

February in many voices

arlene 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. Can you?

In another poem,
an ordinary man named
Kudrat slept like a cat,
his wife alert to the noise of arrival
beyond the trees.
But Kudrat 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 one another.
Their anger appeased by the roots
and leaves in the forest.

You and google can never know
a name as deep as Ubal. Meanwhile,
the guest speaker says
there’s a street named 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 friars’ 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...