

A Poem by Marina Romani

In Black and White

The War had been over fifteen years
and we, college sophomores, passed
our days in technicolor, indulging still
in dramas of the kind that animated high-school
lives—my clothes, their clothes, her hair,
romances quickly blossomed, withered fast.

When the Big War ended I was four
a toddler in a city occupied no more
and everything around burst out in color
whole streets pranced like happy dragons
flowers smiled upon our heroes everywhere.

I grew, and knew who the bad guys were
who the War heroes—the movies made that clear.
What else was known by thinking people
I did not know, or—I dare say—care.

And then, in a history class one afternoon
we heard we'd see a film—anticipated respite
from a tedious hour of professor talk.

It was a film in black and white
and there they were: large dirt pits filled
with piles of bones, no, not mere bones,
human skeletons clothed in decaying skin.
Nearby some skeletons still moved about
in hairless skulls the deep-set eyes wide open
—not comprehending they might live again—
on shambling bones in loose pale skin a hair patch
marked each pubis, a meaty penis hung on some

(while a whole body starved that part kept its mass
— a harbinger of hope? or hideous joke?)
Many, most, lay intertwined in dirt
the rest seemed beings beyond despair
a few stood dazed, a few took shaky steps
—all in a film we saw that afternoon
in black and white . . .

The film came with narration, I suppose,
we understood what we had seen
we came out into daylight without words,
those would come later—atrocities, the Holocaust,

but just then: images indelible, and silence in the sun.

Marina Romani's poems have appeared in the *Porter Gulch Review*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *Tor House Newsletter*, *CWC Literary Review*, *Poetry Pacific*, and previous issues of *Homestead Review*. Her first book, *Child Interwoven* (Park Place Publications, 2016) is a collection of memories in poem and prose of her Russian girlhood in China during the years of World War II and its aftermath.