

MONARCH continued

A member of the Korean National Academy of Arts, Choi Dongho is a Distinguished Professor at Kyungnam University, as well as a Professor Emeritus and past Dean of the Graduate School at Korea University, from which he holds a PhD in Korean Literature. He has been a Visiting Scholar at UCLA and at Waseda University, and has taken part in the University of Iowa's International Writing Program.

His major prizes and distinctions include the Modern Buddhist, Daesan, Park Dujin, Gosan Yun Sundo, Yusim and Kim Satgot literary awards, as well as the Manhae Grand Prize for Literature and Art. He participated in the December 2011 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony, becoming the first Korean officially invited by the Nobel Committee to do so.

He was the founding President of Korea's Poetry Loving Society and has served as President and Councilor of the Society of Korean Poets. He is the Editor of Lyric Poetry and Poetics, the Chair of the Changwon KC International Literary Prize, a member of the Managing Committee of the Hoam Award, and President of the KS World Poetry Festival.

In Monarch Butterfly's title poem, dedicated to the poet's wife, the

butterfly's life stages poignantly recall dynamics common to all of nature and humanity. Other poems in the collection concur in interpreting how an integral life may unfold: from cocoons of contemplative marginality to flights of higher potential.

For Choi Dongho, a Buddhist poet with resonance for other faith traditions, liberation and harmony depend on overcoming self-will. Monarch Butterfly's "A Great Sword" this as an essential commitment to "stop the killing and disorder of the world" by wielding a "living force" like that of a "sword kept in its worn-out sheath..."

Acknowledging the challenges of a "life of transience" in an "age without love," Choi Dongho uses his literary craft to bolster an uncompromising empowerment, empathetically engaged with materiality.

Idiosyncratic and observant, Monarch Butterfly pluralistic rewards in the cosmos of creation: from a "sound of drying paste" where "darkness swells from behind the wallpaper," to lovingly wry appreciations of past selves, kinfolk, sages and strangers, to "how high and blue the sky is" when the urge to "turn it off, your cellphone" gains the upper hand.

In Choi Dongho's

utopian ecology, impulses of inner truth foster an unobtrusively radical sense of inclusiveness.

This major writer's poetic testament has crucial relevance for how we live today. The ISBN number for the paperback edition of the book is 978-0-939378-17-3. Below is a small sampling of poetry from Monarch Butterfly

A GERANIUM WHICH SWALLOWED LIGHTNING

Blood of thunder with lightning
Bursting into red bloom
among dark clouds
Revelation of the sky, setting sunset aflame

The hill where lightning struck
The fin of a great fish
A lightning rod, wordless like a broken reed

Alleys with scraps of paper borne on the wings of wind
Windowpanes of tiny stores
Raindrop-plastered flyers stuck together

Geranium buds,
Swallowing lightning on the flat roof
Poems of expelled lives as candle flames

THE OLD MAN AND THE HORIZON

The stooped silhouette
Of the old man pulling his dog
The horizon under his

knees
Courteous as a faithful servant
Attending the master of his past life

In the afterlife the dog will become the master
The old man a dog;
They will be living a life of the future
Pulling each other's silhouettes
After the wave from the far sea
Has sent back the last remnants of darkness
Slapping its buttocks at the coastline

The children playing with the dog on the sand
Where the dawn seagulls honk for food
Will also roll the wheel of life
And one day again at sunset
Become old men pulling the dark sun
With their stooped silhouettes,
The horizon under their knees

A GREEN LEAF

On a rainy day, looking out

the window at the autumn night
Deep pupils gazing into
Myself in a dark room
Black hair wet with water
Blowing in the breeze

A green leaf
Not yet turned red
Sticking to the window
Like the small palm
Of my daughter gone abroad to study

Will not fall off despite the wind and rain

MONARCH BUTTERFLY - To My Wife

A butterfly grasping the earth
Spreading its tiger-striped feathers
Above the waves is flying

On faraway hills over the ocean
Clusters of small wildflowers
Blooming
Withering, waiting
For the butterfly to come back through the rainstorm

When, to the butterfly soaring above the desert

Magnificent echoes of the mountains
Where the heroes of ancient times would play
Evoke the spirit of the wind asleep on the mountain peak

The cloud-sheathed moon
Watches a caterpillar
Dangling on the leaves, stealing bits of sleep
Preparing to spread its tiger-striped golden feathers
Emerging from its cocoon

A WREN ON A MUD-WALLED HUT

When the sun having shone pale all day long
Drops beyond the mountain

A single streak
Smokes up long and white

In a mud-walled house at the foot of the mountain
The dinner table set for the child not yet home

The shadow of a bent back on the wall
Turning up the kerosene lamp, squatting down

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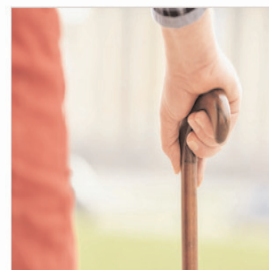
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