

## *Poetry ≠ Poetry*

DMZ Colony. Justified text. As if one warm hand were to happen upon its matte material in a dimly lit bookstore one weekday afternoon, following an innumerable cycle of flipping through its ink-taxing pages, you'd think it was a memoir. The page feels safe, calm, organized – with its symmetrical alignment and pristine spacing, your mind is given the pretext of fiction. The reality that should be considered is that Choi's justified paragraph and narrative formatting works for her goal of using translation as a throughline of history, military violence, U.S. imperialism, and legacy. If we asked Choi to rework what she has presented in her collection, if we asked her to morph her Ahn Hak-sop section into a sonnet, a ghazal, or a villanelle, it would then no longer convey what she currently conveys. While poetry form can be freeing, in many areas of this collection, form will be constricting in the sense that the voice of the narrative will be suppressed (and a driving factor of the collection is voice, language, individual accounts, and translation). In turning her work here into what society deems conventional poetry—which is quite outdated in its constriction—then DMZ Colony will not be DMZ Colony.

DMZ Colony. Historical – narrative. Where, on the first page of original creation, rather than translation, *the waist of a nation*, we are given the historical context of the collection's title through the explanation of the Korean Demilitarized Zone (Don Mee Choi, pg. 5). But, this is poetry, no? Where are the line breaks giving one thought, compacted into a single sentence, three different meanings? How come Choi has opted not to relay this reality she knows of, and that of which has known her, through wittily-welded metaphors or hue-highlighted imagery? Where's the enigma that moves the stubs of our fingers to turn – rip – the page over, or the clever, intentional puzzles for us to decipher – where is the poetry? Is it not here? Flip – rip (does this excite you?) – the page. There, as an element of her description of a flock of snow geese's calls, Choi repeats the word “return” 28 times in uninterrupted, complete succession, broken only by two line breaks and ellipses. Is this, the caesuras, “poetry”? Throughout the collection, Choi doesn't simply use repetition to create and sustain rhythm throughout her work; instead, she uses

repetition to reflect on the trauma of the narrative. Furthermore, the author employs the power of

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memory to repeat certain words, phrases, and even simple vowels, which are funneled through the transformative leverage of language and translation.

DMZ. Colony. White space. In variation. Some pages, such as on page 7—where Choi characterizes the chorus of the snow geese, are filled with white space, empty with the unnerving call for submission. As if the speaker is inviting you to engage with the text, to blacken the pages with your own stream of consciousness. Other pages are spaceless, a black hole of content. Take page 20, where Choi gives a biography of Ahn Hak-sop, where ellipses separate independent and dependent clauses alike, with each sensical inch taken, with no room for addition. Choi uses white space – and the absence of so – to indicate the openness of reality, the bounds of history, the finality of the text. For instance, Mr. Ahn’s life is set in stone; his days, unfortunately, cannot be changed. But the capabilities of mere vowels can be expanded upon – ergo, this is often accompanied by white space. The visual aspects of white space – or the absence of so – pique the mind’s imagination, connecting with Choi’s descriptions of war crimes, loss, isolation, and political force. DMZ Colony. Emotive. Where, throughout the collection, Choi’s diction of the brutal nature of Korea’s history with war and political conflict settles into you. The author completely colors the Korean Demilitarized Zone canvas through her descriptive and concrete language, historical recounts, and narrative style.

DMZ Colony. Experimental. Where, one isn’t exploring new territory but rather bringing a new seed to foreign soil, then letting it sink into the ground and giving it a few drops of water to see what will happen. There’s more emphasis on compiling the tools creatives already have than birthing something new. You won’t find sonnet coronas; there aren’t any pantoums; you’d be cursed with perpetuity if you flip the pages of this collection in anticipation, waiting for any of the traditional formats typical of poetic bards of the past. While Choi still employs elements you’d expect to see in conventional poetry, such as line breaks, caesuras, logopoeia, and repetition, she steps into the other – the Seoul native uses unconventional media to break through the four-brick-walled box: the first wall brandished with a P, the second with an O carved into it, the third labeled E and the fourth carrying an M. Poetry ≠ Poem. That is to say, what Choi does in

this collection is suggest poetry—which at the heart is simply (creative) expression through language—need not be bound by the rules of a poem. DMZ Colony. Multimedia in nature.

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Iridescent lake, reflective water, blue. Home to journalism, home to creative nonfiction, home to maps, home to photographs, home to doodles, home to vowels. Choi uses these elements to challenge what poetry is, asserting that all poetry not be poems – a notion which does not go unfounded on me, still meandering down my own perpetual road of writing and creating. Where, 59 years ago, Frank O’Hara’s Lunch Poem worked to reshape what poetry could be, DMZ Colony further pushes these boundaries.