

E.C. BELLI

The Douaumont Ossuary

The lantern of death was lit
last night. The wick patiently waiting
its turn, stern under a wax coat,
but dancing wildly, once lit,
like fern in the north wind.
Through the little windowed alcoves
and rows of widowed women,
the remains sat grave and cracked
against the dew settled above the graves.
This was once the front. For some,
memories of faces turned mauve;
for others, of hanging about a stove,
clinging to a cross. *Verdun, Verdun,*
un nom damné! whisper the specters
of past soldiers overseeing the ceremony,
some sinking into the moss, others
wafting through the cloisters.
The death-bell rings. We are told
to imagine two hundred thirty thousand
voices hushed in one cloud's passing
and now understand why we were
forbidden, as children, to mention
that word in front of our grandparents:
Guerre. We remember why we were told,
Children of Europe, keep your lips
tightly fastened. At least until the next one!

