

**LET US FORGET**

Pauline Michel  
(Translated by Nigel Spencer)

*For the last survivor of World War I.*

May memory-blanks be as plentiful  
as the live rounds rained on trenches  
Let's lift our heads  
and not be riddled with memories

Let us forget  
the rats of fear  
the fangs of hunger  
Who will eat who first?  
Let us crush  
the vermin of bitterness

The first war would have been the last  
had they suffered alongside us  
those who trigger such absurdity  
such atrocity

These gravediggers who bury us alive  
with their dead consciences  
have conceived our sepulchres  
within their skulls.

The aim of warlords  
is a piece of earth  
stolen from its owners  
a space to glory  
in values all their own  
Let's remove their names from history  
and write them on the skulls  
of those they led to slaughter

They outlive us  
in gilded celebration  
of never being wrong  
regardless of the bodies  
piled forgetfully backstage

No tombstones  
for the nameless dead

Oh swear  
on the sweat  
and the ossuaries of Douaumont  
cynical name  
for the dolorous mountain of sacrifice

Here lie  
the remains of those who dreamed  
of a better humanity

Here lie  
shin-bones  
that marched in the muck  
as they approached realization

Here lie  
jawbones of speechless soldiers  
sacrificial offerings

Here lie  
knuckles  
of men who'd hoped to fold them  
around a loved one  
a woman with flesh to love  
around children  
with a future to hope for

Please  
let us rid ourselves of these incessant insects  
tattooing our skins with definitions  
puncturing our imaginations with horrific precision

The sludge of trenches  
is the spit of the mighty  
mixed with the tears and blood of fighters

This muddy end  
Is Dante's hell

And how is one  
to survive such sorrow?

Let us forget  
but you  
don't you ever  
dare to forget  
And never repeat  
your hatred till the day you die  
your darkness of soul  
choking off the very line to life

War blinds  
the eye of earth  
shutting out all light  
War binds  
the earth in grief  
though brotherhood is a right

*Resquiescamus in pace*

Let us rest in peace  
and not in death.