

Rows

Armenians in Turkey: 1915-1918 - 1,500,000 Deaths

Nazi Holocaust: 1938-1945 - 6,000,000 Deaths

Pol Pot in Cambodia: 1975-1979 - 2,000,000 Deaths

Rwanda: 1994 - 800,000 Deaths

The deaths are only approximate of course.

Who can count them?

Just four examples to suggest it was a bad century.

I leave the US and Russia out of this so as to not seem political.

I leave much else out as well.

It is nothing new – not just a 20th century sort of thing.

Where is the city that is not sitting on the bodies of the
indigenous ones?

From the beginning this thing called civilization has
thrived in the compost of the innocent.

Our way of life was not built
in the midst of wild flowers
nor on river pebbles.

Nor was it otherwise with the Zulus or the Aztecs or the Chinese
all of whom

like glaciers grinding away the surface of the land
and depositing it elsewhere

laid down slow suffering over the centuries.

They were the locusts before the Europeans came.

They were just a little slower getting their hands on steel.

From whatever continent they were no different from the time they
started growing things in rows.

What was it about those rows that inspired their inventors
to also grow pyramids
with their crushing vertical rows

piled on rows.

One begs for the asteroid

That will put an end to these dinosaurs

Or that they will soon be transmuted into birds

That mammals will emerge from the muddy burrows
in which they have hidden all these centuries

And give birth to their young

Alive

And in the sun.

One prays that it is still not too late.

But we are speaking of the actual

The past

What really happened.

And

What continues in the meantime.

It seems criminal that new happiness should sprout among the rows.

Are we zebras that munch contentedly on the grass minutes
after their sister is taken by the lions?

It seems a betrayal that we should aspire for contentment.

And perhaps it is.

We forgive the children.

They after all don't yet know.

But our own blood

that should know better

Rejoices at each sun rise

each friendly word

each assorted chocolate.

Welcomes each day we find ourselves not in too much pain.

It cannot be helped.

Where else would happiness find a time and a place to be?