

# February in many voices

*Arlene J Yandug*

In February when the broad leaves  
of almendro trees trembled  
with the sudden flight of birds

Datu Ubal killed a Spaniard.  
The noon air rent by the cry of birds.

No, the bolo didn't give him  
a measure of courage.  
He gave this object courage.

Wisdom and common sense say  
you can't divide land,  
you can't divide  
water. You can't.  
You

Google Datu Ubal.  
Google says  
Date of Birth: Unrecorded  
Place of Birth: Unrecorded  
Date of Death: Unrecorded

This pot. Yes this.  
This is our land. We live by this clay  
pot, you can't divide  
a clay pot.

In another poem,  
an ordinary man named  
Kudrat slept like a cat,  
his wife alert to the noise of arrival  
beyond the trees.  
She could hear the warm rise  
and fall of the cat's abdomen.

In yet another poem, your great  
grandma brandished her bolo,  
cut back the forest vines, cleared the bushes,  
taking the curse out of an old ground.  
“Ampingan ta ka.” When the land heard that,  
it knew for the first time it was loved.

Your great grandma’s children  
included your grandpa.  
They were in perfect health and they  
shot birds and enemies  
with slingshots.

Right now, the anthropologist  
puts the pot on three stones.  
“The stones represent  
the Muslims, the Lumad and you.”

The three stones where histories meet  
disagree with each other.  
Their anger appeased by the roots  
and leaves in the forest.

You can never know a name  
as deep as Ubal. Meanwhile,  
the guest speaker says  
there’s a street name after  
the slain Spaniard somewhere  
in the deep south.

In February, the broad leaves  
of almendro trees tremble  
with the sudden flight of birds.  
You go blank staring at the slides  
of hills and canyons  
sacred to the very same natives  
perhaps your ancestors killed.

The Lumad declares to the gov't  
"Futile to divide this land  
according to numbers. We've become  
a minority here. If it comes down  
to that, give our land back  
not according to our number,  
but our dignity."

Dignity. Cliché your mind insists.  
But it sounds poignant  
in your language. "Dungog."

Where the Spaniards were killed  
the friar's lanterns flit over the swampy  
ground at night. In February, torches flit  
over the field looking for frogs hiding in the grass.

The Kastila shot a sacred bird and it flopped through  
the foliage with a lot of noise.  
To the natives he said, "Don't be afraid of my thunders."

Sug-ang. Tatsulok. "You remove  
a stone, and the pot will fall." The speaker  
says this with the slightest gesture, his voice  
slightly cracking.

In February when the almendros  
sent out a scattering of wine-colored leaves  
Datu Ubal killed a certain Esteban  
Rodriguez de Figueroa. His wound  
as deep as a canyon.

Is a country a summary of wounds  
inflicted and received?  
Another cliché.  
The rise and fall of the cat's  
abdomen? Is a country a name  
you can't know because  
it is unrecorded?

In the deep south,  
there's the same scattering of leaves;  
fifty wine-colored leaves rolling  
along idle streets, one of which  
is named in honor of Esteban.

That's in February when unrecorded  
names travel with the leaves  
and children are just

gloriously  
all boys  
oblivious of names,  
leaves, clay pots;  
just boys molding  
clay pellets in their hands  
for their first slingshots...