

## Skeletons

*Thousands of skeletons have been discovered  
at Vilnius, still wearing the brass buttons  
of the Grand Army of Napoleon, stopped cold  
on the road home from Moscow. Their stiff postures  
remind me of my mother's relatives  
tossed in a trench by passing Einsatzkommandos  
a few hours away in Berestovitsa,  
where I could find them, if I cared to visit.*

*Bones are everywhere—in the Rift Valley  
and in Rwanda, underfoot in the catacombs,  
crouching in caves at Herculaneum, stacked  
like crockery in Cambodia. I used to think*

*I'd make a nice clean specimen myself,  
like the box of bones they handed out years ago  
in Gross Anatomy. We passed the bones around,  
rubbing the bumps and sounding the crippled Latin:*

*capitulum, epicondyle, a vocabulary  
for looking underneath the skin: ars moriendi  
instead of ars vivendi, saying goodbye  
to the flesh over a long lifetime of study*

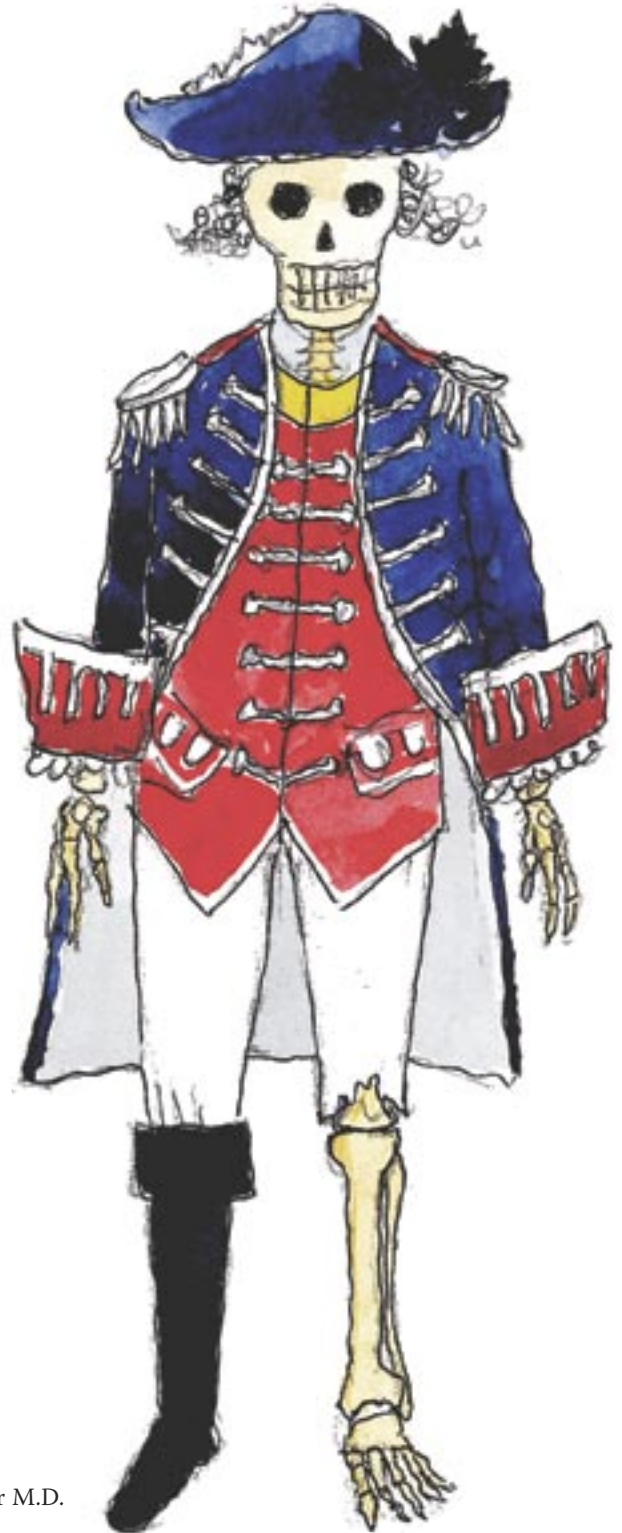
*and discipline: aficionados of disease,  
doctors of disintegration. And you see  
we are perfect at this diablerie; for a fee  
(a sol or two) we will predict your death*

*before you can imagine it, when your skin  
still flushes with pleasure, and the blood pumps  
in your thighs, dear amateurs! And after you're dead,  
perhaps you'll visit my quaint relatives*

*in Belarus: tell them your sad stories  
and ask them to sing those sacred melodies  
one hears below the ground. In the meantime,  
while shreds of appetite still cling to your bones,*

*here's my prescription: Burn, burn, burn!*

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