

Dew, fog, and water. Alba Eiragi



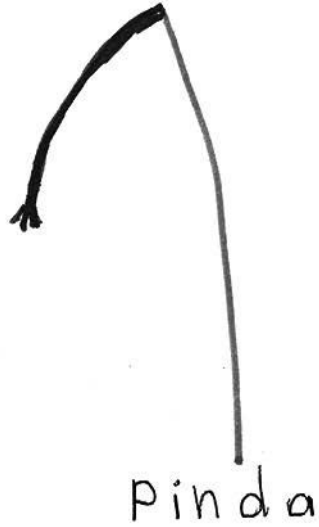
Introduction, selection and translation from Spanish by Elisa Taber

Alba Eiragi Duarte Portillo is an Indigenous leader, teacher, and cultural promoter born in Curuguaty, Paraguay, in 1960. She is an Aché descendant, raised in an Avá-Guaraní community in Colonia Fortuna, Canindeyú Department. She holds a BA in Social Work and Communication, and a diploma in Intercultural Education. Her books include the poetry collection *Ñe'ẽ yvoty: Ñe'ẽ poty* and the short story collection *Ayvu tee avá guaraní*. In 2017, she became the first Indigenous female member of the Society of Writers of Paraguay. In 2018, she presented her work at the 28th International Poetry Festival of Medellín, dedicated to the voices and visions of the native peoples of the Americas. Her poems and stories have been anthologized in several national and international publications.

Ayvu tee avá guaraní is a collection of Avá Guaraní sacred stories written in Avá Guaraní, self-translated into Jopara and Spanish, and illustrated by Alba Eiragi Duarte Portillo.

The pieces in this collection can be divided into sacred instructions and origin myths. What is ordinary is rendered mysterious and vice versa. The instructions explain how to make food and beverages, as well as artifacts, including jewelry, hammocks, and maracas. The ordinary is made sacred by the protocol for seemingly separate and superfluous acts. For example, the directions for preparing *kaguyjy*, chicha, detail the necessary—cereals, vegetables, and honey ferment for three days—and the “unnecessary”—a cedar bowl, a clean home, and songs of joy, blessing, and generosity. The myths describe the origin of the regional flora and fauna, as well as the three Tupí Guaraní classical elements: dew, fog, and water. The mysterious is made explainable by fiction. For example, the genesis of water becomes the story of how the sun and the moon created a river to drown the evil spirits that persecuted them.

The aforementioned sky bodies proceeded to name every being in the mythical Land Without Evil. Care with language is intrinsic to the Tupí-Guaraní family, as *ñe'ẽ* means both word and soul; thus, animating by naming. However, Doña Alba's vocabulary is particular because she alternates between abstract and concrete terms, a duality that formally reflects the content. Her subject matter is split between rendering the material and the spiritual world. The simplicity with which she explains complex concepts is accomplished through colloquial word choice and succinct narratives. These sacred instructions and origin myths are best understood as teachings. She describes how the past molded the present and predicts how the present will affect the future. The way she writes posits the moral principle that one can tap into language's potential for kindness, rather than cruelty. The author leaves the reader with a question: What is holy? Perhaps it is a life led in a way that fosters other beings' existence in another space and time.



Pira pytã ñemongaru

Pira re mongarutarõ ype remoĩ va'erã irundy avati apesa ypy. Upea ouymarõ, ko'ẽ ñavoma rera a va'erã emoguaetee aña era varaity avi avati kai tata peguare emombo mombo va'erã ypy avati rayi iichi.

Aa oguaeymarõ reeja jyyrae va'erã peteĩ ary.

Mokõi jyy oguae aapy katu eraa va'erã pinda aati yvyrare rejopia va'erã aaisa va'erã mbokaja ryvigui ñro katu karaguata ryvigui oiporã ymarõ renoese aarima renoeta. Pira pytã je'u reko: ikangue eembi'ukue ndoviva'erã jagua, tajasuai aa, ype. Uguia oourõ na ñarua moavei. Renoe ypype re'upi va'erã ijarypy rema ata endy va'erã.

Pira pytã ñemongaru

Pira emongarutarõ ýpe emoĩva'erã irundy avati apesã ýpe. Upéva ho'u rire rrahava'erã avati mbichy okáiva emoñuahẽ porã haña emombo mombo va'erã ýpe avati ra'ýi michĩva.

Oñuahẽ rire ehejava'erã peteĩ ary oñuahẽ jey haña pe pira ha upéi erahava'erã nde pinda isáva'erã mbokaja ryvipe téra katu karaguata ryvi va'erã.

Pira pytã je'u reko: ikangue ndo'uiva'erã jagua, kure, ype umía ho'úrõ nerenohevéma, pira pytã renohẽ rire remyataindyva'erã.

Golden Dorado

Feed the fish below water, place husks on the surface daily, to draw and accustom them to this place.

Char the corn and drop in some kernels. When the fish arrive, wait a day or two. Once the water is tame, hook a ball of corn dough and lower your bait carefully. The nylon cord used to be made of *pindo*^[1] or *caraguata*^[2] thread. Notice the quantity and varying sizes of the fish that firmly grasp your *pinda*.^[3]

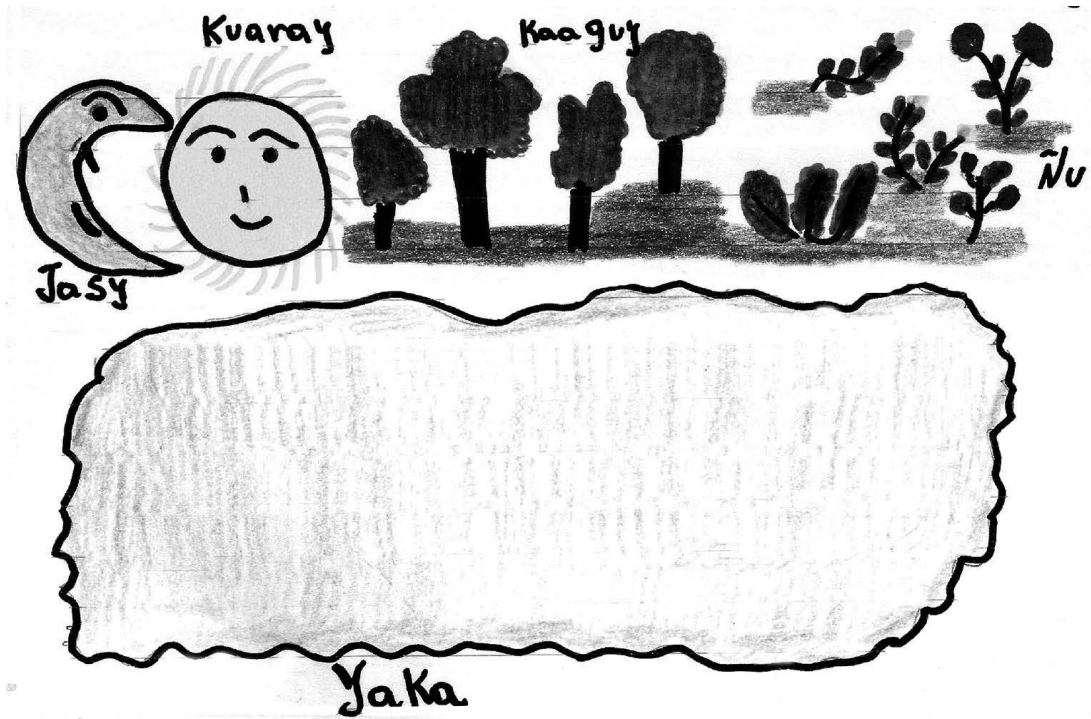
Eat the *pira pytã*^[4] . . . it is skin and bones. The fish, dogs, pigs, ducks, and chickens have nothing to eat. The Golden Dorado will disappear from the water. Place what you caught on the altar and light a beeswax candle—it brings luck.

^[1] Queen palm tree.

^[2] Heart of flame bromeliad.

^[3] Fishhook.

^[4] Golden dorado fish.



Yguasú

Yguasú ae peteĩ y ijapyra yvae oiny. Peva rovaire oĩ avakuery ppyru. Upeare oĩ avá kuery rekoa ayuu kuerenda.

Upegui avá kuery oreko temimbota oikuaa agua mbaemo ko yvyre. Y ae peteĩ mba'e ppyru, yry ju'i, yvy y ae kuaray a jasy rembiapokue, tuvy kuery remimbota ae kuery omboery pavete oĩ vaguive ipype.

Ayvu ppyru y, yaka, ñu, ka'aguy. Y ojapo okuapy ojeepy a agua añaykuery gui a opyta agua ae kuery ojovai yre vovore. A upeicha ojukapa añay kuerype, oitypa chupe kuery ppy, upegui osea oery noĩ ikuai, jaguarete a amboae mbaemo ñarovae mboi. Ojapopa rire tembiapo oo jyy tuvy renda py a upepy eichupe kuery Ñande Ru eete peepeota aguyjema peesape ñane rembiejakue etare. A ombo eko chupekuery guembiapora kuery.

Yguasú

Yguasú ha y ijapyra'ỹva hína. Upéva rovaire oĩ Avakuéra, iñe'pyrũ oĩ avei hekohakuéra, iñe'ẽkuéra renda, upégui Avakuéra oguereko.

Ñemoarandu oikuaa ha'gua mba'épa oiko yvýre. Y ha'e peteĩ mba'e ñe'pyrũ, yryjúi, yvy, y ha'e kuarahy ha jasy rembiapokue, ituvakuéra rupive ha'ekuéra omboherapante oĩva guive ipype. Ñe'ẽ ñe'pyrũete ha y, yakã, ñu, ka'aguy. Y ojapo hikuái, añete, hapete ohundipa ha'gua añakuérape opyta yrembe'ýre ojovái hikuái.

Ha upéicha ojukapa añakuérape, upégui osẽ, ápe heñói hikuái, ombohéra jaguarete, umi mymba iñarõva, mboi avei.

The Great Body of Water

It is truly endless. The life of the Avá man began by the great body of water.

The first name was *y*, water. That is why riverside communities add this letter to several words: rice, fields, jungle.

Avá predictions—knowledge of how we will behave here, on earth—originate there. Water, like foam, is the source of the world. It is life, the commandments are part of life. *Ñande Rueete*^[1] created the sun and the moon, and commanded them to name every being in *yvymary*.^[2]

The planets created the great streams to save themselves from the *aña kueragui*.^[3] All the devils were caught between shores and drowned. The tiger, named in the forest, emerged from the great body of water; he is cruel. When their work was done, they felt hunger and went to *Ñande Ru Tupa*.^[4] Their father instructed: “Leave but forever illuminate those that remain on earth, there are many. Do what is necessary to guide them.”

^[1] Our True Father.

^[2] The Land Without Evil.

^[3] Devils.

^[4] Our Father, god of the rain, lightning, and thunder.



Kurusu

Tata endy ypegua voity jerokyatypy oĩ va'erãity kurusu imboeetepy jera kaeity ñane ramoi oñangareko katu ko'aa ejapyrere ñandevy ko yvypy.

Kurusu jary tee oiko ka'aruare umi mamoraete.

Jaikua yaagoty. Y ary gui oñembokatu Kurusu yvyra imbo'eetepy yary ae ñane ramoi rakaeity oiko ichugui yvyra yary. Iporivete sapy'a raka'e ñane ramoi uguiro guareity Ñande Ru oguerea mamoraity ichupe. Upeiry oaejy uguiene yvyraoity yary yvyra jary kueryro oae ko yvypy. Koay peve opoo epy agua ipirekue po'atee oparingua mba'asypy guaraity.

Kagui ryrura yvyra ñae uusu yvyra ñe'ẽ miri avi tataendyy chugui oñembokatu avi ykarai ryrura avi. Pyrenda mitã mongaraia opy omoĩ guapya iichi aro yaryguigua va'erãity pyrenda.

Kurusu

Ha'e oĩva Avakuéra oñembo'ehápe, tuicha mba'e péva, ñande taita oñangareko hese. Ko'áva ojehejaraka'e ñandéve ko yvy ári guarã.

Kurusu: ijára oĩ kuarahy reikére mombyryeterei ndajaikuaái ñande umíva.

Ygarýgui ojejapo kurusu, ygary ha'e yvyrakuéra ruvicha.

Ha'e ñande taita oho raka'e peichaite yvágape, oraha chupe Ñande Rutee ha omboúje ichupe yvyraro ha ygary oiko ichugui. Ikangýje peteĩ ko'ême ñande taita ha uperõguare Ñande Ru ogueraha ichupe ha upéi ombou chupe yvyraro ko yvy ári guarã.

Ko'ága peve ome'ẽ tesãi, ipirekue ha'e pohã porã opa mba'épe.

Chícha ryrurã avei ojejapo ichugui, vatéa tuicháva ha michĩva, kurusu ykarai ryrurã, avei pyrenda mitã omongaraívape guarã, ko'áva ojejapova'erã ygarýgui memete.

The Sacred Cross

The Avá pray to the cross above the altar. It is sacred. Our ancestors care for it in their spiritual home. Those from the beyond left this cultural artifact to us on earth.

There—far away, where the sun sets—is the owner. The cross is made of cedar, a holy wood, a leader among trees.

The cedar was a man that visited the beyond. He awoke feeling weak and was taken. Our Great Father guided him: he rose to the sky and descended to earth as a sacred tree.

He remains benevolent, of use to the sick—his bark is a powerful drug.

A big or small bowl of chicha, the cross, the baptismal font for *mitã karai*,^[1] and the kneeler grandparents rest on during prayer and communion are all made of *yary*.^[2]

^[1] Rite of passage.

^[2] Cedar wood.

About the translator

Elisa Taber is a PhD candidate at McGill University. Her writing and translations are troubled into being, even when that trouble is a kind of joy. *An Archipelago in a Landlocked Country* is her first book.

More about Alba Eiragi

- “My fire” in [Words Without Borders](#), a poem from *Ñe’ẽ yvoty: Ñe’ẽ poty*.
- Link to press that published [Ñe’ẽ yvoty: Ñe’ẽ poty and Ayvu tee avá guaraní](#).
- [Reading](#) from *Ñe’ẽ yvoty: Ñe’ẽ poty*, ABC TV Paraguay.