

The Poetics of Transience in Marjorie Evasco's *Skin of Water: Selected Poems*

Shirley O. Lua¹
De La Salle University, Philippines

Abstract

This article seeks to examine the poetics of transience manifested in the poetry of Marjorie Evasco. She is the 2010 SEA Write Award winner from the Philippines who writes both in English and Visayan Cebuano. The article focuses on several selected poems from her recent collection, *Skin of Water: Selected Poems* (2009). It underscores how Evasco's poetic situations reflect on life's transitory character – the brevity of relationship, the fragility of a child's body, the passing of pain, an encounter with trees and the inevitability death. It also investigates how Evasco's poetic vision imagines ways of confronting the transient and even triumphing over it. The poet has resorted to clever and creative stratagems, such as conjuring images of things ephemeral, the naming of things to hold dominion over them, the manipulation of rhythmic breaks, the deployment of metamorphic imaging and the evocation of deep emotions of love, pain and joy.

Abstract in Malay

Makalah ini mengkaji puitika kesementaraan yang terdapat di dalam puisi Marjorie Evasco. Beliau adalah pemenang Hadiah SEA Write 2010 dari Filipina yang menulis di dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan Visayan Cebuano. This article seeks to examine the poetics of transience manifested in the poetry of Marjorie Evasco. Makalah ini menumpukan perhatian kepada beberapa puisi pilihan dari koleksi puisinya yang terbaru berjudul *Skin of Water: Selected Poems* (2009). Ia merakamkan suasana puitis di dalam penulisan Evasco yang memaparkan kesementaraan kehidupan – keterbatasan hubungan, kerapuhan tubuh kanak-kanak, kesebentaran sakit, pertembungan dengan alam sekitar dan ketentuan kematian. Makalah juga mengkaji bagaimana Evasco merakamkan kesementaraan kesemua kehidupan ipelbagai ni melalui pandangan puitis beliau dan kejayaannya berhadapan dengan kesementaraan ini. Pemuisi ini telah menggunakan strategi bijak dan kreatif di dalam permainan imej-imej kesementaraan, menamakan objek-objek demi dominasi ke atas mereka, manipulasi irama, penggunaan imej metamorfik dan kebangkitan emosi yang dalam mengenai cinta, kesakitan dan kegembiraan.

¹ Shirley O. Lua teaches literature at De La Salle University in Manila. She specialises in Philippine literature, diaspora studies and genre studies. She is the Field Bibliographer on Philippine journals for the Modern Language Association (MLA) International Bibliography. Her articles have appeared in books and anthologies such as *Writing Asia: The Literature in Englishes* (Singapore: Ethos, 2007), *Spirituality and the Filipino Film* (Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 2010), and *44 Cineastas Filipinos* (Instituto Cervantes de Manila, 2011).

Keywords

Transience, enlightenment, metamorphosis, naming, rhythmic break, Selah

Keywords in Malay

Kesementaraan, kesedaran, metamorfosis, menamakan, jeda ritma, Selah

Of all the arts, poetry reflects on the ephemeral quality of life most intimately. The psalmist of ancient days sings, "Certainly every man at his best state is but vapour./ Surely every man walks about like a shadow" (*The Holy Bible* 487). The poet's revelation makes us shudder at the certitude of mortal destiny.

In *The Thousand and One Nights*, King Shahriyar, because of his wife's unfaithfulness, ordains that he would marry a virgin every night and have her killed the next day. Shahrazad (Scheherazade), the Vizier's daughter said to be well-versed in ancient poetry and legends, offers herself as a bride hoping to be the source of deliverance for the daughters of the kingdom. In the wedding chamber, she requests that her sister Dunyazad be brought to her as she wishes to say farewell. Dunyazad in turn pleads her sister to tell them a tale of marvel to pass the night. Thus begins Shahrazad's epic-weaving which lasts for a thousand and one nights. In the course of this period, she has borne the King three sons which she presents to him at the end of her telling. Deeply moved, the King spares her life. The kingdom is once again lighted. It is said that King Shahriyar rules thereafter in justice and truth. He and Shahrazad live happily ever after.

The Thousand and One Nights is a vivid illustration of life's mocking transience. A night of union and ecstasy unveils a morning of parting and terror. The joy of a new bride turns into anguish and disgrace at the rising of the sun. Shahrazad's imperative then is to delay and delude, in order to survive and elude death. This is how she triumphs over the inevitability of transience – using the power of the word to concoct a web of tales, drawing out stories from frames of stories, and even from a larger frame (what Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa terms the Chinese box method [101-08]).

Shahrazad's stratagem can be used as an analogy to describe the poet's relationship to life. The poet is a storyteller who wields the word and sings forth its cadence to confront the transient, prolong the years, and if possible, attain immortality. S/he threads together the verses and summons what Argentinean maestro Jorge Luis Borges would call "the star of interior epiphanies" (11). Borges believes in the revolutionary potential of the intermingling or collision of things distant, its capacity to overturn the set of laws that governs the conduct of a world. He says, "We came upon the metaphor, the invocation by which we disordered the rigid universe" (10).

To illustrate further, let us consider the work of poet Marjorie Evasco, the 2010 SEA Write Award winner from the Philippines who writes in both English and Cebuano, from her recent collection *Skin of Water: Selected Poems*.²

The brevity of human relationship has been the subject of many poems. Evasco's "La Condition Humaine" (after the painting of René Magritte) reflects on the irony of such impermanence, how it has been foreseen. The poem imagines a man and a woman waking up after a night together. Gazing at Magritte's painting which seems to "function" as a window, the woman realises and accepts:

... how inside
 And outside the rooms of love
 The landscape is not always seamless;
 How, every time she turned her heart
 Into words to invent the true form
 Of being, dustmotes were already trapped
 In the light of images, like this morning
 Vanished fast into another day.

In no time they shall each be elsewhere. (10)

The poem concludes with an assurance (or is it a resignation?) that the relationship will not last, and that soon – "in no time" – they shall be separated and be in different places. Such is the universal and irrevocable human condition. Nonetheless, the poet seeks to stay the evanescent by conjuring images of things transient. As Magritte's painting frames an aspect of human fate, the image of "dustmotes... trapped/ In the light" also serves to frame – in one moment in time – the one-night liaison between the man and the woman.

Still in another poem – "Is It the Kingfisher?" – the poet is made aware of relationship's transitory feature by the sudden appearance of a kingfisher while she and her companion are enjoying the seawaves:

It is this bird that greets us as we come
 Round the eastern bend of this island;

² Born in Tagbilaran City, Marjorie Evasco writes poetry in two languages, English and Cebuano-Visayan. She received the Manila Critics Circle's National Book Awards for all her five books: *Dreamweavers* (1986), *Ochre Tones: Poems in English and Cebuano* (1999), *Six Women Poets: Inter/Views* (co-authored with Edna Manlapaz, 1996), *A Life Shaped by Music: Andrea Ofilada Veneracion and the Philippine Madrigal Singers* (2001) and *Ani: The Life and Art of Hermogena Borja Lungay* (2006). Her collection, *Skin of Water* (2009), is a bilingual edition of selected poems in English and Spanish translations. She is a recipient of the 1999 Metrobank Outstanding Teacher Award and the 2010 SEA Write Award. She is Professor of literature and creative writing at De La Salle University-Manila.

Tells us the hairbreadth boundary between us
Is transient as the air, permeable to the blue
Of tropic skies and mountain gentian. (38)

But is it really a kingfisher? All that the poet sees is a “bolt of burning blue,” perhaps the flash of a kingfisher’s wings. But the “blueness” resounds with the blueness of the skies and the sea, and of the gentian flowers on the mountain side. It strikes the depth of the poet’s soul and makes her “desire god on this island/ With you today: basic and blue...” “Desiring god” suggests a craving of the spirit, a longing for something that is not of the earth, and this is linked to the relationship – “with you.” As in “La Condition Humaine,” relationships are volatile and unstable. The poet then attempts to hold on to that moment – to the relationship – by naming the kingfisher and identifying the “bolt of burning blue.” The poet knows what is passing has to be named. In naming, one extends its life. In naming, one holds dominion over it. In naming, one creates anew.

This facility to name is perceived as power in works of literature such as Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea*. In her splendid fantasy series, true magic lies in the knowledge and naming of things. With naming, one can bring the wind, still a dragon, bind the shadow, or hold a person’s life in his keeping. “Only in silence the word,” Le Guin says (“The Creation”). Like an archmage, the poet utters words, summons things by name and binds them to her will.

In Evasco’s poem “Despedida,” the poet participates in a ritual of murmuring with her predecessors – the Spanish writer Federico García Lorca, the American poet Ted Berrigan and the Mexican master of the marvellous real, Juan Rulfo. Like Susana of Comala whose mouth is filled with earth, she whispers her story of a barely eighteen-year old Margarita, “gored/ In the belly by the bull’s horn, almost bled dry,” after bringing forth a child from her womb (34).

Such is the violent picture of pain and of dying that befalls a daughter of Eve. But the poet knows a way of escaping death. García Lorca has advised, “dejad el balcón abierto” (qtd. in Evasco 34). And so she writes: “[H]er life crossed/ The threshold and opened the balcony to the sun” (34). No other force can draw back the soul from its descent into Hades than the redemptive power of the Word and the music of Orpheus’ lyre.

In another poem, the poet depicts an age-old method to ward off death, and to keep the world. In “Solsequiem,” she engages in an ekphrastic dialogue with the Spanish cubist artist Pablo Picasso. A tender scene of motherhood is re-visualised on seeing Picasso’s “Maternidad.” In the poet’s version, the mother fears that her child will be taken away from her. “She had known ever since she felt/ the miracle of his heart quickening in her,/ it would end the way it began...” She embraces the fragile boy, “her arms/ gathering his hurt body

again and again/ into her indigo mantle,” thus, driving out death “into the world’s double horizon/ of sienna and cyan, cyan and cerulean,/ primary hues of earth meeting sea,// and sea meeting sky” (14). The poet remarks that it is this “shield of her love” which causes death to “quietly slip out” and the world to come to a “complete silence” (14).

“Maternidad” belongs to what art critics have identified as Picasso’s Blue Period (1901-1904), wherein the colour blue serves as the dominant hue in his canvas, evoking a tone of serenity and sadness. The azure vividness of the mother’s mantle resonates with the blue darkness of the room’s wall and contrasts with the white lightness of the boy’s tunic. Evasco interprets Picasso’s art as a portrait of a maternal love in its potency. Moreover, she posits that a work of art is reflexive of the artist’s heart. The artist cares for his world, like a mother for her child:

... Anchoring this vision
 on the woman at the center of a room
 mending a child’s heart, Picasso tends
 to the world before it completely shatters,
 his hands shaping a small blue universe
 illuminating the script, enfleshing the Word. (14)

This is how the poet envisions the artist’s work – nurturing the world he lives in with so much blueness of love in his hands. As the medieval monks illuminate the manuscripts with translucent colours from lapis lazuli and indigo, so too does the artist illuminate the universe with his vision and sensitivity. Art becomes a means of sheltering the world from a shattering end. The last line “enfleshing the Word” is an allusion to the Christian Bible’s “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:1). The poem likens the artist’s mission to that of the Christ’s, and the artist to a saviour and healer.

Furthermore, the poem itself as an art is also reflexive of the poet’s heart. The artist’s art has also “enfleshed” and “illuminated” the poet’s mind, making her see the gentleness of a mother’s love, the quiet strength which compels death to flee, and a world that needs safekeeping. Through her poetic vision, an extension of the artist’s, the poet has transformed the word into flesh and its light dwells among us to heal and move hearts.

In another poem, Evasco offers a parallel scenario of motherhood, how the mother deals with a child’s possible doom. In “Song for My Son,” the mother’s heart breaks for her lizard-son, who lies in a perilous condition, “in the hollow between the double-/ Walls we built around us against/ The heat, the cold, the dark” (40). The lizard-son is pinioned to the ledge by a nail. The poet-mother cries,

Who was it then hammered,

As if by accident, the nail in?
It pierced your left webbed foot
And pinned you to certain death (40)

But the poet clings to the hope that nothing is permanent in this world, even pain, or a moonless night. In a sense, she affirms the transitory nature of things, perhaps, invoking “Love, for lack of any other name for faith” (40). Perhaps this is what the Italian fictionist Italo Calvino, in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, a compilation of his Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, would call, “a profession of faith in the persistence of what seems most fated to perish” (6). Therefore, this is how mother handles the future: she remains and waits. Likewise, the son lies still and waits (perhaps due to the immaturity or helplessness of youth). He “would not sever reptilian foot/ To re-grow another” but suffers for years being “pierced” and “stuck in the dark” (40). Through the years, the mother patiently waits and prays for the “[c]rack of birth when wing will seek the air.” And the miracle finally descends. The crack of dawn comes, when the “[m]agic of words strung together/ Like seed pearls as small as eggs” seeks to “heal in all of us, all things broken” (42).

How else does the poet cope with her son's plight? The elucidation entails for a moment a digression (incidentally, a digression is technique of putting off the closure, a form of circumventing time).³

A Chinese legend (the earliest record dates back to the late Tang dynasty) recounts the fated love between Liang Shanbo, a poor scholar, and Zhu Yingtai, daughter of an affluent family who is already betrothed to another. Liang, broken-hearted, falls into illness and dies. Zhu, on her way to her wedding, stops by the grave of Liang. The tomb suddenly cracks open as if a lightning from heaven has struck it. Zhu throws herself into the grave to join her beloved. According to the legend, a pair of butterflies materialises from the grave and flies away together, never to be separated.

This legend speaks of the star-crossed union between lovers of disparate classes. It suggests the sheer hopelessness of an individual struggle against dominant social forces. The minstrel of the olden days, in singing of this tragic romance, thought of providing a way of escape for the lovers – by imaging their butterfly metamorphosis. In doing so, he also translated the fragility of love into flight and the perishability of mortal flesh into alternate forms of reality. Hence, the metaphoric intervention immortalises the lovers and causes the legend to endure.

³ Calvino echoes this same sentiment. He has remarked that Laurence Sterne's novel is full of digressions: “The digression is a strategy for putting off the ending, a multiplying of time within the work, a perpetual evasion or flight. Flight from what? From death, of course, says Carlos Levi, in an introduction he wrote to an Italian edition of *Tristram Shandy*” (46).

The poet likewise resorts to metamorphic imaging to deal with a troubled future and to construct a way out for her loved one. In “Song for My Son,” the son has built walls around himself and has opted to stay in his own dark world, detached from his family. The poet-mother then re-conceives her son as a lizard pinned to the ledge, enclosed by walls. The lizard is a resilient reptile, able to stay alive and long in tough and dark places, even in captivity. Thus, her lizard-son survives. When it is time for the son to restore his relationship with the family, the mother envisages her son breaking out of his shell – “[t]he little dragon curled up in its sac” (42). Her son is reborn as a dragon – a sturdy, majestic beast. The metaphoric turn has delivered her son from doom.

The poet constantly dreams of alternative ways of confronting the transient. In “Bodies of Gold,” the persona takes a leisurely morning walk in Iowa City’s park with a friend. To their delight, they run into a forest of maples crowned with leaves of red, bronze and ochre. A poet cannot resist such splendour, and desires to possess it through some means. She knows where her passion lies:

We live to forge our way with words,
Bring out the colors of an entire year’s sunsets
Kept warm in the running sap, each fingertip-leaf

Burning back always into inevitable night. (8)

From her trove of myths and memories, the poet recovers two gems: her brother’s painting of the araguaney, and Prometheus’ bequest. The araguaney tree of Venezuela is magnificent especially when its trumpet-shaped flowers burst into yellow bloom. Her brother has attempted to portray such magnificence by painting on canvas. This image in turn recalls the poet to the gift of Prometheus – the torch of fire stolen from the gods to give protection to mortals. Thus begins her poem:

Turns copper-gold the *araguaney* now.
My brother painted its shimmer
The year he lost himself in Venezuela.

It was this burning tree of memory
Led him back to that first theft
When human eye beheld god’s fire,

Singing the imagination to waking.
He found his way out of the forest when
Seed, flower and trunk were forged in flame. (8)

Linking this to her park experience, the poet ends with:

Into a woodland trail ablaze, the sugar maples
Simmering: this yellow umbrella of air engulfs us,
Foundlings of the god who breathes fire. (8)

The poet is aware that such image would not last – “We foresee the time earth will fold unto itself.” Perhaps it is not so much the image – the image of blazing trees – that the poet is concerned about, but the preservation of that “luminous moment” of seeing, as poet Edward Hirsch would say (227). She desires to capture that act, hold on to it, safeguard it, as one would cherish not so much a diamond, but the act of looking at a precious stone. Thus, before the last stanza, the poet resorts to: “Yet now in Squire Point Park, we suddenly step // Into a woodland trail ablaze...” (8).

The rhythmic break after “we suddenly step” is significant. It is a way of detaining, of arresting a moment. It is the catch of breath that takes place even before the eyes are aware of what they have seen. It is the pause before a secret is revealed, the beat of the heart before an encounter with the beloved. It foretells an imminent destiny, and turns an ordinary day into an extraordinary life.

In *The Thousand and One Nights*, perhaps Shahrazad’s most clever ruse is to stop somewhere in her telling and suspend the tale for another night. Taking an immense risk, she leaves the tale hanging like a desirable fruit. When the executioner postpones his act to await the taste of more juicy morsels, she is rewarded with another day. Of this, Italo Calvino, the Italian master of the fantastic, observes:

The art that enables Scheherazade to save her life every night consists of knowing how to join one story to another, breaking off at just the right moment – two ways of manipulating the continuity and discontinuity of time. It is a secret of rhythm, a way of capturing time that we can recognize from the very beginning: in the epic by means of the metrical effects of the verse, in prose narrative by those effects that make us eager to know what comes next. (37-38)

Calvino likens Shahrazad’s (Scheherazade) “art” to an enjambment technique used by the poet in the formation of language patterns to produce a rhythmic and sense effect. Both Shahrazad and the poet are time-players, mages in manoeuvring the temporal measurement and equilibrium of an ever-evolving but rigidly structured universe. Shahrazad’s narrative-suspension trick is a work of transience to combat life’s transitoriness. Paradoxically, the poet’s effort to preserve the moment accentuates at the same time its transience.

Of moments that produce epiphanies or revelations about the life of things, the poet Edward Hirsch says:

The epiphanic moment is a radical attempt to defy the temporal order and dramatize an intense moment of monumental change. Such moments defy continuity. These intense recognitions create gaps or ruptures in the text. They move from the ordinary to some other extraordinary realm of experience in order to negate time itself. (243)

Yet the epiphany in “Bodies of Gold” goes beyond that momentary meeting with the trees. There is more in the poem, and this is the epiphany that the readers must experience in their encounter with the poem. When the poet concludes with “Foundlings of the god who breathes fire” (8), we hear a soundless whisper: “Selah” (*The Holy Bible* 487).

The word “Selah” appears frequently in the Hebrew book of psalms. For instance, psalm 39 reads, “You make his beauty melt away like a moth;/ Surely every man is a vapour. Selah” (487). “Selah” is said to be a musical interlude, or an instruction to the reader to pause and listen. It is more than a gasp or a heart-beat. It is the deep intake of breath, the lull before a storm, the silence in the presence of the divine. The reader-listener becomes the disciple who sits for hours to gain what Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata calls “[e]nlightenment... through the eye awakened inwardly.” It calls for solitude and time set apart for that purpose. As the poet Wallace Stevens has said, “Poetry is like prayer in that it is most effective in solitude and in the times of solitude as, for example, in the earliest morning” (qtd. in Hirsch 244). Evasco, in another poem “Dancing a Spell,” likewise expresses this: “Tonight in the shadows of our dance,/ I tell my soul to grow quiet,/ Become lake, reflect unbroken moon” (36). And she realises: “At this watershed of words/ Silence is our breath and base for music” (36).

What further insight can the readers glean from “Bodies of Gold”? The phrase “bodies of gold” initially refers to the trees – the maple or araguaney – with their coloured exterior. The third stanza states: “Seed, flower and trunk were forged in flame” (8). The tree image however turns into a metaphysical conceit as it alludes to “god’s fire” (8).

In one version of the Greek myth, the gods of Mt. Olympus create men out of various metals – the gold race covers the superior models of men while the iron race the inferior ones, of evil nature and existing in sorrows. In another version, Prometheus is the creator of men, and his gift aims to make men superior, by allowing them to learn crafts of survival and strength through fire.

Thus, when the poet muses that this morning walk is a “quest of waking the body up to the trees/ Standing red, bronze and ochre...” (8), she is referring to their own bodies, that must be “forged in flame” (8) through some sort of an encounter with nature. Subsequently in this woodland, the maples’ “yellow umbrella of air engulfs us,” so that the poet and her friend are caught “ablaze” (8). In this, the poet recognises that they are “[f]oundlings of the god who breathes fire” (8). They belong to the race that has been fashioned by fire

to survive and to overcome. They have been abandoned by the god but have been found in this woodland. They are like the maples and the araguaney in bodies of gold. Thus, the poet gladly says with conviction: "We live to forge our way with words.... Burning back always into inevitable night" (8).

The poet's task is "forge... with words" (8). The poet is a voice in the wilderness that demands to be heard, a metalworker who seeks to fire metal, moulding scraps into iron-models, or better yet, gold figurines. Again, in the last part of the poem, the rhythmic break is crucial after the verse "we suddenly step," for the poem surprises us with the lines "...engulfs us/ Foundlings of the god who breathes fire" (8). This indicates a shift in temporal reality, and the declaration encompasses "us" the readers and "engulfs us" into the family of foundlings. "We" belong to the race fashioned by fire to survive and to prevail. "We" have been abandoned but have been found in the woodland of poetry. "We" cannot but be forged into bodies of gold.

Edward Hirsch tells us in confidence:

Reading poetry is for me an act of the most immense intimacy, of intimate immensity. I am shocked by what I see in the poem but also by what the poem finds in me. It activates my secret world, commands my inner life. I cannot get access to that inner life any other way than through the power of the words themselves. The words pressure me into a response, and the rhythm of the poem carries me to another plane of time, outside of time. (8)

Shall we echo the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, one of Germany's supreme lyric poets? "You must change your life" ("Archaic Torso").

To the radiant spirit of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, the poet heartens, recalling her to the "galleon of light" within her. In "Two Fragments from *Diario Intimo*," she says:

... you are the gambler who wagers all – the rich provisions in the hold of your soul – to restore, to make whole everything broken: a withered leg, a cut limb, a crushed foot, a spine splintered thirty times over, a womb that couldn't hold what would have been your son or daughter. (20)

Fusing her soul with Frida Kahlo's, the poet inscribes on her diary: "*Anguish and pain, pleasure and death are no more than a process... I never paint dreams. I paint my own reality*" (24). The poet accepts this truth that the transience of reality must be lived with.

In this age, the poet has become a namer, an escape artist, a soul-recoverer, a healer, a restorer, a time-mage, a forger, a liver. Whether in the woods or on a rock, whether in her room or in a painting, she breathes out the

verses that call forth the souls – her own, her child’s, her intimates’, and even ours.

We become one with the poet and sing: “Where we sit on this rock covered with seaweeds,/ I suddenly feel the blueness embrace us.... Seawaves sing it, the kingfisher flies in it,/ This island is rooted in it. Desiring/ God is transparent blue – the color/ Which makes our souls visible” (“Is It the Kingfisher?” 38).

Skin of Water is Marjorie Evasco’s third selection of poems in bilingual edition. Her poems in English are juxtaposed with Spanish translations by Nicolás Suescún, Danielle Miller, Amanda Fleites, Alice Sun-Cua and Jose María Fons Guardiola, Susana Haug Morales and Jesús David Curbelo, and Francisco Ruiz Udiel and Ulises Juárez Polanco. Her two other poetry collections *Dreamweavers: Selected Poems 1976-1986* (1987) and *Ochre Tones: Poetry in English and Cebuano* (1999) both won the National Book Awards given by the Manila Critics Circle.

Philippine poetry in English has been marked by a tradition of modernism and radical innovation, influenced by Western poetics and practices. One of the most prominent of poets in the 1940s-1960s was José García Villa, (in)famous for his linguistic and syntactical peculiarities. In Dumaguete City, known for its seaport and for the first American and Protestant private university in Asia – Silliman University – Edith and Edilberto Tiempo were mentoring and honing the crafts of generations of Filipino writers who would produce some of the finest works in English. The Tiempos were known for their New Critical praxis, even if Edith confessed to a spiritual kinship with the English Romantics. According to Gemino Abad, in the 1980s, the writers were informed by the new critical theories and practices via the academe, and traces of these critical engagements could be found in their writing. Hence, the poetic terrain from the 1970s to the present is one of “open clearing.” Marjorie Evasco’s contemporaries include Merlie Alunan, Marra Lanot, Cesar Ruiz Aquino, Alfred Yuson, Jose Lacaba, Jaime An Lim, Elsa Martinez Coscolluela, Edgardo Maranan, Alfredo Navarro Salanga, Anthony Tan, Simeon Dumdum Jr., Francis Macansantos, Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, Ricardo de Ungria, Marne Kilates, Victor Jose Peñaranda, Eric Gamalinda, Merlinda Bobis, Ramon Sunico, Grace Monte de Ramos, Juaniyo Arcellana, Clovis Nazareno, Ma. Fatima Lim Wilson, Luisa Igloria, Danton Remoto, to name a few among so many.

Marjorie Evasco ranks with the best of the Filipino lyric poets. Of her poetry, the writer Myrna Peña Reyes says:

In Evasco’s poems, the reality of a material world and that of the mystical or the metaphorical are not really distanced from each other but are much

closer, more than we think. This perspective is dramatized and served well by the poet's lyric impulse.

Unlike, say, in a narrative poem where the metaphorical occurs to the reader as hindsight, an Evasco poem, as it moves down the page, shifts constantly and seamlessly back and forth between her perceptions of a material, tangible world reality and of a metaphorical reality of higher consciousness, a heightened awareness of the intangible but experienced spiritual, conveying intuitions of transcendent nature – insights, “enlightenment.”

Works Cited

- Abad, Gemino, ed. *A Habit of Shores: Filipino Poetry and Verse from English, 60's to the 90's*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1999.
- . “Mapping Our Poetic Terrain: Filipino Poetry in English from 1905 to the Present.” *A Habit of Shores: Filipino Poetry and Verse from English, 60's to the 90's*. Ed. Gemino Abad. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1999. 1-20.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. “After Images.” *Selected Non-Fictions*. Trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine and Eliot Weinberger. London: Penguin Books, 2000. 10-11.
- Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. Trans. Patrick Creagh. London: Vintage, 1996.
- Dawood, N.J. *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*. London: Penguin Books, 1954.
- Evasco, Marjorie. *Dreamweavers: Selected Poems 1976-1986*. Manila: Editorial & Media Resources Corporation, 1987.
- . *Ochre Tones: Poems in English and Cebuano*. Marikina: Salimbayan Books, 1999.
- . *Skin of Water: Selected Poems*. Manila: Aria Edition, 2009.
- “The Gospel According to John.” *The Holy Bible. New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984. 918-942.
- Hirsh, Edward. *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*. San Diego: Harvest Book, 1999.
- The Holy Bible. New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.
- Kawabata, Yasunari. “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself.” 9 Aug 2010. Nobelprize.org.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. “The Creation of Éa.” *A Wizard of Earthsea*. 1968. New York: Bantam, 2004.
- . *A Wizard of Earthsea*. 1968. New York: Bantam, 2004.
- “Psalm 39.” *The Holy Bible. New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984. 487.

- Reyes, Myrna Peña. "Reality of the exquisite in Marjorie Evasco's 'Skin of Water.'" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 10 May 2010.
<<http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/artsandbooks/artsandbooks/view/20100510-269044/Reality-of-the-exquisite-in-Marjorie-Evascos-Skin-of-Water>>
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Archaic Torso of Apollo." Trans. Stephen Mitchell. Poets.org. 14 Dec 2011.
<<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15814>>
- Vargas Llosa, Mario. *Letters to a Young Novelist*. Trans. Natasha Wimmer. New York: Picador: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.