

SREBRENICA JIGSAW

*(For Robert McNeil, M.B.E., on hearing him talk at Portobello Book Festival,
Edinburgh, 5th October 2014, about his work in Srebrenica after the genocide there
in July 1995)*

Imagine it this way – this way there's no blood, no fragments
Of flesh or bone or clothes, no maggots, no stench:
A life-size jigsaw of a photograph
Of a happy man, or healthy youth, or grinning kid...

A monster stamps on the box, scatters
The crushed pieces over the ground;
Urines and defecates on them;
Digs a hole and buries the bits...

Then returns, sometime later;
Digs up the pieces; takes them away;
Buries the bits in different holes.
The heat and rain beat down on the earth...

Seasons pass. We are asked to dig them up again;
Clean them; try to fit the broken pieces back together;
Search for what's left of the hand that waved,
Knowing we will find no trace of that smiling face...

Now, multiply this image by eight thousand...

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