sight. I couldn't decide whether it mattered, if it was correct to pay homage to a field that had not absorbed the blood of Scottish nationals, or if remembering was sufficient. The museum near the field of Bannockburn was small and largely meant for children; it was in honour of Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots. It was here that he won his decisive victory over the English army on June 24, 1314, in the first war of Scottish Independence. It is a story that is typically legendary. The Scots were outnumbered two to one; some of their own nobles who were enemies of the Bruce betrayed them. But he was cunning and his men were*

*brave, and the defeat of the English was imminent. That is how small nations need to remember things. It did not matter that it would take another ten years to gain sovereignty from England, or that Robert Bruce wasn't crowned after. It was a place to contrast the defeat of Falkirk in 1298, and all the deaths that preceded it. Falkirk was heartache, it was the defeat of Wallace, or was it the defeat at Dunbar when the Stone of Scone and other national relics were taken back to England?*

*On June 28, 1389, the Battle of Kosovo took place between the Serbian Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire. The defeat at Kosovo did not mean instant enslavement, or complete subjugation at that date, but it was the manner of the defeat that echoed through history into mythology. In the legend of the battle, Tzar Lazar, King of the Serbs saw a gray falcon clutching a swallow in his beak. The falcon was symbolic of Saint Elijah and the swallow was a letter from the Blessed Virgin Mary. This letter was a warning that he had to make a choice, that if he wanted to have a kingdom on earth he was to ride out in battle and he would be victorious. However, if he wanted a kingdom of heaven, he would lose the battle and save his soul, he would build a church of silk and velvet. So, legend says, Tzar Lazar built a church in Kosovo, assembling his twelve high Bishops and the Patriarch of Serbia, and gathered his armed forces there to take communion. He choose a kingdom of heaven and they were slaughtered, his own head cleaved with a Turkish axe. The Turks outnumbered and out-armed them, but Tzar Lazar's forces were fierce and brave and died, and that is how small nations need to remember their battles. The defeat at Kosovo, marked the beginning of the end, and during five hundred years of Turkish occupation, they needed to remember that they were brave and that they had fought, and that their king took the crown of heaven. It made me wonder if this time they had labeled the*

*battlefield correctly. It imposed itself like some tired Titan on the modern world, carrying the weight of its dead, saturated with loss, and howling with rage. We drove back to Glasgow quietly; the sky was gray now and insulated our thoughts. What could we say? Victory fields are easier, but somehow we always remember our defeats.*

Remembering kept the bandages in place, soaked up the bleeding, cauterized the wound. Natalia learned a long time ago that a burn is a breeding ground for infection, while a cut can simply scar nicely. It was that poor reasoning that kept the risks nearby, that lent a chance to lose everything.

Now that Michael had left the city, it felt empty, barely there. His new residency in Liverpool meant long absences, long phone calls. Natalia dreaded passing all their old haunts, but it was impossible to stay away. The past few weeks lagged behind like a bad dream, and the constant rain certainly did not help. There was something about gray sky that made her want to stay in bed. It wasn't really the rain, or that it got dark by four o'clock, that was simply the excuse, the northern geography. It was unhappiness that made her tired, and when she slept, she was on that airplane, running away from it all, traversing oceans. This was her third day in bed. At five thirty in the evening, she had already slept twelve hours. Natalia looked in the darkened room, knowing she should get out of bed. Her roommate Kate had also fallen into some deep sleep, as if they were both emotionally hibernating. Kate was bent on having Natalia read to her *The English Patient* everyday, because she wanted to hear the story in a Canadian accent. So, Natalia read to her of Cairo and the desert and a villa in Italy.

“Good morning,” Natalia said, noticing her eyes flickering open.

“Good evening. Did you have a nice sleep?”

“It was an apocalyptic wasteland,” she replied. “I’m serious now, no need to be laughing at it. It was pretty bleak; we were driving in this dust filled landscape in a deformed broken truck, heading for a deserted town in search of water. I can’t believe you’re still laughing!” But Natalia was laughing as well.

“Fancy a bowl of cereal, Natalia? I fear that’s all we’ve got in the cupboards.”

“I can’t say that I do, but I suppose I should eat something.”

“There’s a good girl. You really should, you look disgusting!” She laughed.

“I know it’s embarrassing.”

“Fine, fine. Come on, get out of there, am absolutely famished.”

“Alright, alright.” The girls headed into the kitchen. Lucy was there draining pasta in the sink.

“You can’t be serious! Natalia, you just got out of bed? When pray tell was the last time you saw the sun? You’re turning into some kind of nocturnal creature,” said Lucy.

“It’s alright Luce, I’ve seen it before,” Natalia replied with a spoonful of cereal in her mouth. “It’s hardly sunny anyway; it’s all overcast and depressing.”

“And waking up to darkness is better? Come on Natalia, you have to rejoin the rest of the world. Enough moping around, how do you expect things to get better if you don’t leave your bed?”

“That sounds like a novel, ‘waking up to darkness’,” she laughed until she caught Lucy’s stare. “Alright, alright. I get the message. Does that mean a night out on Sauchiehall? *Nice &*

*Sleazy*, *FireWater* and maybe *Barfly*? What, you can't be shaking your head at this Lucy, you just gave a bloody speech about leaving the house."

"Fine, but nothing too mental"

"That's all a matter of perception. I'll go jump in the shower and wash away all this self-pity, yes? You in the mean time, get yourselves dressed. I don't fancy remembering the last few weeks"

The girls headed down Sauchiehall St. The pavement, still wet from the rain, reflected the semaphores and streetlamps. Lucy was singing some inane song about farmers plowing, much to the derision of the other girls, and cocked a few eyebrows from strangers on the street. The song ended abruptly when they reached *Nice & Sleazy*, and they headed inside with uplifted spirits. They met a group of Italians on a mini break from Parma. Natalia was more somber. It had been days since she had left the house, and she was mourning the loss of Michael who seemed embedded in the city. She was too aware of it, and was bent on forgetting all the disappointment and loneliness. A shifty man approached her at the bar. She barely listened to him, as he kept tipping his drink, dripping it on her arm. He was so far inebriated she might as well have been a lamppost; it would have made little difference to him. She turned her back to him and waved to the barman, any excuse to rid the unwelcome ramblings of a man slurring that he might know her, if her name was Sarah.

She couldn't take the crowd, the smell of too many cigarettes on her jacket, the darkness of the room, the merriment of the cellars. She simply waved to Lucy and left. Outside she inhaled the cool air with relief. The night was ethereally beautiful, overpowering against her

slender body. She began to walk. She lit her Gauloises and kicked the night into the pavement, hands in her pockets. This was the city she loved, bathed in moonlight and streetlight, the blue lights illuminating the river under the bridges, the cascading light from the mosque; enveloping it like comfort was the night, the peaceful darkness. There was the solitude, the unblinking path, and road upon road to be walked. She sat down near the Clyde, looking at the dark swirls edging near but coursing with purpose, knowing their route. It was so beautifully simple, the voyage easy and fluid. There was no tearing- no ripping at the edges. Behind the ramparts, two young lads were urinating. When they walked passed her, they warned her to be more careful, that this was not a safe place for a girl.

A strong wind was coming from the west, pushing the large cumulous clouds across the sky, covering the constellations, blowing against her back, lifting her hair from her face. That cool wind made her stand up. Natalia started walking again, both hands in pocket, her long dark hair falling across her back. She walked through the park, nearing the old gates that shut within them the garden's moving shadows, dark clouds of deep mauve, forest green, the Kelvin river and the falling profile of the university. It was all too dreamlike, the vision too seductive, the evening too giving. It could have been anytime; it felt neither early nor late.

Natalia was about to leave through the gates, when within her sight, in her peripheries, was a small light barely there, glowing an orange-red ember. It must have been very small, and yet it seemed infinitely bright in the darkness of the trees, in the gestures of the shades imprinted with leaves and branches. Natalia stood there staring, her hands falling out of her pockets. She should walk through the gates, she should head towards the streetlight, towards the busy roads

with people and cars and noise. But she didn't. She looked straight on, lifting her weight from her heels onto her toes, taking steps towards the small orange light. The park, dimmed by the clouds, was an inky serpentine road beneath her feet.

She only saw him by the time she had reached him. His face was slightly lit by the hand rolled joint. He didn't say anything, but simply passed it to her, his blond hair falling in his eyes. She inhaled shyly and passed it back to him and they both sat down on the iron bench, space between them. He took it between his fingers and relit it with a match. It was then that she saw his face illuminated, and thought of Oscar Wilde calling beauty a form of genius. He took the joint and placed it inside his mouth still lit, holding the end between his lips. He leaned towards her and as she kissed him, they both inhaled, sending the smoke in their throats. A rush in the lungs pushed by their bound lips.

Natalia had just met Adrian. He gently held her small wrist in his hands, feeling her pulse between his fingers, her fragility. Natalia looked at his down turned face, smiling, she had found her bonesetter.

## BONES

In the artist's right hand  
Beat the pulses of the world

(Time has gnawed at it  
And broken its teeth)

- Vasko Popa (Trans. Anne Pennington)  
From "Pilgrimage: Sopoćani"



The MRI machine was opening, sliding Natalia's body out. She was breathing heavily and the technician ran to her side to help her sit up.

"Take your time," she said. "No need to rush."

Natalia couldn't if she wanted to, her left arm was stretched out, bound by a receptor that transmitted and received the magnetic rays to discern a picture of her bones. The technician had placed sand bags over her wrist to keep her from moving, pillows and blankets to keep her elevated in certain positions, and of course, earplugs because of the deafening noises emitted from the machine. There, inside this medical catacomb she had to remain perfectly still for half an hour for accurate imaging. Her left arm extended, a straight arrow, was in pain the moment they placed her on her stomach on the retractable bed. She drifted in and out of sleep, her muscles screaming out that she moved and in her microcosm of solitude, she believed they were shaking. But she didn't move, she held her arrow position in her small grave, an archaeological find. Her bones did not fit. At first, she thought that this sounded funny, imagining a floating fibula, like those neon dancing skeleton shows of her youth. But her bones were not fitting, they did not enter the joint, revolve, perform. They floated; they hit one another. She had broken her arm as a child some sixteen years ago.

While anesthetized for surgery to set her bones, a stabbed inmate from the local penitentiary had been given her spot on the table. After consequent cancellations and rescheduling, nothing happened, and the broken bone grew like a spear, no bend to it. In fact, it was so straight that it would slip in and out of her joint, like a mismatched key. Some things are difficult to explain; that two seemingly unconnected events, a tobogganing accident and a jail fight, would change her body forever.

And now her bone was scraping out her joint, banging about like some loose part in an automobile, until it banged all the joint tissue and cartilage, giving her osteoporosis. Then, bone would grind bone, until the pain got too heavy and they would sever the tip of the spear, cut half the bone out of her arm so that no more damage could occur. An amputated bone sounded very Hemingway, and perhaps if she were a smoking pugilist writer it would be charming, even flat-out romantic. But her bones were so small, like a sparrow's, that the surgeon warned her that they could maim her wing forever. Her bones did not fit.

The technician bent over her in a motherly fashion with one hand on her shoulder, while with the other she passed her a plastic cup of water.

"All better now my dear," she smiled, her voice rolling like the cooing of a mourning dove. Yes, Natalia thought, it was enough. She grabbed her coat and waved back at the technician as she left the x-raying wing of the hospital. This was the last medical test in a long line. She had dye injected into her joint, to forewarn any surgical error, she had an orthograph that took crosshatched images of her bones to give the surgeon a 3D perspective and she had countless x-rays of her arms in different positions. If it continued, she would die like Marie Curie.

She lit her Gauloises in the parking lot, somehow deflated by the whole experience; the novelty of hospital gadgets was wearing off. She no longer examined the machines with technological wonder; she was growing tired.

She considered, there in the hospital parking lot, whether she should call Adrian. She was fingering her mobile in her jacket pocket, hesitating, breathing in the smoke that dissipated the lab neutrality. She wanted to smell something living. The burning tobacco was a comfort; she

could forget the machines and iodine-filled hallways. His flat was only a street over on Byres Road; she could walk there in minutes. He would make her instant coffee in the kitchen, she in turn would complain that it tasted revolting and that coffee shouldn't dissolve in water. Adrian who never drank coffee would call her a snob and she would point out that it was invented during the war because of necessity, and that it had outlived its use. That was the ritual. She would play up her vices of coffee and cigarettes, and he in turn would scold her and attempt to promote healthy living.

She walked down the street to his flat, running into Monica, one of Adrian's flat-mates who held the door open for her to enter the building. Natalia climbed the stairs energetically, almost leaping. She wanted someone to break the silence, someone to impose himself into her space, to create electricity on the battlefield. At the top of the fourth floor stairwell, she stopped, slowed her breathing, tidied her hair, and pulled her jacket down. She inhaled and knocked on the door. There was no reply, which made her hesitate. She knocked again, her heart beating faster this time. Maybe she shouldn't have come, but there was a reply to come in, so she grasped the dulled golden doorknob and started to turn it, when the door somehow sprung open.

"Yes, who's there?" She heard Adrian's voice coming from the front room. Natalia walked in quietly; too quietly, for he didn't hear her, he was still absorbed in his architecture journal, reclining on the couch. She smiled down at him and at that moment, he looked up. "Natalia," he said warmly. "I thought it was one of Neil's friends coming to pick up his guitar. What brings you round?" He got off the couch and felt he needed to tidy; only there wasn't much to tidy and in the end he placed his hands on his waist.

“Proximity,” she replied grinning at his nervousness to play host.

“Proximity, you say. That’s hardly a compliment. I thought at least it would be my instant coffee!” He walked over and took her jacket.

“Was at the hospital getting scanned and analyzed.”

“And how is the broken wing?”

“Exhausted.” She reached into her pocket for her cigarettes, catching his disapproval in mid-step. “Come on, I’ve just left the hospital!”

“And shouldn’t that make you not want to smoke? Only you can come out of hospital with worse habits!” But she kept smiling at him, which always broke his resolve. “Alright, but over the open window, yeah?” Adrian walked over and opened it for her, while she lit her cigarette and leaned out, pressing her body against the frame. He watched her leaning out, almost taking flight. The fading sun was making a halo around her hair, softening her features like a dimmed fresco. He watched her playing with the cigarette, moving it to her lips, closing her eyes in the brightness. Adrian put his hand on her shoulder and leaned out as well. There was warmth and weight in his hand. This is why she came, to feel him in the room, to have him take up space in her existence. They watched the busy street together, aware of each other, his physicality and her thoughts framed by the window. To the street below, they appeared like a portrait. She inhaled the air and the smell of his shirt collar brushing against her face. Too much, she thought, it is already fleeting; better keep some dignity before collapsing into that seductive dream. She put out her cigarette, brushed her fringe from her face and turned back into the apartment. He watched her move into the kitchen and followed.

“So you came for coffee after all.”

When she left his flat, Natalia decided to head home since she took the entire day off work, cutting through Kelvingrove Park. It had rained while she was in the hospital and the trees seemed greener. Kelvingrove was an old Victorian park, with five bowling greens, croquet and tennis courts, and the first leisure park in Scotland, designed by the very same Paxton who famously created the Crystal Palace in London. It truly was beautiful; in the springtime, there would be countless Azaleas and other Rhododendrons creating borders of pink, coral, purple, and red flowers. Rhododendron meaning rose tree. They were star shaped flowers that formed in clusters like bouquets. Their bright blooms would only last a few weeks, but somehow changed the atmosphere. Paxton used the Kelvin River to his advantage, designing a park that molded and shaped itself with the serpentine river and with the River Clyde, bringing with it Scottish wildlife, from the gray heron, cormorant, redwing, carrion crow, and kingfisher, to the mink and red fox. All that life was throbbing in the city, beneath the bridges and into the river. A secret garden.

Natalia couldn't resist passing the pond that tried ever so slightly to mimic St. James in London. There was Mountain Ash and Wych Elm, Hazel used long ago for thatched roofs as well as divination. There was Knotgrass that fed birds and was used medicinally as an astringent and styptic, and of course, Mugwort believed that if placed in the shoes of travelers they would never tire on their journey. It was almost silent, but there, amid the canopy of willows, at the pond's edge were the moorhens with red bills and shield and white-billed coots with large lobed toes, quarreling in groups. The parks in Glasgow were charming, something apart from the whole city. Carefully planted flowers and shrubs blossomed every season, so that some bright dash of purple, orange or yellow could be seen year round. "Let Glasgow Flourish", the motto of

the city seemed very fitting at this moment. She felt that the exiled Saint Kentigern, known as St. Mungo, who gave the city its motto in the sixth century would approve, his bones resting beneath the Cathedral.

The park was fairly empty after the rain and Natalia felt better, more at ease, forgetting the day and her bones, taking her time. She saw a young man walking towards her. Even though it was a wide boulevard, she moved to the right to give him space to pass, politely stepping aside. He then moved to her right, she moved to the left, thinking how this silly dance must appear to an onlooker. She didn't look up at the young man because she felt awkward staring at strangers; instead, she followed his feet with her eyes. As they were getting closer, she moved again to her right and his feet followed her, the movement of his dark brown boots. She laughed aloud, thinking that they were both trying politely to get out of each other's way without success. Looking up at last, she saw he was looking at her directly, with a big grin that almost looked clumsy. He was young, with short blond hair that gave him a certain severity, wearing a green parka with a fake fur trim on the hood. Natalia smiled back thinking he must be an acquaintance she no longer remembered. But she didn't know him and he started talking to her in a thick Russian accent, asking her how she was. She replied, but kept on walking, feeling the slight pinch of panic at the entrapment. He stood there monumental, while she tried to deflect his eagerness.

"What is your name?"

"Natalia."

"What is your full name?"

“Natalia Popovic,” she replied slowing down her pace, afraid to be rude even to a stranger. To her surprise, he began speaking to her in Russian, mistaking her for his compatriot, her name for Russian. She waved her hand to stop him and explained that she was Serbian. His name was Kiril, he was a migrant worker from Kaliningrad, employed at the local warehouse where they stored yet to be recycled materials in large containers. He asked her where she lived so he could come and visit her. Although he seemed harmless, Natalia hesitated and told him they were likely to meet again in the park, avoiding divulging any personal information.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“Yes,” she lied. “But we can be friends if you like.” He looked disappointed and asked her again for her address, looking down at his boots for the first time. Natalia shook her head; perhaps they could meet somewhere else. But she could see it was going nowhere and left eventually, awkwardly. She felt disheartened; it was obvious that he was lonely in a new country that he was the other side of how things were for migrants. She realized for the first time that her experiences could have been very different and some part of her was distancing itself from the familiar. The city also consumed some migrants. Natalia headed home heavy-hearted, not daring to look back in case he was still there staring back with those sharp blue eyes. She knew it had nothing to do with her, but that horrid loneliness of a new city when one hasn’t found anyone, when one eats all their meals alone.

*It was the fifth. “Remember, remember the fifth of November/ The gunpowder treason and plot”. Yes, I did remember, a simple nursery rhyme bent on warning future generations of the price of treason. Walking back to Argyle, people were already clearing places in parkettes to*

*build their fires, sweeping the dead neglected leaves. It was strange, you would think Scotland would like a man who attempted to blow up the British Parliament, but they didn't, they built their Guy Fawkes effigies, like they've been doing for hundreds of years. Small children were burning small dolls of a man with his name pinned on, a goofy mustache and straw limbs. Even though a part of me was horrified at the semblance of a body being destroyed for fun, the atmosphere was something all together different. Lucy and I had decided to venture out and see what the city had to offer on this night. The Glasgow Green was displaying fireworks near Queen Victoria's People's Palace. This we argued was for the little ones, and that would drag us away from any true experience of the night.*

*Lucy came round nine and we walked up Sauchiehall St, stopping to buy some Gauloises on the way. Lucy was a Francophile who indulged my penchant for French cigarettes; it was our original bond and how we met outside Bamboo. It became very easy to meet people that way, a night out on the town among bar lines. When I was queuing up at the Royal Bank of Scotland, a pleasant blond woman behind me noticed my name on my statement, tapped me on the shoulder and introduced herself. It was that simple, for some my eastern European name became a calling card, something to recommend me. After a brief introduction, we exchanged phone numbers, and a friendship was born. In the small world of the West End, we soon discovered we shared a few friends and acquaintances and would on occasion meet at Stereo, close to where we both lived, and vent in Serbian. There was some element of the confessional to it that reminded me of schoolgirls sharing gossip; signing in a language, they had invented to keep their secrets safe. Perhaps that was the point of Guy Fawkes Day; maybe we were all conspirators, standing near the flames with beer and a chip butty, quietly in on the burning,*



*enjoying the flame and trying to forget what it meant. We were forgetting the fifth of November because it didn't mean anything anymore. It no longer held the power of deterrence, nor did it quench political discontentment. What horror could Guy Fawkes inflict that we have not outdone? His early attempt at terrorism pales in comparison to our century. We are forgetting too much.*

*In my hometown of Niš, Serbia, a monument still haunts me today, a physical representation of horror. During the first Serbian uprising against the Ottoman Turks, a battle took place on Čegar Hill on May 31, 1809. Their leader was Stevan Sindjelić, who upon realizing that they were far outnumbered and overpowered, took his pistol to the gunpowder casks and blew up himself, his men and the Turkish soldiers nearby. He couldn't surrender, they had had enough subjugation. The rest of the rebel army retreated, but Hursid Pasha, who was leading the Ottoman forces, had other plans for the dead. He ordered every dead Serb to be decapitated, and they built a tower of nine hundred and fifty-two skulls as a monument of deterrence. They built it in Niš, and sent evidence of the victory to Istanbul. It remained there until the city was liberated in 1878, when the city was able to finally pay homage to the dead and build a chapel around it. Many of the skulls have disappeared, some for burial while others disintegrated weatherworn back to the field where the soldiers lost their lives. When last I saw it, there were fifty-eight skulls staring back at me. Skull Tower. That Skull Tower represents all the longings of a nation waiting to be born and the price of it. What no oppressive power will ever understand is that monuments to heroism however gruesome will always inspire and not frighten the masses. But there were bones to remind us, and Guy Fawkes was only an effigy. Lucy nudged me from my thoughts, aware that I was far in my wonderings, thinking too much, inhaling the*

*filter, the tobacco long gone. I smiled to reassure her, looking up at the bright faces near the flame, holding onto each other for warmth and children dancing in the light, casting shadows across the field.*

Natalia woke up to the phone ringing. It was Pete calling to confirm their plans for the day. He said the morning was too lovely to be indoors; if she was willing he wanted to picnic. Natalia couldn't say no and they were to meet in two hours near *the Goat*, a pub where they had met the week before. *The Goat*, to nobody's surprise had an alpine motif in the window with a life-size papier-mâché goat in the forefront. The inside had dark wood, where it was common to find hen parties and football matches. Lucy was half-Italian and insisted they watch the friendly, Scotland vs. Italy at the pub. She was the only one cheering for Italy in a crowded room, drawing attention to the two girls in the back. Scotland won 20-8, which put Lucy in a foul mood and introduced a new plan to consume copious amounts of alcohol and argue with half-drunk ruggers three times her size. 'At least she's passionate,' thought Natalia, her back to the wall watching as Lucy pointed her finger an inch away from a man's nose. It was all in good fun, but inconsequential, Natalia could hardly get interested in the match. She went round to the bar to buy them each another pint, seeing Lucy wave her empty one struck her as a preamble to a bar fight. She had once seen a man get into an argument on Sauchiehall St, walking home from FireWater. He reached into the bin to find a bottle, smashed it within the bin to get jagged corners, and went running after a man with whom in all likelihood he had spent the night drinking with as his mate. There were enough knives in the East End for all of Scotland. It wasn't about guns. The little gangsters in their Adidas tracky tops and white trainers knew how

to wield a blade. The police called them “Neds” or “Nedess”, an acronym for non-educated. Each city had a different name for them; Liverpool called them Scallies or Scuffs. There were Chavs decked out in Burberry, like some yellow tartaned hoodlums. It seemed a bit cruel, labeling disgruntled youth, pushing them lower than they were, giving them reason to be angry. At first Natalia thought it hardly frightening to have a fifteen-year-old lad wearing a Burberry hat and trousers in the streets, but there was more to it. There were also real men, not boys with an itch. There was the “Glasgow smile”; a man’s mouth extended with deep cuts, snitch, informant, cannot be trusted, the smile warns. There were drugs of course and any illicit pleasure could be found with little effort. The pubs and clubs on Sauchiehall Street and in town were throbbing with pills and fixes, from ecstasy and liquid cocaine to pure heroin. Anyone in Europe could fly in for a weekend of decadence and drugs. If you happened to be a girl, you could get it all for free.

Pete was an economist, a friendly young man with a big grin. They were both waiting to be served and started chatting about the match. Natalia made clear to him it was of little interest to her, but pointed to Lucy who was now patting the large man on the back, telling him that he was alright.

“Natalia? Is that right? What parts are you from?” Pete asked.

“Serbia.” Natalia hoped she wouldn’t have to explain her life story. She looked at him as his face changed, his jaw dropping.

“Why that’s incredible!”

She soon found out, that sometimes foreigners had a *carte blanche* at their disposal. To her delight, Eastern Europe was seen as some exotic location. Her Balkan heritage following her to a city where people still dreamed of its dark mountains, ruins, and backward ways. Serbia became some forgotten country. She could tell she was the first Serb they met, for she soon was inundated with drinks in hope that she would, in form of a legend she supposed, tell them about the old country. She was asked if Serbs looked like her. She would look at them then, puzzled how to reply. What did she look like to them? On the other hand, it surprised her greatly to find that many people had some Serbian relative or ancestor, usually a traveler or sailor of sorts who impregnated a Scottish lass and then was either forced to marry her or had escaped. Natalia became apologetic on such occasions; imagining it was some distant cousin of hers that had done it and she had some familial obligations for her part. Pete was such an example. His grandfather, he explained, was a Serbian sailor who impregnated his grandmother here in Glasgow. Her family made him marry her, but he died soon after. Natalia looked to the floor. This did not sound promising; it seemed a committed relationship had done him in. Instead of being bitter, Pete was fascinated by this grandfather from the East. He had bombarded her with questions, hanging on to each word as if it was Holy Communion.

“Tell me everything,” he said, eyes gleaming with enthusiasm. She feared the subject would bore him in the end, but she could not resist his grin. Natalia agreed to meet him at a later date, away from the din of the bar, to tell him about Serbia. She had unfortunately left her mobile at home and typically couldn’t remember her number. Pete excused himself and returned victorious with his number written on a napkin with eyeliner he had acquired from an obliging

woman heading to the restroom. Very impressive, she thought, and it was all agreed upon when Pete shook her hand and then kissed it before leaving.

And so, they were to picnic on a fine day. They walked down Argyle St and Byres Road, stopping into delis to pick up Pastrami, Genoa Salami, and other cold cuts, along with an array of soft cheeses, a ciabatta baguette, and a £20 bottle of red. He introduced her to the workers of the deli where he had worked part-time as a student. He smiled while telling of their plans to picnic, making it into some sort of old-fashioned outing where ladies wore great hats and young complicated men read poetry by a still lake. It was so sunny in fact, that everything had a dream quality. They first walked in the botanical gardens, past the green houses and hot houses, and the cherub fountain near the palms. They walked past the Monkey Puzzle tree, a gift from the Japanese royal family, and the children's pavilion. Natalia chatted on, energized by the beauty of the place. She had just received £ 3000 of funding to finish her project with the Art School, making life much easier. She was even secretly thinking of quitting her second job in a shop at the Buchanan Galleries; she was dead tired of folding jumpers for the sake of looking busy. It was either get a second job or give up coffee and a night or two out, and now the quiet joy of quitting a hated job illuminated her eyes.

“What is it like there?” he asked.

“It's hard to explain, so many of my memories have become sentimental. In the countryside, it still remains like it has been for hundred of years, barely mechanized. Most farmers still use ploughs; there are dirt roads and handpicked orchards. It sounds so rustic, but nothing developed as it could have, things are now finally starting to change. Some things have worked out for the best, hard economic times meant that people reused things, bottles, jars,

baskets, no one was quick to throw anything away. Local farming has meant, fresh produce and because of the sanctions during the nineties, they were able to feed a nation. It may seem small, but it's something I'm proud of. During the NATO air raids, schools were cancelled, everything stopped, milk and sugar were rationed, things we see in World War II films, football clubs bombed. For all the suffering I was spared living overseas, I feel a loss for it. Some traumatic experiences shared by a nation shape it differently; shape the people. I didn't live through it. I didn't live through the bombings, the dark nights with no electricity, the huddled life in cellars. I can't tell you, Pete, about those experiences. Mine were altogether different. I remember the countryside, green fields, wheat, cherry orchards blossoming. The windows in the house my grandfather built overlooking the front yard, two stories of dreaming. There was a cool, fresh wind from the mountains that hovered over the white damask curtain, sweeping the bookcases of dust. There was snorkeling gear in the bench of the dining table lot and an inflatable raft when we spent our summers on the Adriatic. There were small Christmas ornament birds tucked away in old brown boxes that were from the 1920's. The mountain air was colder than in Niš, sweeter. I could taste the stream in my Turkish coffee. I would turn the cup upside down on the saucer waiting for the image to form in my coffee grind fortune. The cherry trees would scratch upon my window, their long branches, calling me down the white washed steps, a basket of half cracked hazelnuts on the corner window seat. There was an old rusty pump tap in the garden, and a large tin plate where I would prophesize like an oracle, spinning the water in the sunlight, liquid sunshine of the garden. There were countless sounds, from the rooster crowing in the morning to the wind descending from the mountains. That is how I remembered it. But all that has changed now. That was Yugoslavia. During the NATO air raids, the hospital I was born in was bombed to ash. It felt like my birth was annihilated, that small patch gone. I've seen holes

the size of neighborhood blocks. I don't know how they keep rebuilding the same streets, the same story."

Pete looked pensive, not quite sure, what to say as they sat on a bench overlooking the Kelvin, drinking wine from tin thermos cups. Natalia smiled, she had lost herself again, said too much, forgetting her manners. She raised her glass towards him and asked to hear the story of his granddad again. His face lit up and he jumped into the narrative.

This is his Serbia, she thought, and looking at her arm, she wondered if her bones would fit anywhere and whether it mattered. The same country existed in different perceptions and dimensions, mercurial with each changing of hands, each story, each person. The borders blurred, rebuilding history and memory.

## WITCHES AND OTHER MAGIC

Our day is a green apple  
Cut in two

I look at you  
You do not see me  
Between us in the blind sun

On the steps  
Our torn embrace

You call me  
I do not hear you  
Between us is the deaf air

- Vasko Popa (Trans. Anne Pennington)  
From "Far Within Us"



*There are some things very hard to ignore when walking down the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. It is referred to as the dragon's tail, the spine of the old city where the different closes act as the vertebrae leading to the rest of the city, flesh market close, fish market close, detailing what you would have found down the path in the medieval and early modern city. Other things wind me up tighter, in front of St. Giles High Kirk's looming grandeur lies the Heart of Midlothian, a heart mosaic with a white and red ring, formed into the cobble stones of the mile. Traditionally, you are meant to spit on the heart to avoid being hanged in Edinburgh for witchcraft, and as I peered into it, I realized that even today dark circles of saliva speckled the heart. It made me curious as to who was upholding the rite and how was it that we still knew the tradition signaling the old prison's location. Maybe my mind was lingering more on it than usual, it was after all Beltane tonight, proof of a living pagan culture, the revivification of a pre-Roman history. But there is something uneasy about the witches of Edinburgh, I felt it most when underneath the old clock tower where they hanged the poor wretches for spectacle. I would have torn that clock down long ago. It was beautiful, but a sinister shadow. Looking up, my liquid imagination made me see the dead in the dials and perfect ivory face.*

*It makes me uneasy, the history of witchcraft. Was it that twenty to thirty thousand people were killed in Austria and Germany, that there was a special drowning pool near Reykjavik, or that it still exists today in the townships of Johannesburg, South Africa. I didn't know which was worse, that western Europe killed women as witches because they were the weaker vessel easily tempted by the devil, or that in eastern Europe, men were killed for witchcraft because they wouldn't credit women to be that evil. I shouldn't have been surprised that the preface of James VI's Demonology was written to the elite, meant as a tool for the clergy and courts. And, I*

*shouldn't have been surprised that he introduced an act in parliament to abolish witchcraft in 1603, the year he claimed his English crown. But useless bloodshed hidden behind the veneer of morality can never be understood. With the death of Mary Queen of Scots, Catholicism was declining in the lowlands, credited I would think to her son James, who allied himself to Elizabeth I and Protestantism in exchange for the crown. The Highlands in contrast were rumoured to be a source of witchcraft and paganism, where isolated communities were still holding on to older traditions. James VI took this very seriously, but I wonder how religious and how political his reasoning was. With the Highlands and the Lowlands divided, James VI had every right to fear that northern Scotland could join Spain in a Catholic partnership, threatening his newly united kingdom. On the other hand, he feared the individual relationship with god found in Protestantism; the king was not the intercessor, he was threatened with a potential loss of power. He claimed his treatise was written because of the multitude and the immediacy, that it was in short an act of conscience. The purpose was to prove the existence of witches and to propose punishment and retribution for those convicted. He used dialogue as a tool of rhetoric, specific examples to make it believable, and of course named those who disclaimed witchcraft, like the Dutch physician, Johann Wier. It was three books bent on manipulating the will of people, of fear mongering, of calculated deception. The first was about magic, more specifically necromancy, the art of invoking spirits and demons. The second was on sorcery and witchcraft, while the third book described spirits and specters that appeared and troubled people. James VI cleverly created categories, legitimizing, placing things in order. The elite accepted inherited hierarchy, a system that represented an inverted Christian order. The true inversion is the use of logic and reasoning to propagate lies and murder. His text addressed things in general, allowing the reader to fill in the specifics, leaving loopholes to a faulty theory. James VI used the example*

*of disease, which was rampant in early modern Scotland, claiming that witches could both cure and kill through the power of the devil, demonstrating their power over disease in general and specifically over ailments. This statement targeted traditional healers, midwives, and herbalists. Evil was found in healing. However, he needed to reassure that God was the first agent, the devil second, existing only to test his flock, creating an illusion that evil was controlled. I think of this faulty science, of this rhetoric of hate, when walking under the clock tower, because I need to understand. I need to know why so many Scots died for keeping old rites, for curing with herbs, for being disliked by their neighbors. When James VI implied that death is the only way to purge the land of evil, he retrograded, and suddenly all subsequent progress evaporated. Maybe Edinburgh needs the clock tower, lest it forgets. Maybe we all need those ghastly monuments to past sins to keep us in line, for little has changed to make them historical.*

*When I visited the torture museum in Sienna, I entered out of curiosity. Unlike others I had entered, it was full of real artifacts, the pointed pear, the triangle, and a multitude of angled knives, wooden blocks; it was all human imagination bent on propagating slow pain. The majority of them were used for female genital mutilation, especially for witchcraft, where different blades when inserted would flower open like jagged thorns. The curator explained that the reason behind the disproportionate torture devices was simple: men were more sympathetic to the male body and administered non-genital torture devices. This sympathy did not however translate to women. I started feeling ill, nauseous among the smell of old leather stained by suffering, and the descriptive cards relating their functions and era. Among all these sights that assaulted my imagination so vividly, it was the four last words that haunted me long after I had left the building. They read simply in black ink "Still in use today". All the excuses I was trying*

*to fathom of past ignorance, of inexplicable hate disappeared; we were not more enlightened, more humane, more educated. We were the same brutes that devised dunking-stools and hangings, so eager to show our might and righteousness. Things are forgotten far too soon, and the warning that should ring in the very centre of our being, goes unnoticed. Edinburgh, at least you keep your skeletons out in your streets. But my time for such ramblings had expired, it was growing late and I had to meet Lucy and the girls at the train station. Today, we were going to celebrate the coming of summer.*

They headed to Beltane lighthearted, the sky dimmed and the fresh air reawakened their excitement. Natalia's morose ramblings dissipated in daylight and the dark blue night spread before her like some ocean to a mariner, full of promise and anticipation, electricity in the air. The girls walked up to buy the tickets and headed over to the Acropolis where it would all begin at dusk. They stumbled into the crowd that was growing to thousands of people up on the hill. Everyone was patted down for drinks, but like all the others, they had managed to sneak in a flask in a pocket, cans in a bag; for some it was simply a matter of powders and joints.

Natalia was small in the crowd and kept peering on her tiptoes, trying to see the preparation. Nearly naked men in blue body paint appeared leading another man in a big coat. His face was mask like, unlike the blue men, who would break out of character and grin broadly. He must be someone important in the procession, she thought, otherwise he would enjoy himself more. Natalia peered trying to get a better view, when she realized she had lost the girls and was standing near strangers. She picked up her mobile and dialed Lucy, but the uproar was too loud, there was too much commotion. It was pointless. It was what she had dreaded; now she would

have to watch Beltane by herself with only £3.50 on her, and try to find her friends in the morning. This was typical she thought, but was distracted by the drumming coming from the Acropolis, as the drummers with Mohawks and solid black stripes across their eyes made their way through the procession. The first fire was lit, and bright light illuminated the sky, growing and growing as they passed it on from the original flame. Natalia peeked through shoulders and saw women dressed in white; their hair braided, pink circles on their cheeks and knotted white fabric on their dresses. Then a beautiful woman arrived, the May Queen herself, dressed like spring with flowers adorning her. Natalia stopped looking for her friends, she became mesmerized, the drummers neared her, resembling warriors, their paint gleaming, made liquid by the fire, their muscular arms contracting with each hit of the drum. They looked unearthly and she wanted to reach out and touch one of them to make sure. She didn't, but she had touched the shoulder of the man in front of her when trying to peer between the shoulders of the crowd. He turned around and looked at her as she watched the procession. She finally noticed him when his broad chest eclipsed her sight. It was Adrian.

Natalia's heart began racing, but calmed because she felt blanketed by the night, hidden, only her face illuminated like a startled moon. They looked at each other a moment, and then he grinned.

"Didn't think this was your sort of scene, Miss Natalia."

"I had my wallet stolen last time, so I've come to remedy the experience."

He had come to Edinburgh to consult a building project for expanding the new Parliament building near Holyrood and had decided to stay the night at his gran's and attend Beltane.

“What are they doing now?” Natalia asked trying to refocus on the ceremony.

“Acknowledging the four cardinal points, us, the Earth and the Sky. The May Queen has chosen the Green Man as her consort.”

“The one in the big coat? I suppose it all ends in dance and laughter.”

“Not quite,” he laughed. “See those red men, they are his followers and the white women are hers. He will lust after her and break the one rule he must not break. He will try to take her and her women will kill him, but the May Queen pities him and brings him back to life. When he is reborn, he loses the coat, a symbol of the earth being reborn into summer, casting off the coat of winter.”

“So she forgives him.”

“Or there would be no spring. Come on Natalia, they’re making their way up Calton Hill.”

The lights burned and the attendants washed the faces of the May Queen and the Green Man. The procession washed their faces, interpreting the old legend of climbing Arthur’s Seat and washing one’s face with the dew of the mountain at sunrise for eternal beauty. Natalia and Adrian headed back to the Acropolis and the white women and red men started to dance together, uniting white order and red chaos. It was nearing the end of the ceremony, and couples would then partake in the Hand-fastening ceremony, where they would leap over the Willow-switch withies as a yearly commitment to each. It was after all a fertility ritual meant to encompass the cycle of the year. The ceremony had finally finished and now everyone was free to celebrate the night, where traditionally anything was allowed- a night of freedom. There were fire jugglers and fire-eaters, bonfires and drumming, blue men and black men running around naked in the cold night like mischievous spirits, pinching people and giving kisses. The girl

beside Natalia had black paint all around her mouth, where a guardian of the procession had kissed her and then run off into the darkness to the next girl.

Natalia slipped her hand into Adrian's; she did not want to lose him in the crowd. He smiled and held on, leading them out of the dense area. They walked for a while and sat down on the grass. They looked on saying nothing at all. Natalia reached into her jacket pocket and pulled out a flask that had "Lucky Duck" engraved. She took a swig of the rum and passed it to Adrian.

"Why am I not surprised?" he laughed, took a sip, and held it in his hand as they looked out onto the bonfire.

"It's Lucy's. We got separated soon after the ceremony started. It is probably my fault; I can't focus when people dressed as pagans start spinning fire. They seemed well serious, the lot of them, apparently you have to be a true believer if you want to take part. If I did it, it would be for the fun of it, though I don't think I would fancy being looked at by so many people, like some horrid recital. I would probably do something out of order and ruin Beltane for everyone"

"It is likely."

"Thanks," she laughed. "I understand it's a ritual, but they're clearly making up what they think Beltane should be. How would they know the order of it, and really they should wear modern clothes instead of costumes, that is what a pagan living today would do."

"Well, then that should work for all religions, priests should no longer wear robes either. In fact all ritual should be banished if they cannot be proved to be accurate"

"I agree, I think religious leaders should stop wearing costumes, they should dress simply as they are, and keep religion fluid and modern and important and relevant to the congregation."

Natalia however, didn't want to do away with religion, but found that faith was not a matter of remembering how many times to kiss the cross, nor the words of a prayer. She wanted something more to be asked from the practitioners. It was infinitely harder to say something heartfelt, than an incantation. But there were things she would never change. The smell of incense when walking into an Orthodox church reminded her of her childhood. She found safety in those walls, in the icons; the whole space was filled with peaceful light and old monastic voices. It felt like a puzzle fitting together, instant, with the very first breath at the door. He watched her breathing in deeply, inaccessible in her thoughts.

"In Serbia, the church is part of the state," she began. "Most Serbs are Orthodox. It is more cultural. When my parents were growing up in communist Yugoslavia, they were forbidden to go to church, which of course lent it an appeal as a prohibited place. I guess it resonated with people how it was during Turkish occupation, with Orthodox churches built below street level. They didn't want them to be equal to mosques. It sounds very early Christian, catacombs and all. It survived that and communism. That is why it's so important, it's a shared experience, and it binds Serbian history to Serbs. It is not a matter of God, as much as identity. It became more important when we moved overseas. Everything was so different, the language, customs, even going to supermarket to buy groceries, but entering church meant you hadn't lost yourself. Entering those doors, people took you in, because they too were different and seeking a piece of home. As I child I believed, I really believed. Our patron saint is St. Christopher, who is also the patron saint of travelers and storms, and I would pray to him every day, everything seemed fragile to me then and I feared if I wasn't good enough then my family would be taken away from me. It's silly I know, but they were my whole world, and I believed with childish



diligence that prayers could change destinies. But then the war came, and nothing could change that.”

“Jesus, Natalia! No wonder you have Catholic guilt.”

“I think I might. I propose we do Beltane properly, none of these ass-grabbing drummers in paint. If those early pagans climbed Arthur’s Seat in the middle of the night to watch the sunrise and wash their faces with dew, I reckon we should as well. We’ll do Beltane old-school.”

“Now this wouldn’t be anything about outdoing the pagans, would it? Or beauty for eternity?”

“No, I want to see what they saw when dawn crept over the peak. There must be a reason why it’s celebrated this time every year.”

“It was actually celebrated the night after May 1st, but they’re incorporating May Day to usher in summer. I give them credit, they do it with fire and sex and a party on Calton Hill, no dancing around a May-poll with pastel streamers singing ‘hey-nonny-nonny’ and all that rubbish. But, if this is something you must see, I might as well be there to prevent you breaking your neck on that hill. It’s nearly three; we might as well start the journey to your inner pagan.”

They walked down the hill and headed east towards Holyrood, walking through the closes and cutting through parks by jumping over the iron gates. They laughed, somehow revived from the exhaustions of the night by their new ploy to climb Arthur’s Seat. They arrived near the New Parliament that was still under construction, over-budget and behind schedule.

“That is how things run in Scotland. Hundreds of years of moping about having our own Parliament and we can’t even build it on time or within reason. This is year two, and look at it; it’s not functional at all.” He paused to stare at the monument.

“It reminds me of a whale,” she replied, twisting her neck to see it from another angle.

“Can’t say I’ve heard that one before, how do you mean?”

“That suspension wire hanging closely together, it looks like the baleen of a Blue Whale, like its large mouth opening.”

“I never saw it that way, but I guess it does. A whale. You’re a funny girl, Natalia. Whales and witches, nothing left ordinary.”

“Tonight, Edinburgh has traveled in time and is reclaiming woman as earth. And tomorrow, construction will resume on a building that has been dreamt of for hundreds of years. Your calculations and drawing, your selection of materials and colours, they will be part of it. And that is your history.” She said smiling. He looked at her and wondered where this optimistic clarity came from.

“Let’s start heading to Arthur’s Seat,” he said smiling.

They turned and headed towards the entrance of the park leading up to the mountain. It was still dark, but the clouds reflected the moonlight, making shapes discernable. As they approached, it was pure blackness. Nothing could be seen of the mountain and they walked with their hands outstretched thinking they might hit stone at any moment. As they neared it, they saw outlines and then more contours to the shape and began climbing the rocks, trying to follow the narrow paths of mud and stone. Half an hour into their climbing, they started to feel hot from the exercise and took off their jackets.

“Here, pass over your bag and jacket, I’ll carry it up the rest of the way. You’re going to need all the balance you can get, I can see you toppling over.”

“I resent that, but not enough to carry everything.” And she gave him her things from which he crafted a sort of satchel. He offered his hand to help her up a steep passage. She watched for a moment looking at his outstretched hand, like some holy offer, beautiful in his movements. She stretched her bare slender arm and reached out to him. This is how it could be she thought, if he wanted it that way. It could all be so easy. But the moment ended. He almost lifted her in the air and she was now by his side. She brushed the hair off her face and started on ahead of him, pushing her boots into the soft earth, pushing her resolve, pushing away from him. The sky was getting lighter, a dull gray engulfing the darkness, showing the top of the mountain for the first time. They knew they had to pick up the pace if they were going to arrive before dawn. Eventually it appeared, a ragged summit of ancient volcanic rock with a stone monument at the top. They had made it, and were standing alone at the top. A sharp wind started to blow and their energy was exhausted; they sat down on a stone leaning against the peak overlooking the city.

“Okay Natalia, now you’re part of it,” Adrian said letting out his breath.

“No, now we are all a part of it,” she replied, pointing to a figure emerging from the other side. “It seems we have company.” She waved to a young man in a windbreaker, who sat down beside them. His name was Connor and he opened his bag, where he had packed a loaf of bread.

“It’s all I thought to bring, a bit of a poor spread I’m afraid,” Connor said apologetically.

“It’s a feast, mate,” Adrian said shaking his hand. “Glad to meet you.”

“And we have rum to add to it.” Natalia passed the flask to Connor first.

The three huddled together trying to keep warm, waiting for the sun to rise so they could begin their descent. They were tired enough as it neared five in the morning, but the cold kept them awake. Connor took off his jacket and threw it over them, making a small tent where they ate sliced bread and drank it down with rum, and water that Natalia found in her bag.

“Are you two into the whole pagan rite?” Connor asked cautiously.

“No, just went to the festival and decided to give it a proper try. And you?” Adrian asked cheerily.

“Not at all, the ‘true’ pagans are down at the second plateau, they haven’t bothered to climb to the top. They camp there after the festival; you can see their fires. It seemed far more romantic to make it to the summit. My girlfriend couldn’t be bothered though,” Connor replied relieved, his mood lifted. As he finished telling them of the second encampment, four more people had reached the summit, so they pulled down Connor’s jacket and waved.

“We dinnae miss it then?” A ginger girl asked as they dropped their bags to have a rest.

“Not at all, we’ve been shivering here long enough, you’ve got better timing,” Natalia replied passing the rum flask to the new arrivals. They sat together creating a circle with their backs to the wind. There they sat, all strangers except for Natalia and Adrian, passing the rum and bread until both were gone.

“This seems a fitting way to celebrate Beltane” Adrian spoke up, and they all cheered as the sun rose, bending towards the grass to wash their faces with the mountain dew. There was some instant camaraderie that Natalia often imagined was gained by disaster survivors; she had

found it so easily with strangers on the top of Arthur's Seat celebrating a ritual they didn't believe in. Connor was the first to get up and the rest followed, waving as they all descended in their different directions, like the bowing to the cardinal points in the fire festival.

"Now we've acknowledged the sky, we can climb down and acknowledge the earth," Natalia said remembering what he had described to her earlier.

"Enough philosophizing Natalia, it's beginning to rain." He tucked her under his umbrella and they began their descent. They seemed to glide over the rocks and crannies, or maybe it was fatigue that made them lightheaded, drifting down half in sleep. They reached the bottom, and it was only then, when walking again on the pavement that they felt how sore and tired their legs were.

"We should head over to my gran's, we can get a quick kip before heading back to Glasgow. I'm too tired to be bothered catching the train just yet." Adrian still held her under his umbrella. Only when he mentioned the train did she realize she had forgotten to ring the girls.

"I need to call Lucy. I can't believe I forgot to find them when we left."

"You might as well wait until we step out of the rain, ten minutes will hardly make a difference now," Adrian replied. They finally arrived at his gran's, who was out for the day. He led her up the stairs to the attic where remained still, after all those years, his bedroom.

"So this is what a young architects' room looks like," Natalia said looking at all the posters, from the Guggenheim to the Sydney Opera House.

"Yeah, something like that."

It occurred to her then how private this space was; and it imprinted an image of a young boy so desirous of a future and quietly fearful it might be taken away from him. This was his

early shrine to great architects. There were some sketches still pinned to the wall. The Scottish Parliament. She couldn't help smiling; the zeal and passion were evident in the broad hurried strokes of charcoal. It was in this room that it began, that he began to awaken.

"You better give Lucy a call before you forget." He left the room to get them some water. She reached for her mobile from her jacket pocket; there was only one bar of power left, at least that. After two attempts, she reached Lucy, who was on the train already heading back. They both apologized profusely, laughing half way and catching up on the past night. They were chirping away, when Adrian came back into the room and Natalia saw how tired he looked. She promised Lucy a call back later and placed the phone on his drafting table. He sat on the bed and looked up at her saying nothing. She was struggling to take her boots off, and he gave each of them a tug.

"I feel like a sea captain and you're my wench!" She laughed, as she sat down next to him. He lay down, his legs still hanging off the corner of the bed, and she did likewise at his side. They were both looking up at the ceiling, tired and yet too aware of one another to fall asleep. She turned to her side and placed her head on his chest. His heart was beating fast; she listened to each beat, pressing her ear like a child playing at doctor.

"Your heart is racing," she whispered, placing her hand to his heart.

"Shit," he said with one hand over his eyes, then covering them up with his right arm.

"Why's that? You're ok, aren't you?" She lifted her head trying to peer at his face in the crevice of his elbow.

“It’s not exactly something I wanted you to notice, Natalia,” he said with a half smile, lifting his arm away from his face and turning towards her. And for the first time it occurred to her that she was the cause of it. That his heart had quickened for her.

## A CONSEQUENTIAL DROWNING

White bone among the clouds

You arise out of your pyre  
Out of your ploughed-up barrows  
Out of your scattered ashes

You arise out of your disappearance

The sun keeps you  
In its golden reliquary  
High above the yapping of the centuries

And carried you to the marriage  
Of the fourth river of Paradise  
With the thirty-sixth river of Earth

White bone among the clouds  
Bone of our bones

-Vasko Popa (Trans. Anne Pennington)  
"Belgrade"



The snow was falling in large flakes; geometrical pieces of sky were piling on top of one another on Natalia's window. She watched as they climbed and melted over others, softly bending to the will of the latest landing. Natalia leaned her face against the glass feeling the coldness on her forehead, the draft coming through the single glass pane. This was the price of living in a tenement block. The snow fell so slowly; so unpredictably that she kept looking. They could easily be cherry blossoms, gliding down quietly, yet dramatically like the opening of a Japanese opera. It reminded her of an epitaph she read a long time ago at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. It was hand carved into stone for Sir Duo and his wife, Lady Zhao. It simply read:

The grave is somber,

The road towards it vast and hazy.

The trees are dense, the mist is thick.

The place is far, and endless wind is blowing...

Our thoughts try to reach you through boundless space.

That was at least how the curator had translated it. She remembered, tracing the engraved characters with her fingers, wondering at the carver, who with minute tools wrote out such longing, reaching out to the dead in the vastness of their tomb. She was not meant to touch, but this tomb she reasoned was not meant to be in Canada either. It no longer marked the dead; it no longer led them back home. An endless wind is blowing, she thought. Yes, this snow is dense; so much space is filled with white cherry blossoms, it would hardly be possible for souls to find their path. She wondered, leaning back a bit further, how could her thoughts reach the boundless space of the city. Natalia remembered a line that stuck out to her like some universal truth, only

because she wanted to believe it. She kept these pretty quotations so they could come out like a sermon on such an occasion, or, and this made her laugh, like some commonplace book kept by young girls. She could see Jane Austen scolding her, but she carried on. "You think of those who think of you". She had read that in Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*. The imposing book left her hating all the characters for their simple resolution of inaction. But that line, amid the suffering in silence in the rest of the text, rang true. At this moment, through the myriad of snowflakes, sedating the city into a dreamy sleep, on Byres Rd over the Abbey bank, was Adrian thinking of her? Or, was she simply going mad from staring at the whiteness, dazed by the unusual snowfall that had made the dark stones of the merchant city turn into an orchard of snow blossoms, a Glaswegian Swan Lake. She had slipped out of time and now she had to get ready, she was running late, it was important. Adrian had invited her to a Christmas dinner he and his flatmates were having early in the holiday season. Natalia was dressing carefully, looking at herself pensively in the mirror, as if putting on some uniform that had to be immaculate, centered, and right. She had spent the whole day in contemplation and preparation. The girls were sat round in the kitchen. It was a Friday and a bottle of red was already opened. They caught sight of her in the doorway and began whistling and cheering; she gave them a wink and headed for the door. She was inundated with happy nervous thoughts the moment she stepped outside, inhaled deeply the cool winter air, and rushed off to the Oddbins to pick up a bottle for dinner. The night had been building up for three weeks, when she was completely exhausted by his absence; he had rung her up with the invitation. It had been months since their last encounter, that left her hollowed out and secretly, so very secretly longing for him. Every morning while drinking her coffee near the stove, she would concoct numerous explanations for his absence and elaborate

each theory subsequently. But, she couldn't find a real reason; she couldn't lie to herself any more.

She walked slowly, taking her time, savouring her steps like a queen to the gallows, pausing to straighten her coat or smooth her hair, trying to catch her reflection in the large shop windows. She felt slightly ashamed of this, but was overcome with nervous activity. Vanity, she laughed to herself, among all the grandeur of the city, what difference could she make? One of her great friends had caught her own reflection in the window of an office block and in a heart-wrenching moment thought she had seen her identical twin sister. Natalia couldn't imagine being fragmented with another person; the thought was demoralizing. She remembered a different version of the Narcissus Myth, by the Greek author Pausanias. Narcissus, devastated by the loss of his twin sister, mistook his reflection for her and drowned in the reunion. Natalia liked that version better, for she had seen it happen. Longing can make one see ghosts; make one drown in memories. The snow had stopped altogether now; it had melted into the street, a thumbprint vanishing into the wet concrete. She slowed down near the bridge, walking to its centre like an 18<sup>th</sup> century pastoral print of a shepherdess.

The river was lit by the street lights, and the extra snow had increased the river's volume. It was rushing past in all its thick brown glory. There was however, more movement on the left bank. She could not see it at first, but there were large splashes, and that was when she first saw the old armchair rise and bob in the river like some sinking giant or carrier ship. She peered further and realized that children were throwing stones trying to sink it. It was their whole recreation, whatever garbage or stone they could find they hurled with impressive accuracy at the

cumbersome furniture that refused to sink. There was something mildly disturbing about the whole scene. Natalia wasn't sure whether it was the chair that was swept up by the river because it had risen, or the mischievous children who were bent on sealing its doom. She had read that during the siege of Stalingrad, when the shelling became unbearable, people and animals alike would try to swim across the Volga to the safety of the west shore. But no one ever made it and bodies of men and beast would be seen floating down the river, their faces swollen and their bodies in rigor like some horrid duplicate of Pompeii. The chair bobbed, sinking and gasping for more breath. Natalia pulled away.

Rivers had a quiet power that could lure you in, she thought. The rushing of the water was like a soft whisper that made her want to bend her ear to hear it better. A small boy had died that way in Niš. He was playing ball with other children and the Nišava river was very high for the summer. The ball fell in and as he approached it, the river edged it a bit further out of reach, always promising as it coursed along the old Turkish Fort of Tvrdjava, until he was deeper and deeper, until a small hand jutting upwards to the sky was the flag of the sinking *Pequod*. This is what she also knew about rivers. They had built a small statue of the boy playing with his ball to remember his tragic death; it was later destroyed during the civil war when a group of vandals realized he was Croatian.

She was startled by small stones hitting the bridge where she rested her hand, the children had caught sight of her overhead and were tapping the stones nearby either to get her attention or maybe move to a more interesting target. It was time to carry on; the river had made her heavy. We were once different, so still in our ignorance, looking steadfastly but not seeing it, not seeing each other, it could all have happened differently, she thought.

A bell was tolling somewhere, lifting her heart with its even “ding-dong, ding-dong”, like a metronome in her chest, reverberating. Natalia picked up her pace; lifting her feet that felt awkward in the boots, that Lucy had lent her. They were classic Doc Martens with replaced laces of midnight ribbon. They were slightly too big and heavy which made her conscious of each step. Soon she approached the University and sat for a moment on the steps of the old Grecian Temple, the Wellington church that was converted into a soup kitchen and a cheap lunch canteen for students. The street was gleaming, the black wet cement was dented, mixed with small white and gray pebbles that made the street look like the back of some enormous Sperm Whale. She stared into its tar belly; it was almost liquid where the street lamps shone their gentle yellow glow. Natalia got up quickly, aware of the time escaping her nightly wanderings. She was half running and in minutes was standing under the Abbey Bank sign, rummaging through her handbag for her phone to ring Adrian. But, like always he had beaten her to the punch and her bag reverberated with Davie Bowie’s *Rebel Rebel*.

“Hello Natalia, are you still coming? It’s almost dinner you know, everyone is here already!” He sounded worried, as if he was contemplating that she was simply not showing up.

“I’m downstairs. Let us in?” She had never before heard him to be that nervous, or for that matter so dependent on her actions. He ran down the four flights of stairs and pushed open the heavy street door. He was well dressed, his shirtsleeves rolled to the elbow. He resembled early Russian communist art, shining like a worker of a socialist republic, blond hair, blue eyed with red in his cheek, a poster boy for a revolution. She looked at him for a moment as he held the door open; yes, he looked exactly as he should, so utterly male and so completely different from her in every aspect.

“You fancy coming in?” He rushed her inside. “I’ve been waiting, thought you might not show up or something.” They began their long trek up the wide staircase.

“Why would you think that when I told you I was coming weeks before?” she said taking two steps at a time trying to keep up with his long legs. But she could tell it no longer mattered, for he was in a cheery mood and they soon reached his flat. The door opened before them and Neil’s large pudgy hand stretched out to welcome her in.

“Natalia, my love, so good to see you at last, we were giving up hope. Please, do come in,” he said in his thick Aberdeen accent, wrinkles forming round his eyes from smiling.

“Thank you Neil, Happy Christmas!” She kissed him once on each cheek. He led her inside, while Adrian took off her coat and bag and led her to his room. He hung her coat in his closet and she took off her boots, leaving them near his bed.

“Come on, let’s get a drink and then you can meet everyone.” He turned off the lights. They entered the dinning room, where Monica, Adrian’s other flatmate from Barcelona came over and wrapped her arms around Natalia, giving her big kiss.

“It has been too long, no? Why have you not come to visit us? Adrian, I blame you, you must have given her reason not to come. But, no matter, you are here now.”

“It’s very good to see you again.” Natalia was a bit overwhelmed by all the hospitality. She gave Monica the bottle of red and the present for after-dinner games. Monica hugged her again and placed the gift in a large bag that contained mismatched shapes in a variety of festive wrapping paper. Adrian returned with two wine goblets and they cheered with warmth the good fortune of friends. She almost had her moment with him, but Monica and Neil were gathering everyone around the table. It was beautifully set with nametags. Adrian and Natalia were placed at the head of the table; her name written “Nataleea”, which made her laugh and Neil explained

he was writing phonetically. They sat down and she couldn't help feeling some pomp and circumstance, like a king and queen before a banquet. She felt like the Serbian Queen Natalija Obrenović. And then she realized that she was his only guest, while his other two roommates had invited four or five each. She couldn't find the reason behind it, surely, he must know someone else better, and in his harem of girls, surely there was someone prettier, funnier, a more interesting guest. But, there she was at his side, their names sitting like neighboring cities on a map. To her left was one of Monica's Spanish friends, a gorgeous girl called Sophia, who was extraordinarily attentive and when Adrian interrupted with some inane comment, she simply ignored him and continued talking to Natalia in a conspiratorial way. To Adrian's right were a young doctor and his wife, whom Neil had invited.

Between the courses, the rest of the women had left the table, deciding on music, but Natalia stayed where she was beside Adrian, surrounded by the rest of the men at the table. Neil had imposed a rule for the dinner, if the plate was full after the course; a specific drink was issued as punishment. For the first course of soup and salad, Natalia had to take a glass of gin and vermouth. For not finishing her main course, she had to imbibe a shot of whiskey. She had attempted to pass most of the roast and potatoes, sausages wrapped in bacon, Yorkshire pudding and winter vegetables onto the doctor and Adrian, but Neil had caught her in the act and she was forced to take two shots. By dessert, she was struggling, and before she could dig her fork into the chocolate mousse, Neil had given her a tumbler of Bailey's, knowing she wouldn't even finish that.

"Neil, had it ever occurred to you that you put far too generous portions on the plate?"

“Nonsense Natalia, if everyone else can clear their plates, you have no excuse... unless you’re having a go at my cooking?” She could say little else after that, she couldn’t well explain that social dinners made her anxious and she was incapable of eating heartily in front of strangers. She also couldn’t tell him that this was her fourth Christmas dinner; that she had experienced the heavy banquet meant as a yearly decadent feast numerous times in the past two weeks. She simply smiled and drank her Baileys, as Neil called everyone back to the table for the gift exchange. “Come Santa Natalia, you have to pass out the gifts to everyone.” It startled her, for she was content in simply sitting quietly and conversing with Adrian and the doctor. She shook her hand, implying that he should pick someone else, but Neil was insistent. He explained that she was the only one wearing red and thus had to take the place of Santa Claus. She looked at him skeptically, but unfortunately it was true, she was the only one wearing red.

“This better be some sort of Scottish tradition Neil, otherwise I consider it bullying after all those drinks!” As she got up, everyone cheered for her to take her post as gift master. She started handing out gifts. Adrian received a dodgy box of Australian wine, or “goon” as it was known. Natalia reached to the very bottom of the bag for hers, it was a notebook with stretched raw silk for its covers from Oxfam and a box of Maltesers. Adrian looked tired and announced he was off to bed.

“You can’t go to bed, I’m your only guest.” Natalia protested. He took her by the hand and simply asked her to follow. The lads whistled as they walked into his room. He collapsed immediately on the bed. Natalia closed the door and looked at him, shaking her head. She bent over and removed his shoes, placing them on the floor near hers. She pushed him over so there



would be enough room for her to stretch out. She simply laid there, her hands behind her head, staring at his ceiling. He did not move.

*It seems to me rather funny that this was how it's going to end, the last time I would likely see him before he left for Singapore, and here he was simply sleeping from a heavy dinner and too much wine. Yet, I don't want to go. It feels far too simplistic, almost barbaric that I am this happy to be here, in his space. I am happy just to watch him sleep. His breathing is filling the room, floating like mist over the Danube, consuming my thoughts. His breathing is tiring me; I have to push him further in the bed so I can stretch out. I'm so close to the edge that I have to fold my arms under my head. Typical luck, no sweeping statements, no Empire State Building in fall. I have crossed an ocean to look at the swirls on his ceiling. Pride kicks in, pricking me in the spine, telling me that I shouldn't be here, that I should have left, walked the streets to the river. But that was not the point. I have come to remember him, to memorize his hands stained with ink and his lip that curled when he slept like some well-pleased cat. I have come to memorize the space between us. He twists in his sleep, stretching out and reaching for me, placing his heavy head on my collarbone, nestling in the crook of my neck. He is dreaming now, I can tell he is drifting, his pupils darting left to right like a rabbit on a greyhound track, and I think too much, remembering something harsh he said, something honest he didn't bother to shape into more cunning words, more elegant or appropriate sentences. No, he likes his strong statements, his simply stated facts. I turn my back to him, showing that I don't care, knowing that I do. Sleep, sleep, but I can't, he is here, so I stare at his walls, at topographical maps of Mount Snowden in Wales, of a faded picture of Mull.*

*My arm becomes a beacon and he reaches out for me, hiding in my corner. His mouth on mine, all else would have been dust. He wraps himself around me, like an ocean wave, and I'm drowning in his mouth, and dissolving to his touch, as we cling to each other like lifeboats, finding salvation only in ourselves. Both of his arms encircle me. His chest is pressing against my back. So, what can I do when encountering the cowboy grin in my boudoir, but let it in, washing in tidal, changing me the way seasons are forced to change. I twist my head to look at him, wriggling in his arms, his face aglow, smiling. We hold onto each other tightly. We heave for perfection; we edge upon it, the rapping of the door to our hearts.*

"Tell me a secret," he said, holding her still tightly, lest she slip out of his consciousness into the reality of the night. She looked at him a moment, pensive. He wanted something specific she thought, but what information could she surrender. She had misspoken so many times, judged it wrong, what was safe to say. When they were still early in their acquaintance, over coffee she made the disastrous mistake of telling him about Erich Maria Remarque's *L'Île D'Espérance*. It was early spring and she related the chapter of the book where the NAZI army moved into Russia. A simple German soldier, the protagonist is horrified when, out of the snow like rotten flowers, the corpses of the past winter's dead rise like Lazarus. They had been frozen there waiting, the earth too hard for burial, until spring when they lifted their hallowed eyes and began their rest among the crocuses and daffodils. The smell of decomposition mingled with the overripe perfume of the flowers. He had looked at her and told her while taking a sip of his black tea that she read too much, something Neil had convinced him of. Was that even a possibility, could anyone read enough let alone too much? But it had silenced her, how could she reply.

History always crept into her like some birthright that seemed terribly important and yet archaic at the same time. Walking in old places was like walking in a church; the dead were always around like a Sub-Saharan African memory board, her ancestors and descendants on her shoulders in time and space. She couldn't tell him.

"I can hear you thinking it's so loud," he said, his arms wrapped around her. "Something too heavy, come on love, nothing can be that serious, right?" She smiled up at him, he had a manner of simplifying the world, of not seeing ghosts, and he could sleep straight through the night until morning. She could hardly remember such a time.

"No, this is perfect," she replied. He sighed and thought that it was. This is how it could have been and should have been, but it was too late, the wheels were in motion, Singapore and work.

"Yes," Adrian whispered in her hair. "I'm deeply sorry for that". She knew what he meant. They had wasted their time and now it was near the end. The world is very small and yet she knew he could promise nothing. Adrian rested his head on her ribs, feeling the separate bones under his cheek, the rising and falling of her breath. He imagined a shell, he imagined an *Altivasum Flindersi*, the flinder's vase, with tall, red and orange spires like a Buddhist temple, a small shell palace dormant in the warm waters of Coffin's Bay, South Australia. He could hear the ocean, the push and pull of the tide. He could see her bones, the way her hipbone jutted out like in a crucifix, her clavicle, her scapula, but it was her ribs, her thoracic cage, like a dome of safety, like architectural arches. She was composed of shooting columns and vaulted ceilings... But then the breathing, the rising of her rib cage, wind in her sails; he moved his lips across the ridges.

*By the third day of lying in bed, Adrian had to work and we had to get dressed. His smell was still on my skin; I didn't know how to part, how to say goodbye. We stepped into the night, our eyes blinking in the newfound darkness. Each car horn felt like a siren to our silent bond, even the streetlights seemed too bright and garish. We were swept up in the steady flow of hurried feet, moving us along forward. Suddenly we had reached the tube station. He kissed me and descended the escalator to the trains, disappearing in the crowd. My head was spinning; I stood there shell-shocked among the scattered passengers. I left, walking the streets idly, lightheaded, not feeling the pavement under my feet. Everything was wet from the rain, and I couldn't help wanting to touch things, stretching my hand outward running my fingers on the wet branches. The heavy leaves left tears in my hand. There was the bark's coarseness, the elasticity of young branches, the rust on old gates, the wet stone of the bridges. I found my bridge, the one overlooking the river Clyde, the river rushing underneath, strong, determined. Suddenly I was tired, barely standing, leaning against the statue of the wounded soldier and the world dimmed around me. I was sinking to the ground; my knees were giving up, my palms stretching themselves out in expectation. Then, darkness.*

*The wind had been howling at my window for days, thrashing the thin glass frame. I could not get him out of my mind. This wind was not the one that brought me here to his shore. The unsteady beat created a cacophony in the walls, setting the room spinning, raging. It did not relent. I looked outside, trying to find a sign of it stopping. But nothing was there that gave me hope, and the world seemed to change its rotation, bringing me back to all that I had escaped, bringing me back to the wartime of my heart. He had been away for weeks now. My head was still throbbing; the light confused me, the fever making me see ghosts. The entire flat was ice*

*cold. There were no steps, no rattle of keys, just howling carried across oceans. Throbbing, burning, aching. Poison has a funny way of showing itself on cheekbones. The pain seemed lessened, but my heavy heart kept me trembling. I must have been dreaming, for sunlight was streaming from the furthest corner of the east window, reminding me of his golden hair. It led me into the streets; I rushed out the tenement, following some specter of sunshine, following the only thing that resembled him.*

She walked down the street possessed, a skeleton among the living. Her eyes shone from the fever, like crystal coal, burning a steady glow. Her skin lacked any evidence of life; it was simply a mummy wrap, except for the beads of sweat gathering where her eyes creased and on her temples, then rolled off. People were looking at her, but she could not see them, for she wasn't looking side to side. She looked straight on. Small steady steps, guiding her down, the look of a witch pulled from a child's book. How is it that we know what witches look like?

She could see the magic now that the rain had started to fall, turning the streetlights into glowing domes, the semaphores into dazzling orbs of green, orange and red. Natalia had reached Great Western Road, the Oran Mor and botanical gardens in her peripheries. The sickening sweet smell of vomit and rubbish had disappeared from the streets, replaced by the smell of wet grass. The semaphore lights were changing too quickly, a circuitous dance Natalia failed to join. Her right foot hesitated, weighed down by the rain that was pelting it, pushing the streams of rain down her leg, pushing her foot down. Her dress was heavy, like wet cement. She felt it on her lungs, molding itself, slowing down her progression. Red light, green light. Red light, green

light. Her eyes picked up the frenzy, darting up and down, causing a cacophony in her ears, the rain and the lights, and car horns, and magic.

She closed her sparkling embers, her coal tired eyes, one-step pushing her and then she fell. The fall was light at first, like a bird taking flight, only her wings malfunctioned and her outstretched arms reached for nothing, her ankle twisting at the missed step. She was falling onto the street at the busy intersection, the crossroads of three streets, her left arm bent in anticipation of the cement.

And there, like a dark flash, a large mass, a black car clipped her. It hit her elbow just so, it sent her spinning, half a pirouette in the rain. Her eyes opened past the fever, as she hit the cement hard. Her dress too heavy, the rain too heavy, pushing her further down, her mouth in a puddle of filth. She opened her eyes and there was her broken wing. Her bones did not fit, and there was her arrow, her straight spear coming out of her elbow having pierced the muscle and skin. A razor sharp bone and blood in a street in Glasgow.

She was spitting out the puddle, gasping as more filthy water filled her mouth, her eyes tearing up, bulging in protest. She was getting tired. Natalia lifted her head, the agony of not reaching the street engulfed her, and then, holding her breath, her head dropped back into the pool, a splash and her cheek bruised, submerged. She was bleeding out, her eyes shut tight, holding herself within her breath, living in that small shell of her body. She tried to raise herself with her one good arm, but however she moved, wherever she shifted her weight, her broken bone ripped further the flesh, pushing more blood onto the street. Her mouth was still somehow in the puddle, she kept spitting it out, but like the tide, it surged into the roof of her mouth, a rip curl of brown water. The sidewalk seemed too high to reach. Natalia could feel her pulse, the

engorged throbbing; the pulpieness of raw muscle and skin; and the metallic smell of blood, pungent, heady, noxious. She closed her eyes.

There were voices all around her arguing over what was to be done. A woman's shrill voice was screaming and screaming. There were steps and voices, and the wind that wouldn't let her be. Her body was tossed almost in mid-air, entirely lifted in one single effort. She saw nothing, but recognized the very distinct smell of disinfectant. No, he hadn't come; they had come. Now sirens, now more yelling, and the jerky movements of the ambulance as it threw itself upon the winding streets. A cold hand touched her forehead. But she was not there, no, not in that room. She does not see the blood, she does not hear the nurse say "oh, but she is small there, she barely takes the bed." No, she won't hear any of it.

They had to cut off Natalia's clothes when they brought her into the hospital, and there she lay, small and naked under the hospital gown. The anesthesiologist wheeled her in to the bright operating room that shone with lights, the floor white and spotless. She first noticed the lights, the excessive brightness and then the cold. They lifted her body onto the operating table and before she quite grasped it, the nurse piled warm blankets on top of her as the anesthesiologist searched for a vein and put her into a heady sleep. She had simply refused to look at her arm, the mangled fleshy mess.

They were shouting, trying to wake her, pushing her from the sea depths of anesthetics; ripping her to the surface of the living.

"Deep breaths!" They shouted as she gasped for air, her neck twisting side from side, her head rolling, trying to focus on the faces. "Deep breaths." But it was difficult, she grew tired, there were voices telling someone to give her oxygen. They placed the tubes in her nose. 'Breathe, breathe' they said. The strange, cool, almost too pure, air entered her, filling her fish-out-of-water lungs. It made it easier, she was breathing, so they removed her monitors, the circular pads from her ribs.

"You 'right now?"

"I'm in pain," she said, though it was hardly audible, her throat was dry. Her voice sounded foreign to her. During the operation, they had placed tubes down her throat and she was feeling the raw ridges of the departed plastic. Natalia barely made a sound, but kept mouthing the words. "I'm in pain".

The post-op doctor stepped in, took a needle of morphine, and injected it into her IV drip. Natalia started to feel it course, the quickening of the heart, the tightening of her chest. It made her panic.

"I'm in pain." And the doctor took another morphine-filled needle to her I.V. Her eyes were rolling; her arm was throbbing like a thousand shards of broken glass were rattling, piercing and then the burning sensation of her hip. They had to graft part of her hipbone to make up for the cracked ulna and splintered radius. They had cut and pasted her back to life. The pink antiseptic dye had stained her hospital gown, and peeking from the enormous plaster her fingers were pink too. There was hipbone in her arm now, bound together, realigned by a titanium plate.

"I'm in pain," she said so quietly and the gentle doctor walked over to her bed and injected more morphine.



When they finished, they placed her somewhere different, giving her a small room, down a small corridor overlooking the parking. There was nothing in the room to look at, there were charts on the door she could not reach, and there was a sink in the corner and a dresser, though she knew her clothes weren't there. And she waited, trying to dream, trying to fade into nothingness, but her mind wouldn't let her and her heart felt naked now.

*How will they judge us in such times, will they forgive the things we have done so naively, so forcibly oblivious. Will they forgive how we loved? I wish I could forget many things and slip from here so lighthearted that they would swear I had wings. But memory is a tricky friend that clings inside us when we are aching, that climbs to the top of our heads. I have tried to forget you. But trying proves only one thing, that you dwell in that very core that gives me life, that you rumble endlessly in my temples, a tireless thing reverberating the echoes of days and nights already spent. And when I walk, you are in my steps, your shadow weighing me down to earth. Could they forgive me that?*

*Nighttime comes like a jagged tooth, there are too many shades of doubt and longing, everything blending, lapping over themselves, confusing the truth with hurt and prayer. And you at a distance, oceans suspended in your eyes, when will you reach for me? History is repeating itself, I have the scars to prove it, but no will to fight it. So, I feel it washing me over, edging past my throat, a cool equator, a circumference of the world. We traced our hands like children, mapping the rivers of our palms, the peninsulas of fingers, moving tectonic earth, breaching two continents. We must have grafted our fate one to another.*

*I walked to the bridge with the wounded soldier, thinking of a time when my nights were easy and your touch was light upon my skin. I couldn't help leaning on him, pressing my right hand on his bronze boot, staring into the river that slipped around the bend in a hurry, moving too rapidly to reflect the dull sky. I stood there unable to remember, hearing murmurs; soft voices in the ripples beneath. The sea was calling me home, calling me back. The exile was over. It was beautiful, the cool water against my skin, my hair flowing, unbound to its salty soul. My arms slid out of my shirt like black water snakes. Something in the water touched my fingertips. I thought it was seaweed at first, but it was golden, and you were there smiling, taking me into you. I was pressed in the warmth of you. And my heart was full again, drunk on the river, smiling in your arms, I was returning. I was sinking in deep mauve, in blue, in your golden halo like sunken gold. There we were, one bone to another, floating and riding the river home.*

## Afterword

I began this work thinking it would be a dialogue between East and West, only to find that the borders were indefinable, metamorphosing through history and customs. There was something completely unsatisfactory with political borders, which fail to represent linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical divides. Such artificial lines are pivotal causes of wars, disputes, and political unrest. I then tried to examine natural borders, different ecological zones, the coursing of rivers or mountain chains, where I encountered a similar dilemma. Nothing was stationary, nothing was easily definable, not even islands with their cut out shapes, spangled in the ocean. Jonathan Wooding advocates that even sea-shores are not definable borders, for the tide changes the morphology of land and sea, giving the example of recent land-rights disputes in Australia where Aboriginal communities are making claims over traditional ownership rights that extend into the ocean (Rainbird 22). I began by viewing both Great Britain and the Balkans as islands in my writing, but rather than being insular and bound which is traditionally conceived, they have blurred borders, are places of travel, fluid geography. I wanted to express the necessity for an international community. However, I did not want to depict a story entrenched with migrant suffering and abuse at the hands of foreign powers, as depicted in such works as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Rather, I desired to show the freedom of the traveler, unhindered by politics and xenophobia, who was at liberty to experience and communicate. I desired the journey to be a beginning and an end, a cyclical voyage from life to death.

Paul Rainbird proposes that the geographical study of islands is nothing less than the study of movement; they are the product of transformation (Rainbird 1-3). If we can accept islands as fluid geography, then it becomes imperative to look at all land in movement.

Although Britain is clearly an island, and historically a nation formed from the invading Saxons to a Navy Empire, Rainbird claims that its proximity to land (34 kilometers), imparts the perception of a peninsula rather than an island (Rainbird 141). The Balkans are also often considered isolated and impenetrable, that is- insular and backwards. These negative stereotypes are hardly credible, for the Balkans are the gateway between the East and West and have had foreign powers and influence throughout their history, from the Turks to the Templars. Regardless, I believe both Britain and the Balkans share some aspect of island culture, some element of instability and movement.

For the western imagination, islands have been built upon myths and dreams, either as freedom or as death. The unknown world was mapped on invented islands, where monsters, mythic cities could exist; we see this in the lost city of Atlantis, while home remained a permanent center, a core. Invented islands were also used, according to Rainbird, as a way of dealing with the unknown, unmapped world (Rainbird 11). For the ancient Greeks the ocean was a place of perils, and thus Oceanus becomes a river god that encircles the entire world. The Ocean represents a savagery where “the tides mimic the breathing of a living animal” (Rainbird 4). The ocean, like the desert becomes a country of monsters, set to test monks and the devoted. O’Loughlin gives the example of an ocean mirrored desert, on the island of Iona in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland, where the monks are tested like traditional desert hermits through seclusion and hostile landscape (Rainbird 5). I chose to place Natalia in the British Isles to be similarly tested, to be challenged in her own Scottish odyssey. There are many parallels between the ocean and the desert, which superficially appear to be opposites; they share vastness, danger, freedom, expanse, and serve in many ways as no-man’s land. Nationality becomes of little

importance or consequence in the unclaimed territory; there is an element that seems to strip the human being to a purer, more refined state.

Paul Rainbird argues that it is easy to place utopias on islands, where alternate societies can be explored without political implication from home (Rainbird 4-11). These imagined utopias, he writes, were only possible from the exploration of islands, such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, written after Sir Francis Drake's explorations (Rainbird 7), but he admits that literature had also inspired exploration, as seen with Thomas More's *Utopia*, and Ferdinand Megellan breaching a new ocean, the Pacific (Rainbird 10). The discovery of Pacific islands gave rise to the encounter of very different people, that Rainbird calls "Tattoos and Taboos", but also to the idea of space. These encounters changed how Europeans saw themselves in the world. I wanted to explore the idea of foreign space in my narrative, and how Natalia reacts to her own identity when encountering Scottish history and geography.

These foreign contacts led to islands being used for commerce and trade, as demonstrated by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Glasgow, Scotland flourished as a port town dealing with the cotton and tobacco imported from the slave colonies in the United States, giving rise to a wealthy merchant class. This period in Glaswegian history shaped how the modern city was formed, from politics to architecture. The Merchant City industrialized Lowland Scotland, while commercial outposts helped maintain the slave trade by providing economic partners and the demand for goods. Water was also important in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Nevertheless, islands have also been used more spiritually, as Islands of the Dead. Avalon, modern day Glastonbury, in Somerset, is a mapped area, and yet it is entrenched with mysticism. It has both its druidic past and its connection to the Arthurian legend, as well as to its

Christian abbey. It exists as an island caught between time and space, an island of the dead. Islands of the dead, like invented islands were used as a way of separating the known from the unknown: the living from the dead. Tony Pollard examines this social separation of living and dead in Scotland, concentrating on medieval and modern examples, where graveyards are situated with coastal or ocean views, or are found on sea and freshwater loch islands (Rainbird 12). Rainbird interprets this physical separation as the incorporation of travel to the burial rites, such as a procession, and the transportation of the corps “from place of death to grave”(Rainbird 12). He alludes to the classical Greek model of water crossing to gain access to the underworld. More profoundly, he addresses the symbolic image of life as a journey to death, and water acting as a liminal zone between the two (Rainbird 13). This notion of a journey towards death was pivotal in my thesis. Natalia is journeying from East to West, crossing the Atlantic unaware that she is crossing to her death. The passage over water is her sacred rite from one state to another, from one stage of her life to another.

In Classical mythology, the river Styx is a beautiful example of the liaison between river and death. Not only is she a river deity, but also the most prominent river in Hades, daughter of Oceanus himself and Tethys. Perhaps what is most striking is that the river Styx in Homer’s *Iliad* is holy, “the dark and terrible oath-stream of the gods”(line 858), that flows nine times around Hades. I similarly used examples of rivers of death, from the Nišava, to the Volga, and ultimately to the River Clyde, where Natalia drowns in the last story: *A Consequential Drowning*. Interestingly, Oceanus, what is considered today the Atlantic Ocean, was conceived as a river that wrapped itself around the world, derived from the Underworld, a circular cycle of life. The world was considered flat, and Hades at this point in mythology was not seen underground but across a river. Edward Tripp reminds us that Odysseus crossed Oceanus to reach Hades (Tripp

401). "Here, towards the Sorrowing Water, runs the streams/of Wailing, out of Styx, and quenchless Burning- torrents that join in thunder and the Rock" (line 569-571). Oceanus becomes the source of all waters as well as cool winds where the "mild and lulling airs from Ocean bearing refreshment for the souls of men- the West Wind always blowing" (604-606). But, Odysseus also has a powerful foe in Poseidon, who pleads with Zeus to impale his ship, to "end all ocean-crossings with passengers"(Atchity 1996: 14). This demonstrates both benevolence and hostility of the ocean in the ancient Greek tradition.

In Virgil's *Aeneid* the shift of the underworld becomes apparent. It is no longer the necessity of the journey to death, but a dreaded place. Like Odysseus, Aeneas travels to the underworld, where he first encounters a river, "the gate of the king of darkness is said to be Here/And the shadowy swamps that is Acheron's overflow" (Atchity 1997: 104). He enters a cave, called Aornos, where no bird can fly, where Sorrow, Fear, Hunger, Poverty, Sleep, War, and other sinful entities lie in evil council. From there, he moves to a murky whirlpool with boiling mud, leading into the Cocytus river (the river of wailing), and there he encounters Charon, the boatman with flame eyes. It is perhaps here that the hopelessness of the underworld is most ardently felt, in the unburied begging to be ferried across, waiting for hundreds of years until their bones are put to rest by the living. Bones are very important in this passage of the *Aeneid*, and the burial rites of the living are reflected in the water crossing of the dead. Charon at first refuses to ferry Aeneas for "This is the place of Shadows, of dreams, and of /Night Full of sleep. It is sinful to carry live bodies across/ In my Stygian boat" (Atchity 1997: 108) Only by producing the golden bough, and by Sibyl drugging Cerberus with cakes, do they manage their journey.

The concept of the Stygian boat was relevant to the ancient Greeks and Romans because of their sea-faring lifestyles. According to Robert Foulke, the sea quest is the oldest voyage pattern in Western Literature, as seen in ancient Greek epics to Dante's *Inferno*, to Ulysses disobeying the gods and sailing into the vast open Atlantic (Foulke 112), what Foulke calls going beyond the known world. In his work *Writing Travel*, John Zilcosky marks the importance of the traveler as storyteller, retelling adventures of monsters and beauties. He suggests that maybe storytelling started with travel (Zilcosky 3), that the two forms seem intertwined. He illustrates that in Homeric Greece a traveler's duty was storytelling and that Odysseus only receives hospitality in return for his stories by the Phoenicians (Zilcosky 3). In my thesis, Natalia is a storyteller influenced and enlightened by her travels. She is capable of seeing through different time periods, an ability that produces a multi-faceted account of locations and events, such as the witches in Edinburgh, Guy Fawkes day, and Beltane. Without travel, she would not be able to correlate different events in her narrative.

The sea-narrative, the ocean journey, has become engrained in literature. Just as a young Odysseus would have found seafaring a natural longing and occupation, so too Joseph Conrad opens *Youth* with the disclaimer that "this could have occurred nowhere but England, where men and sea interpenetrate"(Conrad 9). Although critics, including Robert Foulke, disclaim it as a naïve tale of first experiences at sea, it offers more in the notions of exoticism and nationality on the open ocean. Marlow is overly romantic when he falls in love with a crumbling ship, *The Judea*, with its motto: "Do or Die". But what is most striking is his lure to exoticism, as he exclaims: "There was all the East before me, and all life" (Conrad 30), with the allure of Bangkok, evoking magic. There is also his first encounter with Malay seamen when *The Judea* explodes. He eulogizes the death of the ship, where the burning is a funeral pyre in the ocean, "a



magnificent death had come like grace, like a gift, like a reward to that old ship at the end of her laborious days... the surrender of her weary ghost to the keeping of stars and sea" (Conrad 54). This can easily be compared to the epilogue in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, where Ishmael drifts in Queequeg's coffin, floating "on a soft and dirge-like main"(Melville: epilogue). This floating coffin is reminiscent of the Stygian boat where even the "unharming" sharks glide, and savage sea-hawks sail until *The Rachel*, searching for her own lost crew comes across Ishmael, a new found orphan. Death on the ocean is depicted spiritually, a force, a deity. When Pip is thrown overboard, the sea is described as lifting his finite body, but drowning his infinite soul, or "rather carried down alive to wondrous depth, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes" (Melville 453). Death at sea depicts in one sense, an unfinished journey. There are no bones to be buried or claimed, rather they are absorbed in this liminal zone. However, the assimilation of the human with this powerful element is poetic, and the mutability, vastness, and uncontrollability of water acts as no-man's land. The bodies die nationless and unpossessed.

Regardless, the sense of loss in Conrad's *Youth*, is exactly in the title. It is a tale of recalling child-like enthusiasm for travel and adventure. Marlow sees the East, more specifically Java, and feels he has "seen its secret places and [has] looked into its very soul... It was impalpable and enslaving, like a charm, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight" (Conrad 57). Here, he describes the sight, voice, and men of the East who look back at him. Marlow sees them as unchanging, the same encountered by ancient mariners, mysterious, resplendent and somber. While the rest of his crew is sleeping, he states "the West [was] sleeping, unconscious of the land and the people and the violence of sunshine...the East looked at them without a sound" (Conrad 62). For Marlow seeing the East was a right of passage. Likewise, in *Moby Dick*,

Ishmael greets the Pacific, “that serene ocean rolled eastward from [him] a thousand leagues of blue”(Melville 525). The Pacific, named by Magellan for its calm waters, evokes a hidden desire compared to the “tornadoed Atlantic of [his] being”(Melville 425). The oceans contrast one another, where the Atlantic represents his soul and his home, and the Pacific represents exoticism and desire. The Pacific becomes “sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potter’s Fields of all four continents”(Melville 525); infinite space.

This boundlessness of space and metamorphosis of elements echoes Seamus Heaney’s “Bogland”, where there is “no prairies/ To slice a big sun at evening” (line1-2). Ireland becomes this “unfenced country/ Is bog that keeps crusting/ Between the sights of the sun” (6-8). There in the peat, the Great Irish Elk’s skeleton sinks, the ground is like water, melting the earth and the physical, much like Melville’s pasture oceans. Heaney’s water-earth is where “The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage/ The wet centre is bottomless”(28-29). He powerfully plays off land and sea in his poem: “Ocean’s Love to Ireland”, where the invading English are the Ocean who rape the Irish shore, where different languages exchanged are the elements made distinctive one from the other. This blending of the dead and the living, between ocean and earth, demonstrates the unsettledness of borders and the mutability of perceptions.

With the blurring borders, these sea voyages transcend into desert odysseys. They are in fact mirror images of each other in their boundlessness and freedom. The desert, like the ocean, provides room for magic and exploration. Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, perhaps like all journeys, begins at home. In this utopian tale, alternate societies are explored in the spirit of Thomas More, with philosophical questioning of Islamic culture and faith. Naguib Mahfouz asks: “traveler, what are you looking for?” (Mahfouz 1), describing homeland as the core of a being. Quindil sentimentally recites:

However much the place distances itself from me it will continue to let fall drops of affection, conferring memories that are never forgotten, and etching its marks, in the name of the homeland, in the very core of the heart. (Mahfouz 2)

It is this memory of the homeland where the smells and sounds of childhood are retained, where the faces and streets of the city permeate, and the mosques and lablab trees are eternal. Homeland becomes a place of memories; the originator of our being; the opening line of a great epic poem. For this reason, my creative thesis begins at home, with the sights and sounds of childhood that reverberate through Natalia. The journey begins with its known world, describable, palpable and named. As Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in his letters to the young military student Franz Xaver Kappus:

If your everyday life seems poor, don't blame *it*; blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is no poverty and no poor, indifferent place. And even if you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world's sounds- wouldn't you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond all price, that treasure house of memories? (Rilke 7-8)

Ibn Fattouma, known as Quindil, tutored by Sheikh Maghagha al-Gibeili, begins to question the world around him-- the world of Islam, much like Thomas More did in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He sees the avarice of officials, the wealth of the Sultan and poverty in the streets. When his fiancée is married off to the Sultan's third chamberlain, he finds no solace in his home and yearns for a journey. His biggest wish is to find the elusive land of Gebel, believed to be the most perfect society. His journey represents the traditional quest. It is his first step in

opening his eyes to his own homeland, to view it objectively, and to be critical out of love. In this Arabic tradition, travel is valued and integral, a culture of travelers and trade.

Being young, Quindil both fears foreign lands for being non-Muslim, as much as he desires an alternate existence. His entry into different lands is his education. This is echoed in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, a fable about a nomadic boy named Santiago who initially contemplates a sedentary existence with a merchant's daughter (Coelho 8). He is a shepherd living for travel yet entrenched with his own prejudices and xenophobia, from Gypsies to Arabs. Only through meeting with the old king, a man with multiple identities and homelands, does Santiago venture into Africa in search of treasure and destiny (Coelho 34). His mingled fears of foreigners, symbolized through Saint Santiago Matamoros, are tested. It is his realization that both Spanish and Arabic are spoken, that both cultures co-exist amicably in Tangiers, that he perceives that understanding is the language of the world. He gives himself completely to the Arabic culture, from learning the language and customs, to dressing differently in white linen, head cloth and sandals. He is so transformed that he is mistaken to be an Arab on his caravan to Egypt. The desert, like the ocean in sea narratives, becomes a teaching ground; he learns how to read it, to understand its omens and symbols.

In *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, Quindil is the only traveler in the caravan. His experiences become personal, unique in circumstance, uninfluenced by others. For the caravan traders, trade is the mark of civilization and the will of God; they inform him that the Prophet Mohammed was a merchant. But Quindil reminds the traders that the Prophet was "also a traveler and a man who emigrated from his place of birth"(Mahfouz 19). He begins to see his journey in a new light.

I wanted to impart the importance of travel in my thesis: one, as a necessary tool for tolerance and understanding; and two, as a way of objectively observing one's homeland.

Like in all journeys, the different lands Quindil travels to provide unique problems, as well as some illumination on Islam. Mashriq is a place intolerant of other religions, where the slaves walk around naked and live in poverty; Quindil notes the similar poverty that exists in Muslim lands. In Haira he compares the God-King to the Sultan, and the landowners to those in Arabia. He realizes that "There is no evil [he has] come across in [his] journey which has not reminded [him of his] unhappy country" (Mahfouz 57). But, his illumination continues in his tolerance for other cultures and religions, which he discovers in Halba, land of freedom. There he feels a rebirth, a rediscovery of God (Mahfouz 84). He starts to feel his roots more strongly when he is away from home, and he finds a new Islam that has evolved to represent its people: one that exists in harmony with all its practitioners.

Every land imprints itself differently upon him, both with cruelty and enlightenment. His choice to leave Halba and his family is due to his choice for the quest of ultimate truth achieved through travels. While reflecting on the remedy for his homeland, his spiritual awakening is shortened when invading armies force him to leave for the land of Gebel. For the first time the caravan was composed of travelers and emigrants. The journey becomes difficult, the mountain itself, like any great spiritual feat, must be done alone. The caravan stops, and the travelers must climb by themselves to the summit. Homeland becomes irrelevant in the end; only the journey exists as a pure passage, as a light in darkness.

These contacts with foreigners and foreign countries can be transformative, but there is always the chance of misunderstanding and misguided opinions. Quindil and Santiago lose their prejudices and xenophobia through their travels, but that is not representative of all

narratives. It is difficult to write about the East-West dialogue without mentioning Rebecca West and her magnum opus: *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*. Her work presented to the western European powers a westerner's journey through the East, through her own experiences and observations, published in 1941. She attempts to break down the stereotypes of backwardness. However, the simplification of her observations in turn creates other stereotypes. She was a remarkable woman, but what her work exemplifies are our own prejudices and personal visions.

She travels by train to Serbia with her husband, and Constantine, who is representative of Serbs. Through the train ride, she observes people and their customs. For her, the great revelation is the peasant:

Nothing we believe about peasants in the West is true. We are taught to think of them as stolid, almost physically rooted to the soil, and averse from the artificial. Nothing could be less true, for the peasant likes to travel, and travels more happily by train than on horseback. (West 447)

Thus, the peasant is uprooted from his earthy realm, and described as a locomotive being; free, complex. What she attempts to demonstrate is that the perception of insularity is flawed, that although the Western world had been ignorant of Balkan issues until they entered their politics, travel and movement are inherent in the region, as is the diversity of people and languages. However, the reader cannot help but reflect on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and his description of different easterners on the train ride to Transylvania where Harker comments, "The strangest figures we saw were the Slovaks, who are more barbarian than the rest"(Stoker 33). The further east Harker travels the more uncivilized and unorganized he finds it.

West differentiates between the east and west with Constantine's wife, a German, who is depicted as the epitome of intolerance, western pride, and superiority. Her family sees it as disgraceful that she should marry an easterner. Constantine, on the other hand, shows childlike enthusiasm to be liked, but lacks tact and fineness, as depicted in his efforts to win over his wife's family by praising the Pope, when they are Lutheran. The Orthodox Church to the Germans family becomes not only unacceptable, but also disgusting; they label him as a savage (West 448). Therefore, West demonstrates the hostility and intolerance of the Germans, and the naivety of the Serbs. Both caricatures take on extremes. Constantine's attempt to fit into the western world comes with disguising himself. He serves as an examples of the easterner trying to exemplify Western cultures. Similarly, Dracula pores over books and maps devoted to English customs and life, pointing out to Harker that "a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not-- and to know not is to care not for" (Stoker 51). Even though Dracula speaks perfect English, he fears that his accent will betray him. Constantine attempts to fit into German culture by claiming, "that there is nothing to be said, so [he] must drink white beer, though [he is] a Serb and therefore not a *petit bourgeois*, but a lord and a peasant" (West 449). This concept of being a lord and a peasant is something that West finds praiseworthy.

Although historically peasants were a lower class of citizens, when Rebecca West traveled to the Balkans things had greatly altered. Peasant is an inaccurate description of the agriculturalists and farmers in the 1940's. They were for the most part landowners themselves, they were not labouring as serfs. West over-romanticizes the stereotype imposed by the west of the south Slav. The peasants in Serbia, according to West, enjoy greater freedom because there was never a Catherine the Great or Peter the Great to remind them of centralized power, but rather they rebelled in small independent groups, such as Princip assassinating the Archduke

Ferdinand. Therefore, they could never conform to a vast Marxist system (West 486). However, the Balkans did not transform from serfdom to communism like Russia, they were more capitalist with property and individually owned factories, etc. As for Princip, he and his group were highly supported by a centralized Serbian Government. Many of West's observations are highly superficial and incorrect.

She imposes a duality in Serbs, such as Karageorge, who was a pig farmer turned revolutionary, a "springing tiger" (West 490) with military genius, both cruel and noble. The extremes in temperament, of vice and virtue, existing in the same person, demonstrable in the same day. Rebecca West makes caricatures of people, over dramatizing them through extremes, as is the case with Constantine who describes his time spent at the Sorbonne in Paris. He explains that Slavs are a people of "*légèreté*" until they become suddenly heavy as lead, the extreme duality of a passionate people. West writes that there is too much of him, and draws the distinction between east and west, expression and restraint. She complains that in England close friends offer less comfort during illness, indicating an openness of feeling in the East. She would rather have someone cry over her like the peasants did when they found the old man by the roadside (West 463). For West it is a matter of economics, those in a capitalist materialistic Western culture are more restrained in their feelings and openness, and that it is the state of having less wealth to lose that opens more emotions in the Balkans. She binds the peasant's wealth to the soil, which replenishes itself yearly, reasoning that this "saving" money consciousness in western society, translates to emotional shortage.

These volatile temperaments, she relates as the effect of not being accustomed to urban life (West 473). The Orthodox Church is depicted as being superstitious and ritualistic, echoing the peasants in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, clutching their crosses and garlic. She observes



that the children are fragile and pale, and claims it is because Serbs have not yet learned how to live in urban areas. They are depicted as being ignorant, keeping their children indoors in winter and neglecting vegetables in their diet. Belgrade is one of Europe's oldest cities, and a metropolis and capital during her visit there. By claiming that Serbs are not accustomed to city living since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, West implies that "no area since the world began can have been at once so highly educated and so wildly uncivilized" (West 476).

However, West does attempt to breach the east and west in her many interesting comparisons of Serbia to Scotland. Through this train ride, she witnesses the impact of Turkish rule, with Bosnian Muslims wearing fez hats, and the then rarely seen turban. Nonetheless, it is the arrival into Serbia that marks an ending to Islamic influences, with no more traces of it than in England. Somehow Serbia constitutes a marked difference, as a crossed border.

We were, in fact, in Serbia. We went and stood on the platform and breathed the air, which was now Serbian air. It is as different from Bosnian air as in Scotland the Lowland air differs from Highland air; it is drier and, as they say of pastry, shorter. Anybody who does not know that it is one pleasure to fill the lungs up at Yaitse or Loch Etive and another to fill them down at Belgrade or the Lammermuir Hills must be one of those creatures with defective sensoria, who cannot tell the difference between one type of water and another. (West 450)

She also compares the outskirts of Belgrade, driving towards the distant Avala and the rolling countryside, as the replicate image of Lowland Scotland, differing only in the rich redness of the Balkan earth (West 486). The different soils are harmonized, unlike in *Dracula*, where the eastern soil brought to London is representative of contamination and incompatibility. She

sincerely attempts to report unbiased observations, but like all travelers is affected by her own personal worldview. However, her effort to physically see and experience the Balkans is highly commendable, as is her determination to bridge the east and west into a harmonious unity.

I wanted to depict a more harmonious experience between east and west. Natalia is capable of drawing parallels between the two from the battlefields of Kosovo and Bannockburn, to Guy Fawkes and the Skull Tower. It was more important for me to write about how they interpenetrate, their similarities living along their differences, than portray them as rigid opposites. Understanding comes from a sense of empathy, and therefore Natalia has to empathize with Scottish people and culture.

These prejudices and xenophobia that confronts the traveler led to an inquiry into the faulty science that provokes these tendencies. In his scientific investigation entitles: *The Feebly Inhibited: Nomadism, or the Wandering Impulse, with Special Reference to Heredity*, Charles B. Davenport, director of the Department of Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbour, decided in the early 1900's to breach the subject of nomadism. He believed that nomadism was ingrained in genetics, and conducted a series of trials in an attempt to pinpoint the "wandering impulse". To a modern reader, his work seems completely unfounded and offensive. But, what his work demonstrates is an attempt to answer why some people are more sedentary, while others more nomadic. Today, this subject would be considered through anthropological, historical and geographical research and questioning, as a behavioural, rather than pre-disposed trait.

What is alarming is the negativity attached to the "wandering impulse" as a symptom of social degeneracy and irresponsibility. For Davenport, the human condition ranges from "sessility" and extreme domesticity, to "ambulatory automatism" (Davenport 7). He chooses the word "nomadism" specifically for racial connotations, trying to evoke the "restless, wandering

type", rather than the German "Wandertrieb" or "Wanderlust" (Davenport 7). He approaches human nomadism with animal migration, claiming that being capable of movement, human's instinctively want to travel. He compares migratory and sedentary birds to human cases.

For Davenport, the wandering instinct is most prominent in what he describes as "primitive people", more specifically "Fuegians, Australians, Bushmen, and Hottentots" (Davenport 10-11). He claims that it is their nomadic instinct that makes them hunters rather than agriculturalists. He includes a list of what he calls less-primitive people who still have an impulse for travel, including the "Cossacks and Mongolians". However clinically he observes people, his scorn seems to fall with Gypsies, whom he describes as living outside the law and plaguing Europe with their constant movement, and bringing fear to farmers and peasants. Davenport quotes Gaster who claims that Gypsies "have no ethical principles and they do not recognize the obligations of the ten commandments. There is extreme moral laxity in the relations of the two sexes and, on the whole, they take life easily and are complete fatalists at the same time they are great cowards"(Davenport 11). Gaster attempts to place morality on mobility, and systematically classifies a group of people with stereotypes, which is highly dangerous and xenophobic. The nomads become a destructive force that plague the settled. Flusser's philosophy interjects with the Greek meaning of the word nomad as "a person searching for boundaries or limits set for him, for a region or area in which he has legal status"(Flusser 47). He argues that settled people living with a legal status view wanderers as outside the law, and he gives the example of how the police attempt to group Gypsies into specific areas (Flusser 47). A nomad therefore resists being defined in space and time, as well as boundaries. Davenport's wanderer is a morally lax vagrant lacking that which is fundamental to society. He expresses the capitalist value of property being a priority rather than cultural richness and experience. The question lies

whether it is a difference of values, or whether it is the lack of control a society can impose on people that are non-taxable and unprotected, that spur on this xenophobia. Davenport argues that it all comes down to genetics, that the sedentary trait is more developed in some people over others, and therefore nomadism becomes a case of evolution, of recessive genes, of failed perfection.

In Vilem Flusser's essay *Thinking About Nomadism*, tool use is a far too simplistic and lacking system of classifying epochs. For him the Neolithic Age was "a 10,000 year interruption in nomadic life" (Flusser 40). He draws a distinction that sedentary people exist in space and nomadic people in time. He gives the example of an address, where a sedentary person lives and is defined in the space of that address, whereas a nomad is transient, residing both in space and time (Flusser 41). This returns to his fundamental theory that the settled possess and the wanderer experiences. This settledness cannot avoid being political, such as Davenport mentioned in the *Feebly Inhibited*. What Flusser refuses to do is to make nomadism inferior to settledness, even though civilized means literally "village-dwelling", and property is "easier to observe than experience" (Flusser 42). Technology, he argues has transformed communication. The internet, where information can be attained from home does not mean that society is becoming more sedentary, but has opened international communication (Flusser 42). He argues that throughout history, travel was essential in collecting data and information, that the Greek word for "idiot" meant a private citizen who knew nothing of the world, that it is a matter of information (software), rather than possession (hardware) (Flusser 42-43).

Walter Heape's *Emigration, Migration and Nomadism*, is a different scientific study that investigates animal movements. He explains that emigration is an animal's determination to

evacuate their home, with no evidence that they intend to return (Heape 75). Thus, they are not migrating from one area to another, rather they become emigrants in their new habitat (Heape 75), and although they follow similar conditions and principals that make them leave, it is only a temporary exodus. These movements are determined by climactic conditions and are not natural movements, but survival movements (Heape 204).

Nomadism, however, is something altogether different. It is what Heape calls alimential-climactic movement. It has no direct regard to reproduction, but is instinctive. It is a smaller version of emigration, but differs in that the animal wanders a defined area which it considers as its own/neutral territory (Heape 321). It is the level of locomotion in the animal that dictates the size of the area. "The true nomad, on the other hand, has no fixed home; he shifts his home as he shifts his hunting ground; though, at the same time, he does not extend his wanderings beyond the boundaries of the territory which he regards as his own" (Heape 232). He compares this nomadism to the Kirghiz nomads of central Asia, shepherds whose traveling depends on the needs of their large herds. The journey from South to North is based on the welfare of the herd, from reproduction to feeding grounds (Heape 329). Both scientific texts are dated in attempting to explain the "wandering instinct" in animal nature. However, Heape defends nomadism as functional rather than aimless wandering (Heape 330).

The relationship between animal and man is also explored in Flusser's essay *To Be Unsettled, One First Has to Be Settled*, where he elaborates on flora and fauna distinction. He playfully acknowledges that a plant would view animals as unsettling because they are unsettled, but that animals unlike a plant would have a variety of viewpoints about settledness. Because there are numerous forms of movement with animals, there is no standing point. He argues that

humans are the most restless of animals, always moving, gathering and transmitting experiences (Flusser 25). He writes:

Human beings are even more rootless than other animals, and when they do search out their roots, one gets a vegetable impression of them. Truly rooted and settled people (to the extent they exist in reality and not just in ideology) are experimentally impoverished shrubs. To be a human being in the true sense of the word, one has to be unsettled. (Flusser 25-26)

For Flusser, this uprooting is essential in becoming a human being. The expellers who force this movement, he claims, act like plants and see themselves as native, “They expel the rejects so their spawn always remain the same”(Flusser 26). But it is the expellees who become human, who being animal act with resolve, who grow with change and are transformed by it (Flusser 27). Travel becomes a stimulus for growth, as do the experiences and histories gathered during the journey.

The idea that immobility stunts growth was something I wanted to explore in my thesis. The need to travel thus becomes significant in development. As mobile animals, we are in constant locomotion, it is those experiences that transform our worldview, that bring us in contact with the unknown and subsequently broaden our knowledge. Mobility also relates to how the human body heals, after bone surgery, part of the healing is reconstructing the damaged tissues and the sliced muscles. If movement is not implemented during early recovery, then the muscles and ligaments are stunted and restricted in their mobility permanently. I was very conscious of how mobility affected Natalia not only through the voyage, but also through her physical body, both her limitations and aspirations.

History has been a major influence in linking knowledge with travel in my thesis, as well as a way of breaching different cultural identities. Similarly, books have a myriad of meaning in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. Hana falls upon them as an escape from the war and reality; they become the "only door out of her cell"(Ondaatje 7). The library in the Italian villa is thus transformed into a sanctuary, as well as a hiding place of secrets among the volumes written in different languages. She examines their physicality, imagining pages joined together as waves, herself as Robinson Crusoe discovering the weather-worn books upon her own foreign shore.

However, for the English patient himself, books encompass his very existence. He writes his life into his copy of Herodotus' *Histories*, where his and Katherine's love story remains; "their foreignness intimate like two pages of a closed book" (Ondaatje 155). He also sees her foreignness in words, for she exists in the realm of water and moisture, having grown up in an English garden with words like "trellis and hedgehog" (Ondaatje 170). Her foreignness thus resides not in geography but in different elements, her ocean contrasts his desert. In the desert names are erased. For Katherine, her lineage is permanent, while Almasy consciously disregards his ancestry, living in namelessness. And yet, he exists in the world of maps, in the language of geography, in the mirage:

Within two weeks even the idea of a city never entered his mind. It was as if he had walked under the millimeter of haze just above the inked fibres of a map, that pure zone between land and chart between distances and legend between nature and storyteller. Sandford called it geomorphology. The place they had chosen to come to, to be their best selves, to be unconscious of ancestry. Here, apart from the sun compass and odometer mileage and books, he was alone, his own invention. He knew during these times how the mirage worked, the fata morgana, for he was within it. (Ondaatje 246)

The book of *Histories* transcends being simply a book of travel, but a book that travels and that keeps within its pages his own stories. This is a new way of reading the world that comes with movement or travel, as well as constant locomotion or nomadism. The winds are an interpretation of cultures. They are living, existing in history with the decimation of armies, of wars waged, such as the aajej, a whirlwind in Southern Morocco, or simply temporal as the alm, a fall wind from the Balkans. Through the lives of these winds, the reader is given accounts of different people ingrainning these legends into culture. The winds become symbolic of the freedom of movement without necessity to be explained nor justified. Vilém Flusser writes in his essay *Thinking about Nomadism*, that the concept of nomads being aimless wanderers could simply be an imposition of the sedentary. That it is a completely different way of perceiving the world. The laws of the sedentary may take into account the laws of gravity with the falling of a stone, but not the mutability of the wind. He contemplates whether nomadic existence in the desert could be comparable to clouds and wind, while the settled comprehend it as seasonal, a change from summer to fall. He asks quite profoundly, “Perhaps nomads live meteorologically, and we, astronomically” (Flusser 43).

Traveling is central to my thesis as the means to different perceptions. The English patient travels; his constant movement gives him the ability to transcend his literary and topographical knowledge through his experiences. When the Bedouin tribe finds him, he is able to piece his geographic location through their customs. The medicine man himself, who rubs ground peacock bone on the English patient’s rib cage, was someone everyone knew from the Sudan north to Giza because of his nomadic existence. With his hundreds of bottles of ointments and powders, “he seemed a vessel to himself, this merchant doctor, this king of oils and



perfumes and panaceas, this Baptist” (Ondaatje 10). The medicine man becomes the embodiment of traveling knowledge. The English patient, in turn, is kept alive for his knowledge. His talent resides in the maps of his mind, because he can recognize towns from their skeletal shapes, the images of the ocean floors, of tectonic movement, and the historical passages of people (Ondaatje 18). Thus, he exists in multiple times simultaneously, for he is able to historically reconstruct passages. He is able to graft Alexander the Great’s journey to his own; the passing of the caravans is the passing of information and stories. In many ways, Natalia is also capable of reconstructing histories from different countries and different times as a way of understanding her newfound surroundings. She cannot fully experience Beltane without responding to the witches of Edinburgh, nor can she comprehend Guy Fawkes Day without comparing it to the Skull Tower of Niš, or the symbolism of bones.

By encompassing history with the present, and living with multiple identities the English patient is able to breach water and desert. He can visualize the people of the Sahara hunting water horses from reed boats (Ondaatje 18). Thus, it seems fitting that Katherine, a water lover, should die in the Cave of Swimmers in the Wadi Sura. The desert becomes a burial ground of history, from the pre-dynastic harpoons and early sails in the Nubian desert to the dead of the continuous wars. He looks upon the caravans and sees rivers. Water for him exists in exile, “carried back in cans and flasks, the ghost between your hands and your mouth” (Ondaatje 18-19). The desert is a boundless space, as well as an inconstant one, without permanence or demarcation. His ability to see these parallel worlds, the ocean in the sand, is the mirror image of his love for Katherine. When he is finally able to return to her, years after her death, he recounts their reunion as years too late. They exist on different planes, their stories crossing each other like caravans across the desert, each on their own independent journey.

Likewise, in my thesis, Adrian and Natalia are traveling on different trajectories, with temporal meetings, and they also embody different cultures, languages and origins. I specifically picked their names to symbolize these differences, I chose the name Natalia because of its historical resonance and connotations with birth and beginning, as well as Adrian, meaning 'from the sea'. These differences are not used against each other, but rather are harmonious in their compatibility, a union of different nations.

Identity becomes critical when the Allies find the English patient, burned beyond recognition; they try to read him like a map, to discover his body history. But they cannot. Unlike Caravaggio, who is marked, identifiable with his missing thumbs, his body betraying his personal history, the English patient remains enigmatic. When they discover the English patient, they are determined to identify him, to mark him. They identify him as English because he recreates Katherine's garden from her youth. "Everything about him was very English except for the fact that his skin was tarred black, a bogman from history among the interrogating officers... He had rambled on, driving them mad, traitor or ally, leaving them never quite sure who he was"(Ondaatje 96). Even Hana believes him to be English, because for her: "Some of the English love Africa. A part of their brain reflects the desert precisely. So they're not foreigners there" (Ondaatje 22). Nevertheless, the English patient himself wants his body to be remembered through his experiences. He beautifully elegizes:

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if in caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography- to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are

communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps. (Ondaatje 261)

The English patient also refuses to identify his international explorer friends through their nationalities. Rather he refers to them as a “small church of nations” (Ondaatje 136), an oasis society exploring and mapping the desert between the wars, sharing intimacies, skills and weaknesses. Their friendship was fashioned from their love of the desert and discovery. They were Germans, English, Hungarians, and Africans, but wiped clean from their nationalities. The desert becomes an ideal place, because it cannot be claimed nor owned. It exists without borderlines, names, but is ever changing and mercurial.

The identity of the English patient becomes important, partly for Caravaggio who thinks him the enemy who betrayed him, in part by his nationality. He is a multifaceted person; someone who Flusser might say carried many homelands within him. As the Hungarian Count Ladislaus de Almásy, he is someone who had spent his childhood in the Levant. He is familiar with the Bedouin tribes, educated in England, and yet part of the desert. He becomes the very essence of the modern man, the lacing of cultures into one being who is free from any identity. In many ways I wanted Natalia to encompass this complexity, to be multifaceted and imprinted with many different cultures and countries. It is the choosing of sides, the black and white factions of war that truly demonstrate the artificiality of borders, as insular pockets of culture and identity. When war breaks out, the explorers find themselves on opposite sides. Suddenly friends and colleagues who had saved each other's lives are political enemies. It is that fragility of alliance that forces Madox to commit suicide, choosing his international family over his nation. He ends the war by shooting himself in the middle of a church service in Somerset, England

(Ondaatje 241-242). War only highlights the artificiality of nationalities as great human divides, serving only in the fragmentation of the individual.

This wartime self-fragmentation is heavy and difficult in W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*. His story of Paul Bereyter is the epitome of the anti-nationalism, not only because it is a story about persecution and intolerance, but also because he demonstrates the complexity of identity. Paul Bereyter, a country schoolteacher, endured a very strict Catholic teachers training college at Lavingen, surviving it only through his desire to teach children amid all the atrocities and ostracism of the little village S. The village S represents perhaps the biggest betrayal in their silence and communal amnesia during and after the war with their mistreatment of its Jewish inhabitants.

What Sebald accomplishes in this story is the emphasis on inexplicable bonds and the complexity of identity. He refuses the simple story, the simple black-and-white division of alliances. Paul Breyter exists in that complexity. He sees the demise of his family's emporium at the hands of anti-Semitism in the village, as well as Helen Hollaender's deportation on the midnight trains, and yet, remains quintessentially German in identity. What Mme Landau called "out of blind rage or even a sort of perversion" (Sebald 55), Paul Breyter struggles to find work in France, returns to the heart of Germany, to an unfamiliar Berlin, and is called to serve in the NAZI army. This scenario becomes alarming in both respects, that someone who is three-quarters Aryan is deemed suitable to serve in the NAZI army, and that that a one-quarter Jewish man would willingly enter that violent machine, which he knows is bent on annihilating people of his background. Perhaps the most striking aspect of all is that after six years of service in the artillery that had taken him to many occupied countries, he survives and returns to Germany.

What moved and perhaps even forced Paul to return, in 1939 and in 1945, was the fact that he was a German to the marrow, profoundly attached to his native land in the foothills of the Alps, and even to that miserable place S as well, which in fact he loathed and, deep within himself, of that I am quite sure, said Mme Landau, would have been pleased to see destroyed and obliterated, together with the townspeople, whom he found so utterly repugnant. (Sebald 56-57)

It his choice to commit suicide under a train that mirrors his love for the practical beauty of trains and his Jewish relationship to the concentration camps that embody what Sebald writes as his “German tragedy”, where the fragments became incompatible within himself.

The Balkan Wars of the 1990’s also impact Natalia with her identity being questioned. The homeland of her youth exists no longer, therefore her perception of Serbia exists both in the past through her memory and in the present politically. War inflicts on the individual a complex dualism that both binds and separates them from their homeland. Natalia is both a Serb and an outsider in her own homeland. Forced migration or exile, become difficult to harmonize with identity. However, Natalia is able to harmonize her multiple identities, by not choosing one over the others, but having them reside simultaneously.

Vilem Flusser’s philosophical work on migration, immigration, and nomadism, is not only reflective of the twentieth century, but of the man himself. Anke K. Finger writes that he is the embodiment of that turmoil, as a refugee, exile, and migrant (Finger viiii). In short, he is a man transformed by change. In his essay *The Challenge of the Migrant*, or the literal translation from the German “Taking residence in homelessness”, he writes about home, or more

specifically “heimat”. Heimat is a German word that encompasses more than just the idea of home, but rather homeland, alluding to its regionality and ancestry with a certain degree of nostalgia. Finger is determined to point out this difference, as well as to mention that many right winged factions have used this concept for propaganda, and that it was intrinsic in NAZI philosophy (Finger 1). The idea of heimat, in the pure sense of the word, is not political, but highly emotional; it is a sense of belonging.

Flusser’s interest in heimat is perhaps the interest of all immigrants-- living without one. It is not the loss of one heimat, but more the accumulation of many heimats that co-exist within one person. For Flusser these multiple homelands manifest themselves in his daily work, and his knowledge and comfort in many languages challenges him to translate and re-translate his writing (Flusser 2). These multiple languages living simultaneously demonstrate the acceptance rather than the preference of his different heimats. For him, this “unsettledness” with himself, serves as a bridging tool with others. It forces him to “experience and work through what is transcendent about heimats but also to theorize about them” (Flusser 2).

Natalia also retranslates her multiple languages, but also different world histories, binding Serbian and Scottish history in order to access cultural information. Flusser reasons that since no one chooses their birthplace, our first heimat is imposed on us, as are many of our relationships and bonds. But the migrant is free from these obligations in his movement; he is able to choose his bonds, which choice makes stronger. Freedom is choosing one’s relationships in life, rather than forced relationships and responsibilities. It is not a case of forgetting one homeland for another, but having them co-exist, being a citizen of many places, and respecting the sacredness of each place (Flusser 9). Homeland is central to my work, not only because it is essential for a beginning, but also because it exists in its multiplicity. Natalia carries within her

multiple homelands. She is interpreting Scotland from a westernized easterner's point of view, and although her interpretation is unique to herself it is seen through multiple lenses.

This transformation, through movement and experience, becomes essential in our evolving thoughts as global community. It seemed to me increasingly important to include the viewpoint of eastern European artists and writers who have affected change in this bridging and morphology of land, who have contributed to an international dialogue. This necessity to seek the unknown, to make contact with the outside world, and yet carry the homeland, is essential in Yevtushenko's work. I was drawn to Yevtushenko's poetry, with his depiction of communal memory and exiled homeland.

In my thesis, Natalia gets exiled from Yugoslavia during the war; she is physically and politically not allowed to return. The exile is of course complex, for there is both longing and disconnection. The NATO sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia made it into an isolated island. It is an island where any fiction can take place, existing in multiple times. Yevtushenko was born in the Siberian town of Zima, a remote outpost on the Trans-Siberian railway, in an already established Soviet Union. It is his childhood that he returns to with longing in his famous poem "Zima Junction", and yet there lies the deeper knowledge that travel is terribly important, leading him away from the small town. His poetic return to Zima after living in Moscow is the rediscovery of his native-town seen through eyes opened by the metropolitan city, creating multiple depths to his experience.

The Siberian town of Zima fights the stereotypes of Gulag prisons and harsh uninhabitable countryside, but returns to a peasant landscape, full of agricultural details and lushness of wheat fields, clear rivers and towering pines. It is those great pines that are calling him back. They have witnessed the history of the town, silently watching for the arrival of the

exiles of the Ukrainian province of Zhitomir, and the arrival of his great grandfather. Yevtusehko imagines the hard passage of the exiles herded through bad weather “In wanderings finding fortitude to forget/ what each of them loved more than his life” (line 30-31). Yevtushenko enters the movement of his ancestors making a difficult forced migration, and tries to imagine what these peasants felt reaching the unknown, in some way a fate harder to endure for a peasant who is bound by the land he tills and sows. It is that tearing at the root, that unwilling transplantation that he imagines as the center of their suffering. His great grandfather is skeptical of the stories that on their new land they would live like princes. He is forced to push back his doubts, and convince himself that earth is earth, tilled the same as in the Ukraine. What Yevtushenko accomplishes through this passage is the terrible doubt and fear of movement, the longing for a motherland that is distant and an impossibility.

These willy-nilly peasant colonists  
took (I suppose) this foreign countryside  
like fate, to each his own unhappiness:  
one's stepmother however kind-hearted  
not being the same as a mother.  
They crumbled its soil in their fingers,  
drank its water, and let their children drink,  
questioned, understood, possessed,  
felt it as earth and tied by blood to them” (line 58-66)

[...]

However much they bent their labouring backs,  
it always turned out not to be them



who ate the bread, it was the bread that ate. (73-75)

The betrayal lies in not being able to live, in his great grandfather starving his whole life and the peasants barely clinging to their new existence. They were deceived by Moscow, punished and forgotten. That was the agony of those first colonists, and yet that was not Yevtushenko's fate a few generations later. He fell in love with the forest, the quiet houses, peering through bullets holes in barn doors when Hitler was nearing Moscow, and taking in the war lightly as a child. Yet, he imagines everything around him getting smaller, only to realize that "the streets hadn't all got shorter,/but [he] was walking with a longer pace/ranging the town" (149-150). There comes the calling to leave the idyllic countryside in search of cities and travel. This also makes his return to Zima necessary. The voice of Zima Junction speaks to him when he is ready to leave once again, speaking to the young poet's soul. It tells him that his search, conflicts and constructions, are not unique, that he need not have the answer to the "lasting question". Rather, that he should meditate, listen, hold out, but most importantly explore. He must travel the world over, walk and love, and have his hometown in his mind. The voice of Zima Junction tells him he can always return, but that is time to leave. Young Yevtushenko, leaves and is eternally traveling.

A contemporary of Yevtushenko, and a new exciting voice coming out of post-war Eastern Europe, was Vasko Popa. Ted Hughes who wrote the introduction to the first English translation of the Serbian poet's work in 1967, perhaps best introduces him. For Ted Hughes, Popa's work revolves "around the living suffering spirit" (Hughes 10), after the hardships of World War II. Hughes writes that Vasko Popa is historically perceptive, yet free from spiritual/mental ownership, that "no poetry could carry less luggage than his, or be freer of predisposition and

preconception. No poetry is more difficult to outflank, yet it is in no sense defensive. His poems are trying to find out what does exist, and what the conditions really are" (Hughes 12). Hughes articulates that the primitive pre-creation atmosphere in his poetry creates dynamic verse, as well as the fragmentation of human bodies and landscapes, a surrealism of folklore (Hughes 14). The precursor to Popa's fragmented poetry is found in WWI poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, in their condemnation of nationalism. Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting", has enemy soldiers meeting in the after life, exclaiming: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend" (line 40), annihilating the artificiality of sides during wartime. He vocally opposes pro-nationalistic propaganda in his poem "Dulce et Decorum Est", fighting through his verse the old lie desperate for glory (26). Siegfried Sassoon met Owen while committed in Craiglockhart, a mental hospital in Scotland. He was admitted because his pacifism was discarded as shell shock syndrome. Along with his declaration demanding for the end of the war, he wrote powerful verse about the hypocrisy of government in sacrificing it's soldiers in political play, most notably in his poem "Blighters". He imagines a tank rolling through a Music Hall as the only way to silence the jokes that "mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume"(line 8).

The dead are also visible in Vasko Popa's poetry. In his collection of poems entitled: *One Bone to Another*, Popa grafts a story narrated by bones. The bones become separate entities, once free from the flesh they begin to talk. And yet he layers fragmentation, not only is the human body broken, dissected, but also the backbone becomes a streak of lightening, the pelvis a storm, the ribs heaven (Popa 47). In his poem "At the beginning", the sky is pieced together in these bones, and yet they perplexingly declare: "We are not anyone's bones"(line13). This fragmentation, multiplicity, and excess of violence, is mirrored in many Balkan representations. Could a Serbian poet following World War II write any differently?

Similarly, Marina Abramovic, the Yugoslav artist, worked with bones for her performance art piece *Balkan Baroque*. She sat washing large bloody cow bones wearing a white shift that became stained with blood the longer she worked, as a way of purging the death and violence of the Balkan Wars of the 1990's. Bones become metaphorically ingrained in the South Slav psyche. And what may appear to be gruesome to an outsider is the expression of coping with the disintegration of man during wartime. In Popa's poem "Belgrade", he is able to visually recreate the bombed city as "white bones among the clouds" (1), rising from "ploughed up barrows" (3) and "scattered ashes" (4). The phoenix city is golden and immortal, mythical in its survival. It becomes a second Eden with the fourth river of Paradise, believed to be the Euphrates, and the more ambiguous thirty-sixth river of Earth. Yet, it remains earth bound in carrying a nation, the "Bones of our bones" (13). This undressing of the self to a purer form is also demonstrative in "The Wedding", from *Games*. Vasko Popa asks the reader to take off his skin, to wear his bones, to exist in multiple levels, in multiple times, to be elemental as well as raw and child-like. The bones in Vasko Popa's work bleach in the sun, are dug up, are not resting. This echoes the bombardment of Serbia and the upturned graveyards. The bones reflect very ancient concepts of upturned bones being restless, and suddenly the reader flashes back to Hector's mangled body, or the wailing souls waiting for Charion to ferry them across the River Styx. However, Vasko Popa's bones sunbathe naked, are lovers, and are tricksters that catch inside dogs' throats. The bones are striped bare like the poet, each word counting, exposed, free from filigree ornamentation, purposeful and beautiful. Body is fragmented, as is sky and landscape. There is not one vision, one completed existence, but multiple images painting a Seurat image. Each dot, however inconsequentially small, is essential in the final visions.

Bones are at the centre of my writing; they are in fact the storytellers of history. Bones represent ancestry and homeland, and how we perceive our historical past. Niš, like Belgrade in Popa's poetry, has its dead dug up by the war. The concentration camp mimics the bombardment of the city. And through this act of violence, the bones speak vividly in Niš, metaphorically in Belgrade. Their physicality is unavoidable and yet terribly important to our global memory. They represent our own human fragility as well as freedom, being the vessels of our own journey.

The body as a vessel, as a bridge, is critical in Marina Abramovic's work. As one of the best-recognized artists of the performance art movement, her work has taken her all over the world, to the red light district in Amsterdam, to her farewell piece with Ulay, where they each walked from one end of the Great Wall of China to meet in the middle. Her work: *The Bridge*, documented through her interviews with Pablo J. Rico, centers upon the idea of the "space in-between", of a "permanent state of traveling" (Abramovic 50). Abramovic explores the state of leaving one home, but not having yet reached another, thus existing in that in-between space, where the mind is open. I used similarly the space in-between when Natalia is on the airplane, literally in mid-travel, hovering in the air. For Abramovic, this vulnerability and exposure, freed from barriers, is essential in feeling alive. This journey can be related to Flusser's philosophy of leaving the comfort of the initial homeland to achieve a great sense of self, of not having a terminating point or goal, but existing in the journey, in the constant motion. Ernesto "Che" Guevara articulated this idea during his travels through South America, before becoming the iconic revolutionary:

The first commandment for every good explorer is that an expedition has two points: the point of departure and the point of arrival. If your intention is to make the second

theoretical point coincide with the actual point of arrival, don't think about the means- because the journey is a virtual space that finished when it finishes, and there are as many means as there are different ways of 'finishing'. That is to say, the means are endless. (Guevara)

For Abramovic, contradictions existing in one person are important and for her to express this multi-faceted identity, her work must be fluid like a river:

I come from this Yugoslav land, the Balkans, the bridge between Eastern and Western world, between the Eastern concept of time as something very slow and relaxed and the Western concept of time where everything is completely rushed and where there is no time. On the bridge there are always winds, and maybe that's why there has always been a war, why it has been such an unstable area. It is always moving. I strongly believe that geographical conditions always affect human beings... geographical conditions make your mind think in different ways. So, genetically, by the fact of coming from the Balkans, I have had this bridge in me already. (Abramovic 55-58)

The East charges (takes) Abramovic, while the West discharges (gives) her. That is why the bridge exists as an unstable territory, making the artist alert and alive. For Abramovic, stability and pattern comes easily to people, but at the disadvantage of going against natural movement, and that everything is in movement. The bridge acts as intermediary between two opposite forces, between east and west: it is also about this duality within each person.

During the interview, Pablo J. Rico reflects on the nature of bridges, as not only passages, spaces for moving and traveling and transformation, but also as dangerous thresholds, ambiguous no-man's land hovering over two definite points (Abramovic 50). These bridges, however

ambiguous, are attractive to the traveler for their passage-- either for migration, escape, or quest (Abramovic: 58). He brings up the concept of cannibalism during the interview, as integral to post-modern society and culture. By cannibalism and "eating" he means, the "visiting, knowing, living together" with a different culture, of reclaiming a primitive energy that in the humanist sense belongs to us, which Abramovic replies with her own anecdote of leaving Yugoslavia (Abramovic: 60-62). For her, the past twenty-two years had been in constant motion, living in cars and hotel rooms, living in the great deserts of the world, from the Sahara to the Great Western Australian desert. She claims that cannibalism is a form of passage, reverberating Flusser's concept of only being able to see oneself when distant from home. That home stunts growth and transformation, as well as understanding: "The planet is the space where things happen. There is no longer any idea of borders, cultures, and nations. They are all dead. The artists are functioning in-between everything." (Abramovic 62). But Abramovic warns that cultural cannibalism has to be reciprocal, that when one takes one has to give. That balance is necessary. "More and more we are talking about global things. The whole thing with borders is, of course, political manipulation. I really think that cultures are extremely intermixed (Abramovic 64-66).

The journey is at the center of everything, a right of passage that blurs borders, history and time. It is our awakening in the world, both our escape and our responsibility, where the roads are boundless and our means endless. Homeland is a way of approaching foreignness and breaching the divide with historical interpretation, and subsequently gaining multiple identities and multiple homelands. Bones are a physical representation of this ancestry and homeland, our beginning in the world. They reflect our past, our understanding of world histories beyond

boundaries, beyond language, binding us globally. Bones are a love story, one to another, surviving war and time, our human fragility made visible. And finally, bones represent our physical selves, vessels of our own journey, taking us across the threshold, across the liminal space of uncertainties, from beginning to end, from east to west.

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