CICAME

The Yage Drinker

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Fernando Payaguaje

Fernando with nuní plants

Afterword

In February, 1994, Fernando Payaguaje died in San Pablo de Cantesiayá, Ecuador. Shortly before, he affirmed to his family the beliefs that were his life. He assured them that they should not fear his power after his death. While the death of a great Secoya yage drinker usually produces strong localized seismic tremors and similar natural phenomena, he recommended that they remain calmly in the village. Nor would he cause harm to anyone directly, not even to his enemies. He was resolved to be, until the end and beyond, a wise follower of the good spirits.

His closest relatives follow the dictates of the Evangelical faith, but they obeyed the dying man's requests and gave him the burial he asked for. They did not imprison him in a wooden box; they did not pile earth upon his body as if it were a rottenness that had to be hidden. Fernando was placed in his hammock, anointed with *nuní*, and hung in a deep, empty grave, atop which was placed a roof of split palm wood, leaving him ready to get to his feet in the middle of the night and walk confidently along the path he had taken on so many journeys with yage.

At the end of the path: the sky; heaven; his ancestors; real life. Nothing other than life itself was indicating to him that it was time to move on.

Will his words retain their power, translated and betrayed into writing? Will they still be able to summon us to a primordial world full of spirits and significances? I recall now the old Saxon, the witness to whom Borges bids farewell with such nostalgia. Likewise, after the death of the drinker, the world will be a poorer place.

Miguel Angel Cabodevilla
Quito, July, 1994

Lucrecia and Fernando

INTRODUCTION

The Survivor's Nostalgia

Fernando Payaguaje is between seventy and seventy-five years of age. We cannot be more precise. In the time of the 1941 border conflict between Ecuador and Peru on the River Napo, he fled from the Peruvian hacienda of Mauricio Levi to the lands around the Cuyabeno River. He was over twenty then, and his children, Delfin and Maruja, had already been born. At around the same time, Fernando was preparing himself intensively to be able to attain that which the Secoyas consider the maximum personal and social realization: the level of healer, yage drinker, and chief. The pages that follow will tell us what constancy, bravery and suffering it took to reach that goal, in such a way that his life was marked forever by the experience.

Now almost half a century has passed, and the drinker reviews the long river of his age, barely able to comprehend why or how he has ended up alone. He sees himself as the last of the great wisdom keepers of an Indigenous nation that was famous for the power of its religious chiefs. Among the Secoyas who live in Ecuador, he is the final representative of a lineage of leaders who treasured the profound secrets of authentic life: contact with the celestial spirits, domination of the forces of evil, memory of the most ancient traditions, power for healing. Only he remains, and, what's more, it's been over twenty years since he left off exercising the majority of his functions, beginning with the most basic of them, the ritual of yage.

For any poorly-informed traveler who meets him, perhaps even for the young people of his own group, this thin old man can seem like just another Secoya. Nothing could be more untrue. Because if Fernando says, with apparent mildness, "now I live tranquilly, silently, as if I knew nothing; I live just like anyone else," the gleam in his eyes

gives the lie to his words. Or, better, his own words are telling the hidden truth in its deepest sense. Because the one capable of transforming reality lives tranquilly; the repository of collective memory lives silently; the one who has known the hidden face of truth lives as if he knew nothing; and the one who exerted himself forcefully to supercede the barriers of mediocrity, enter into the closest contact with the divine, and acquire power over life, lives just like anyone else.

Fernando belongs to the Secoya group, so-named because they came from the region around the Siecoya River. The Secoyas once formed part of a highly-populated nation that extended its domain in the land between the rivers Caqueta and Napo. Later the anthropologists identified them as members of the Western Tukanoan language group. Fernando is also related to members of another subgroup, the Sionas, near whom the Secoyas now reside in Ecuadorian territory. In Ecuador today, the total population of the two groups is less than 500. If we add to them the remaining descendents of what the 16th-century missionaries called "the Great Nation of the Longhaired People" (*la gran Nación de los Encabellados*), which is to say the Secoyas, Sionas, Coreguajes, Macaguajes, Orejones, Tamas and Corijonas (the Tetetes being apparently extinct) in Colombian and Peruvian territory, the final figure will barely surpass 2500 individuals. Furthermore, these are groups whose respective "national governments" tacitly consider them to be disappearing, and refuse to give more than lip service to the consideration of their natural territorial and cultural rights. The loss of land; pressure from colonization, oil companies, and the military; the entry of missionaries and investigators who are disrespectful or ignorant of their most authentic traditions—these have all to some degree weakened the patterns of their lives.

Nevertheless, we are in the presence of an ancient Amazonian culture, a marvel of integration into their environment, respected among their neighbors for the high specialization and wisdom of their religious directors. This is not the place to describe the social structure, but something should be said about the central figure, the nucleus of clans and extended families, the drinker of yage.

The importance of this profession is such that Fernando tells of

his life as a function of that magnetic pole of his personality. He is a religious expert, therefore a healer, and, according to the traditions of his people, chief of the family group. For this reason he describes his childhood and youth briefly, almost as a simple backdrop for the aspiration felt from the beginning and nourished by his father: to become an expert knower—"the highest," he says—of the other side of material appearances, the world of the spirits. It should be understood that life, in any of its manifestations, appears to the experienced eyes of the drinker as something like a puppet theater whose threads are invisibly manipulated by an almost infinite legion of spirits, and, ultimately, by certain divine powers. People unfamiliar with that hidden world are subject to the caprices of the spirits, or worse, to the snares of sorcerers who dominate the occult powers. The educated Secoya, though, will accede to the spiritual vision: to contact, dealings, and friendship with the protector spirits, with the owners of animal life, and with the deities themselves. From that time on, he will appear before his group as a mediator with the transcendent world, as a guide and as a protector. The power to cure, the power to summon game animals, the defenses against witchcraft, and the other prodigious acts of the drinker will come to him exclusively as a result of his contemplative skill.

So how can such virtue be attained? The answer is in Fernando's detailed narratives that describe certain practices which I will summarize here in schematic form: a long and difficult apprenticeship under the wise guidance of a teacher, within which there's no lack of physical suffering, self-domination, memorization of oral traditions, self-experimentation with healing plants, et cetera; simultaneously and progressively, the aspirant initiates himself in the drinking and the mysteries of the psychoactives, agents of spiritual communication, with all that those sessions convey: physical purification, control of one's mind, the staging of ritual...; finally there remains the test of fire before the judgement of the group: ritual ability, narrative, interpretation, healing power, clean and exemplary conduct, energy that brings together the vital forces propitious for the community.

These Indigenous people, free wanderers, who needed no organ-

ization other than their own families, always united around someone they called "yage ucuquë"—yage drinker— or "iti pa´iquë," chief. Such personages have been the keystones of their common life, so much so that that life cannot be explained without them. This fact was so well-known that everyone who drew near them, whether for purposes of conquest, trade or understanding, had to speak with the emblematic figure of the drinker. So when Fernando narrates his life here, he's simultaneously telling the story of his people's life, and when he laments his current solitude as the last of his lineage, without disciples, he leaves up in the air the question of whether this might be the last moment for his people.

It's not about the nostalgia of old age, propitiated by living in the past. Reading him attentively, no one would deny his considerable openness toward new forms of cultural adaptation; see his comments about schooling, medicine, and the Indigenous organization. It's just that the integrity of Secoya life itself has been ruptured. In other words, there's been a fragmentation of an integrative existence where all the elements, human and cosmic, appeared tightly bound, referred and related to an underlying spiritual reality. With the yage ritual discontinued, today's Secoyas deny themselves the possibility of their own knowledge; from now on they will run the risk of being "just like anyone else," to use Fernando's phrase, modern people who will lose the ability to distinguish themselves from the rising tide that surrounds them.

In any case, Fernando spends little time detailing the most recent evolution of his people. His interest, instead, is in the vigorous effort he made to learn the hidden powers of reality and, thanks to them, to protect the lives of the people in his group. Only foreign ignorance can label people like him "uncivilized." Today as yesterday, it's tempting to ignorantly undervalue the Secoya religious complex, reducing it to an object of curiosity. In that respect it seems appropriate that now, Indigenous people are presenting themselves to the cultures that undervalue them and, above all, strengthening the traditions that have sustained their existence up to the present day. This publication seeks to contribute in a modest way to that.

New Rituals

The drinker's tales constitute, in some way, a biography. They recall landscapes of Indigenous life that belong to the past, very distant in some ways, as will be seen. We could consider them memoirs; the writing seeks to retain or reflect a time irretrievably lost. But I'd like to think that they're the result of what I hope will be a new Secoya ritual.

I mentioned above the dissolution of some of the most fundamental customs. I underlined the uncertainty that this leads to within the identity of the group. The disappearance of its traditional nucleus could lead to the forgetting of a large part of the oral tradition preserved above all in the memory and practices of the i̱ti pa´iquë. From creation myths to moral teachings, an entire body of ancient wisdom, elaborated in group and treasured down through time, could vanish rapidly. Without that legacy, will these people be able to conserve enough of their own identity to resist being diluted in the generic Indigenous identity that threatens them, along with Mestizo (culture) pursuit?

Fernando has lamented more than once the fact that it's only certain outsiders who come to ask him questions about his knowledge. In any case, he knows what the final destiny of his tales in the hands of the *gringos* will be: first curiosity, and then forgetting. Because the Indigenous oral memory becomes reduced to mere words for an outsider when it's removed from its intrinsic structure, which will be Secoya or nothing at all. It seems evident that traditions are conserved fundamentally in actions, in the concrete methods of adaptation that each group retains; at the same time, the folktales, rituals and symbols act within that system as a substratum that creates meaning. For this reason it's artificial and ultimately sterile to try to enter their environment as an outsider, even if one hopes to assist in the conservation of Indigenous teachings.

With some frequency I had opportunities to converse about this subject, from the time of my first visit to San Pablo de Cantesiayá in 1984 up to now. I spoke with young Secoyas, over the course of meet-

ings, workshops and sporadic visits, about the apparent disinterest of their generation for what had previously constituted the most essential features of Secoya existence. Of course it's true that they have grown up pressured and manipulated by another culture to which the figure of the drinker means nothing. They were even severely warned away from it. Now, though, some of the young men became interested in deepening their understanding of ancestral knowledge, to which, of course, they were not complete strangers. It was not about returning to practices that had fallen into disuse; the pre-dawn teachings around the *yoco*, the yage ritual itself, the multi-family house, to name just a few, have disappeared, perhaps forever.

But other possibilities have arisen: writing, schools with Indigenous teachers, the organization of communities, and the recuperation and defense of what is intrinsically Secoya. Can these techniques help revitalize such a tiny minority population? For the moment, the young people are trying them out. Three young men, Alfredo Payaguaje and the brothers Marcelino and Jorge Lucitande, all grandsons of the drinker, have sought in some way to renew the ritual of apprenticeship. They sought Fernando out and listened for long hours to the unending story of his knowledge. Later they translated what he had said into Spanish, thus initiating the first steps from being passive subjects of investigation to active elaborators of their own culture.

So this book is the narration of a grandfather, a drinker of yage, to his grandsons, literate Indigenous people. They recorded his tales over the course of three years. They translated them, sometimes repeatedly, until they found the most appropriate expression. They returned many times to consult the drinker and even sketched, under their grandfather's attentive eyes, some of his yage visions and the itinerary of voyages he had taken. In that way they gathered dozens of tape recordings and hundreds of written pages, although only some of them are printed here, the ones closely tied to the drinker's biography. The main body of his mythic narrations are being reserved for another occasion, although in fact many of them have been published elsewhere, as can be seen in the bibliography.

With this publication, only an early stage of the new rituals is performed. Still to be reborn among the Secoyas is a true revalorization of ancestral knowledge. One of Fernando's comments on contemporary community leaders comes to mind: "they can't call themselves *i̱ti pa'iquë*, only *pa̱i ëjaohui*." In other words, true leaders are what they are because they have attained a comprehensive knowledge of the world in both its material and spiritual aspects. With that, they can protect their people. Without it, they can give orders like politicians, but the people will remain unprotected; they won't even know where they come from or where they're going. It seems necessary for today's Secoya leaders, teachers and investigators to develop new types of apprenticeship, debate and practice where the secular traditions meet the changing conditions of the present; these will be, I repeat, a new type of ritual to keep them close to their changing identity.

For my part, with more (nerve) daring than knowledge, I limited myself to accompanying them in this process; however, more concretely, I did give the final form to their translations into Spanish, and, obviously, any error of interpretation is my responsibility.

Pompeya Island, Ecuador, May 11, 1990
Miguel Angel Cabodevilla

Together with his great-grandsons, 1989

Fernando and his granddaughters

Fernando

THE EARLIER TIME[1]

The tribe from the sky

The River Wahoya, between the Napo and the Aguarico, has a tributary which the Piaguajes called Neaocoya, or Blackwater River. One day they found some people there dressed in multicolored, striped tunics. At the same place were also wild reeds with rainbow-colored stripes. Blue birds were being born out of the flowers of these plants and flying away.

The Piaguajes asked the people, "Who are you? What tribe do you belong to?"

"We are Ñañë siecopai: the Multicolored People of God," they said.

"Can we stay here?"

"Yes."

The Piaguajes stayed for a night and a day. They felled trees and cleared brush to make space to plant food. Then they left and returned with other Piaguajes to continue the work, telling them about those people. The Multicolored People of God warned the Piaguajes not to make their gardens so close, because it was their area. It also happened that the menstruation of the Piaguaje women bothered them, as their women, being people from the sky, didn't menstruate. For this reason, they didn't want them to come too close.

The Piaguajes returned to their homes until the women had finished menstruating, and also to stock up on provisions so they'd be able to stay longer in that place.

But when they came back again, they saw that the people from the sky had abandoned their houses, their decorative plants, the wild reeds from which blue birds had been born, the bamboo for making multicolored spears and flutes, the corn and sugarcane of very beautiful colors. And the plants were already beginning to die. Nobody knew what had happened or where the people had gone. Everyone supposed that they had returned to the sky.

The Piaguajes occupied the abandoned site. My grandparents lived right there, at the mouth of the Blackwater where it flows into the Napo. Ever since then, we've called that river Siecoya, which means Multicolor River.

Visiting Hupo, where God lived on earth

The place called Hupo is at a waterfall on a stream near the river Huahoya. The first person who visited it was a shaman. He turned into a jaguar and went there. When he came back, he said to the people in his house, "I saw Hupo."

"We want to see it, too."

"Then we'll go the day after tomorrow."

As the group was organizing for the trip, the shaman said, "I got there fast because I turned into a jaguar. Traveling as humans, it'll take us several days."

That's what he advised them. They set off. The shaman spoke again. "When we get there, if you hear the sound of the bark (waterfall), (Jupo is the bark of a tree) don't say that it's the sound of the bark (waterfall)."

That's how it happened. They got there, they heard the noise, but they remained silent. They saw the place where God had lived. There was a natural salt deposit there, a salt lick. They waited a short while and a tapir appeared. They killed it They cut it up and brought part of it behind the waterfall and spent the night there, smoking the meat. They planned to take the head with them the next day, but at dawn, they didn't find it because the caiman that lived in the waterfall had taken it away.

With the smoked meat, they returned to their houses.

Wahoya, the River of War

In ancient times, it was called Sotoya, Clay River, because the riverbed had a stratum of white clay. After the battles, it was called Wahoya (war river).

That river flows into the Napo from the left side. In front of it, on the other side, lived a man named Sios̲e'e[2]. He had been a good person, but when he began to speak Spanish fluently, he became proud,

and guided the Whites who came and killed the tribes who lived on the Sotoya. For this reason, the people built and moved into houses up on a hill above the river. Around the hill they planted an impenetrable wall of thorn bushes.

Also, from the river to the house, up the slope, they made a ramp, at the top of which they piled *pambil*[3] palm tree trunks. The attackers would arrive by canoe, and they would release the trunks from the top of the hill to kill them. That's how they defended themselves.

The death of Siose'e

A man from the Awisiri River came to visit them at Wahoya. The people there crouched down behind the trunks, but that man called to them, "I'm here in friendship. I don't want to hurt you."

"Then come on up."

In the house, that man said to them, "These attacks are caused by Siose'e. If we want to live in peace, we have to kill him. We can use the witchcraft of the Añapëkë"

That evening several of them accompanied him to Siose'e's house. It was nighttime when they got there. On the river, holding on to a branch, they overheard what he was saying. The man from Awisiri knew some Spanish, and translated for the people from Wahoya. "He's saying he's going to go back to Wahoya to kill you."

Before the man from Awisiri went to visit the Secoyas, he had entered Siose'e's house. He knew it well and he knew where the pot of chicha[4] was kept. Now he watched as Siose'e went up to rest in his hammock. He saw him go to sleep. Then he and the Secoyas went up to the house. One stood at the head of the hammock, another at Siose'e's feet. They cast the witchcraft on him. Another bewitched the chicha pot. Immediately, they hid themselves again to listen to what happened.

"Please, bring me some water!" Siose'e had woken up and he was calling his wife. She brought it and he drank. Immediately he asked

for more and drank it. He had a burning thirst. He asked for more and more. The thirst didn't go away. His wife went to the river to bring up another pot of water. He finished that pot, too. He ordered her to bring another and another. He drank seven pots of water before his thirst was quenched. His stomach was swollen to the point of bursting. Slowly he got back into his hammock but as soon as he lay down, his belly split open. The water ran down to the river. The people in the house were astonished.

"We won't have any more problems," said the people who were watching from their hiding places. They returned to their homes.

Wahoconé

This man was a warrior. In a battle he had captured three Secoya boys and their mother, and forced them to live with him. Two Secoya brothers were going down to Iquitos to trade. Wahoconé awaited their arrival on a beach where he went to sleep next to the captured youths.

The following day, the two brothers were passing down the river near the opposite bank.

"Hey, come visit us!" called Wahoconé.

"Let's not go," said the younger brother. "He's always killing people who cross his path."

"We haven't done anything to make him want to kill us," answered the elder.

"Fine, let's go die."

They crossed over and beached the canoe. When they got to where he was, he killed them both and buried them in the sand. The following morning, the kidnapped woman asked, "Did those relatives of ours show up yet?"

The youngest son explained to his mother what had happened. The mother wept and scolded Wahoconé: "You're only happy when you're killing people!"

Wahoconé nearly killed her right there, but in the end he didn't

do it. He set about preparing yage. He wanted to kill all of the prisoners. The brothers knew it and stayed alert. Wahoconé drank with his father and brother-in-law. At a prearranged moment, the Secoya boys threw themselves at the men, killing Wahoconé and his brother-in-law. But Wahoconé's blind father went outside, saying, "Great, you killed them." He thought his son had killed the Secoyas, but Wahoconé was the one who had been killed.

The Witoto[5]

During wartime, our ancestors captured two young Witotos. One was worthless. He shat on himself in the hammock. When they saw this, they killed him. The other was a good hunter and fisherman, and lived with them. One day he said to them, "Clear the brush away from the riverbank so I can fish there."

They did, and the young Witoto fished there many times. One night he heard other Witotos coming to kill our people. He went and advised the chief who had captured him, so that the people were able to hide themselves. At dawn he said, "Let's follow their trail and kill them."

That's what they did. They reached the Witotos' house and set fire to it. The families fled down another trail and our people attacked them. In a pitched battle, the shaman was hit with a spear, and they had to retreat.

They returned home. The wound was large, and the point of the spear had broken off and remained inside. The wounded man said to his wife, "Make me some strong chicha."

He drank and, in a trance,[6] he was able to remove the broken tip. He recovered completely.

Wars with the Aucas[7]

Alberto Payaguaje's father was a great jaguar. Once an Auca woman hit his wife with a piece of a clay pot and then ran away. The healer transformed into a jaguar to chase after the Aucas to punish them.

In those days, because it was summertime,[8] the people were fishing with barbasco[9]. They were finishing piling up the poisoned fish from the calm part of the river where the barbasco had been placed; others were collecting wood to smoke the fish.

At that moment, the healer sensed the communication of his jaguar spirit. "The Aucas are nearby, planning to surround the people who are fishing; they want to attack tonight."

So the people stayed awake all night, vigilant, and the Aucas didn't attack. In the midafternoon of the following day, the healer, transformed into a jaguar, went out to eat the Aucas. He attacked and dispersed them. Although they regrouped and attacked again, he beat the second and third group. During this time, a fourth group, much larger and fiercer, arrived from the other side of the Napo. The magician decided he had to invoke a more powerful spirit. And that's what he did. He transformed himself into Ñamase, a kind of deer, and leapt into the midst of the attackers, instantly infecting them with a terrible epilepsy. The whole group of them died[10].

In those days I lived in P̲isimoaya[11]. That magician lived two days' walk away. He had invited my father to join him in combat against the Aucas; your great-grandfather accepted and went to devour them. But the Aucas also master the art of the spirits. They have visions of who is going to attack them and what healer is leading the attack. Now they learned where another shaman lived, and, hunting him, they reached our house. The Aucas customarily cross dry branches or broken sticks on the paths they walk down. So when we saw those signs, we said, "The Aucas have been here."

They had come on rafts from the other side of the river. Eight rafts had come down from across from the Wahoya. That bank of the Napo was virgin forest, uninhabited. In this attack our shamans killed

them off. Later they cast spells to prevent them from coming back from the other side. The Aucas made a lot of trouble. That's why we fought them. Now they live on the River Curaray.

*

In those days, the largest group of Secoyas lived at the mouth of the Aguarico where it flows into the Napo. A Secoya was going down the Napo with his sister and brother-in-law to visit some relatives. They were paddling down the other side of the Napo, near the mouth of the Blackwater River[12], when evening came. There was a stubble-field there and the brother-in-law wanted to sleep in an abandoned hut.

"My whole body aches. I'm going to smack myself with these nettles they planted here"[13].

"Let's not stay," said the other. "Let's go at least down to the beach to sleep. The Aucas can attack us here."

But the brother-in-law, out of pure stupidity, responded, "I don't want to. I'm staying here to be closer to the nettles."

Because he had gotten angry, the other didn't insist. "All right. I'm going fishing."

He left his blowgun leaning against a tree and took his hook and line to the water. He caught some fish and went back up. He saw that his blowgun had been moved. It also seemed to have been bitten: there were toothmarks on it and it was moist. The darts he had prepared and wrapped with cotton had disappeared. He went to the hut and spoke with his sister.

"The Aucas are moving around making trouble. I think we'll die tonight. They're going to attack."

His sister cleaned the fish and cooked them and they all ate. After midnight, the brother-in-law was sleeping soundly. Suddenly the Aucas appeared and nailed him with their spears. Others did the same with the woman. But the man jumped up and the spears hit his hammock. He ran out and jumped in the canoe and paddled a short distance away, waiting. He spent the night there.

Auca magicians tried to get him. They sent a boa to grab the canoe and drag it away from where it was resting against a palisade in the river. But he was able to kill the snake and get away. In the morning he went back to the hut. The corpses of his sister and his brother-in-law were pierced with spears and covered with nettles.

"He wanted nettles, they gave him nettles."

He got back in the canoe and went down to where his relatives lived. Because he had been awake all night, as soon as he arrived he lay down in a hammock and fell into a deep sleep. The relatives, anxious to know what had happened, tried to wake him up, but he couldn't shake off his exhaustion. They bothered him so much that for a moment he regained consciousness and said, "It was the Aucas!"

Only those words, and he fell back to sleep. They kept on trying to wake him, even more curious now, but he wouldn't open his eyes. Around three in the afternoon he woke up.

"What happened?"

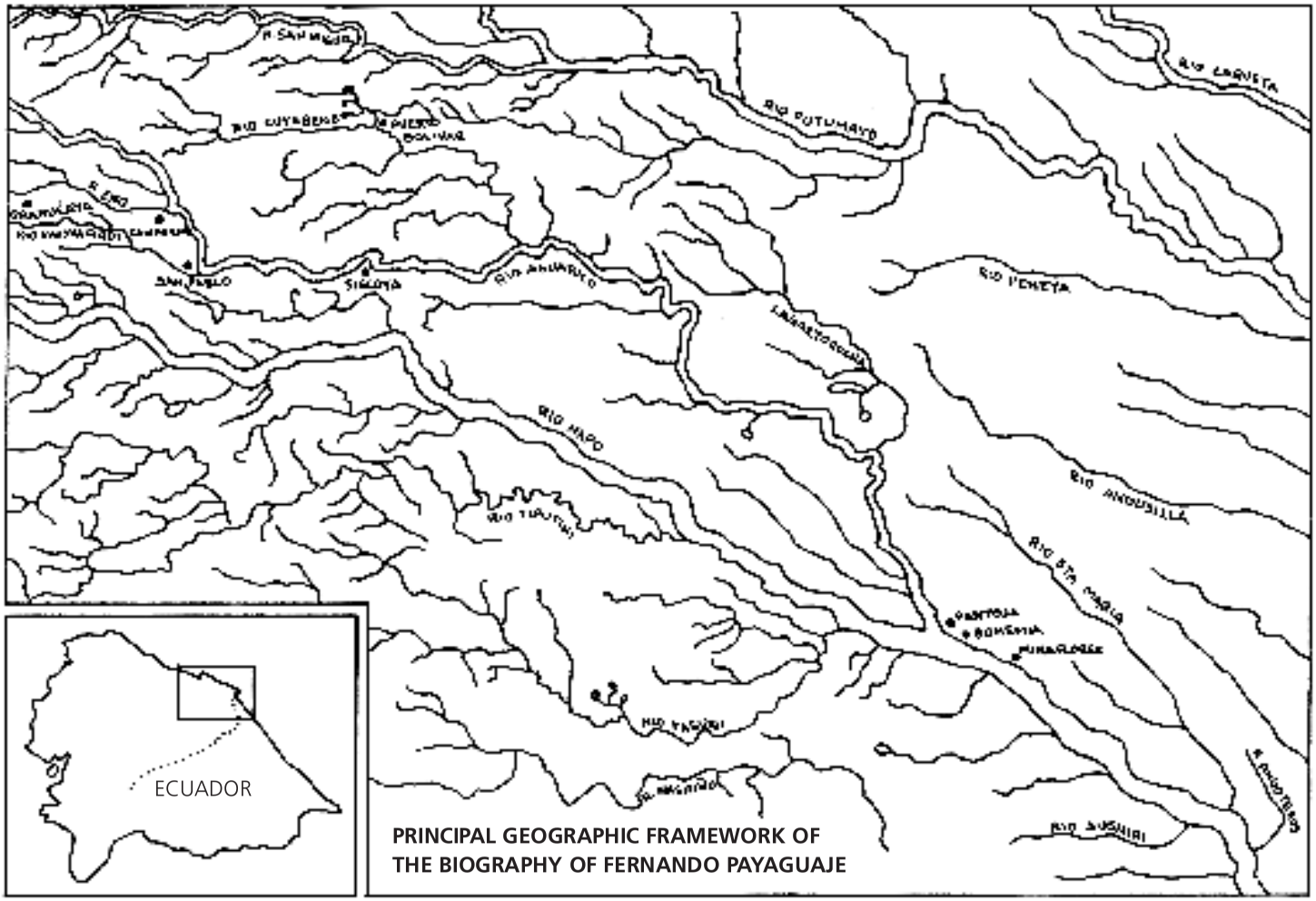
"The Aucas killed my sister and her husband in the stubblefield on the other side. Their bodies are still there."

The men picked up their spears and went upstream. They saw the bodies stuck full of spears, both in the same position, propped so that they were nearly sitting up in the hammocks. They took the corpses to the house downriver and buried them.

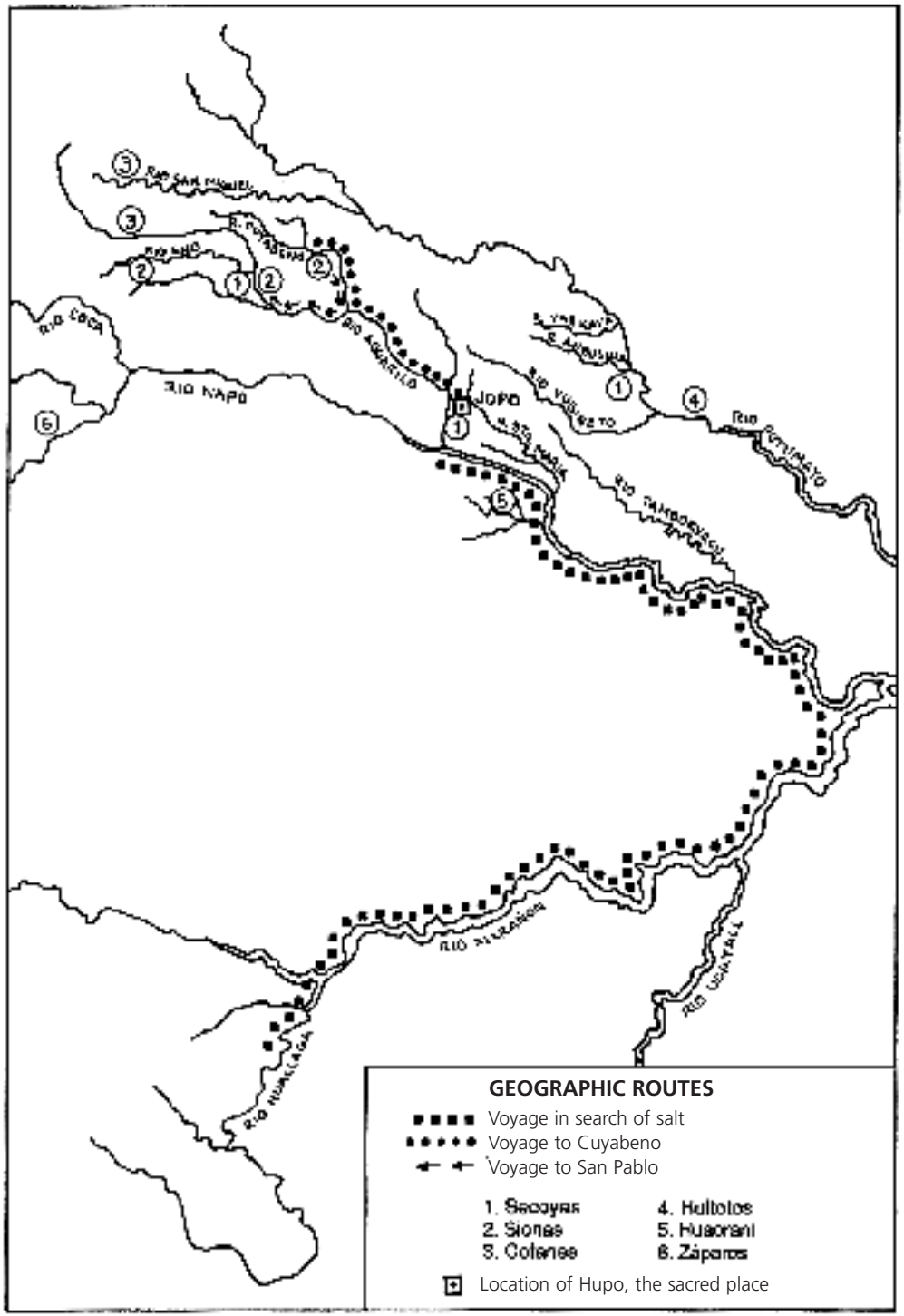
*

Around that same place, Neaocoya (Blackwater River), lived a Zaparo. Back then, those people were still around. One day the Zaparo was on a beach in front of a small fire. He had just applied poison to his blowgun darts, and he was drying the darts over the fire. He said to his wife, "Keep an eye on the edge of the forest to see if the Aucas come around."

Shortly the woman saw a small Auca child who looked out from between the trees and then vanished into the forest. Next a boy appeared, glanced around, and hid himself. About half an hour later a number of Aucas appeared at the edge of the forest.



PRINCIPAL GEOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF FERNANDO PAYAGUAJE



The Zaparo continued drying the poison onto his darts, but he said to his wife, "Go to the canoe. If they get much closer, go out in the river to where they can't reach you with their spears."

For his part, he kept on doing what he was doing, completely calm; he had his spears within arm's reach. The Aucas came toward him. When they were close enough, they threw their spears. But the Zaparo knew how to defend himself. He dodged them, jumping from side to side, and the spears stuck in the sand. When the Aucas came close, he began to fight them with a spear of his own. Although they attacked him in a group, he protected himself, he dodged and he jabbed, he jumped and he drew blood. He was able to kill a number of them because he was very good at dodging. That's because he was well-trained. He was able to knock the spears out of their hands. They were losing their weapons.

But they kept coming back at him, and he began to get tired. "Bring the canoe!" he shouted to the woman. He threw his spear at the Aucas and ran into the river with them chasing after him. He got on board and took the canoe out into the middle of the river.

That Zaparo was extremely courageous and skilful. They couldn't kill him, while he left their dead and wounded lying on the beach, on the other side of the Napo, right across from where the Siecoya flows into it.

From there he paddled upriver to the mouth of the Aguarico where the Secoyas lived. As he went along, his arms swelled up, because as he defended himself from the spears flying at him, he took a lot of blows to his arms. He said to his wife, "You paddle in the stern." And he lay down in the canoe. When he got there, he said, "The Aucas nearly killed me."

The Secoyas called him Nunifutki. He had a brother. That day, when he was telling the Secoyas what had happened, there was a Black who had a shotgun. The Black said to the Zaparos, "Let's go fight the Aucas, let's kill them."

"Sure," the brothers responded.

So one morning they went downriver until they found the Aucas' path. They went up it. They hadn't gone fifty meters when they saw

the Aucas coming. The Black fired his shotgun at them and ran back and took refuge in the canoe. Meanwhile the two Zaparos had to fight the Aucas. They fought them from the morning to the late afternoon. Those poor Zaparos fought really bravely, just the two of them against four groups of attacking Aucas. In the end they got too tired to keep dodging the spears that flew around them, and they retreated running. The older one tripped on a vine and fell. The Aucas tried to spear him, but he defended himself by rolling like a log and managed to get up. During all of this, the Black was in the canoe in the middle of the river.

"Bring the canoe!" they had to shout to him.

They managed to get in right as the Aucas were coming at them.

"You're a coward! You ran away like a dog! Didn't you say you wanted to kill Aucas? How are you supposed to do that when you're hiding in the canoe? The least you can do is shoot them now!"

That poor Black shot at them, but missed; the Aucas ran away at the sound of it. That Black was an Ecuadorian. He had to put up with a lot of ridicule from the brothers for having abandoned them.

The Zaparos have a sound in their language like *tu, tu, tu*. That's what they talk like. It must mean something. I think there still are some Zaparos. I've heard that they live near Archidona, upriver from Coca. They must have joined with the Quichuas. They continue to be themselves, but their lives have changed completely[14].

Wars with the Tetetes

For a very long time, the Tetetes lived in Zancudococha together with the Sionas. One night when they were drinking yage, a lake suddenly formed. Half of the Tetetes drowned in the water. The other half fled[15].

The fugitives settled at the mouth of the Cuyabeno, built houses and planted crops. The Sionas moved two bends upriver on the Aguarico and the two groups visited each other. One day, four Tetetes went to the house of the Sionas to say hello to them. They had their

spears with them because they never left them behind, not even to go visiting. As it happened, there was only one Siona in the house. The others were in their gardens or out hunting. When they arrived, the man wanted to offer them a smoke. He rolled tobacco in a plantain leaf. He lit a match instead of lighting it off the hearth fire. But when he lit the match, the Tetetes started screaming, "You're going to give us all malaria!"

They were enraged and tried to kill him, but he escaped. The Tetetes looted the house, carrying out machetes, axes, hammocks, fishhooks, everything they had. They got in their canoes—which were very wide, I've seen them on Blackwater River—and they went away.

When they returned, the other Sionas were furious at the man who had escaped the Tetetes.

"Why did you offer them tobacco? Don't you know they never smoke?"

The next day they cut down some *chonta*[16] palms and made spears. Then they went down to kill the Tetetes. The Tetetes saw them coming and yelled, "You won't have to come up here, we'll fight you on the beach!"

On the sand the two bands formed two long lines, face to face, and began to fight each other with their spears. Soon the Sionas were winning. Some Tetetes escaped, some were killed, some were wounded. One of the wounded ones, seeing that he was losing a lot of blood, started praying or something and put his finger in the wound. The blood stopped flowing out.

Some of the Tetetes were escaping into the forest, including women and children, because the Sionas didn't kill them. One who fled was a girl with a basket of parrots. A Siona begged her, "Will you stay and live with me?"

"No," she said. "Your people are killing my family."

In the houses the Sionas found all that had been stolen from them. They gathered up their possessions and returned home.

*

The Tetetes had been living on the River Aguarico at the point we

call Huira. After the battle they moved upriver from the mouth of the Aguas Negras[17] and had their houses there. One day they were having a party, drinking chicha, when a Siona arrived. They greeted him warmly, invited him in, gave him a seat and some chicha, and joked with him. When everyone was drunk, they wanted to give him a girl. He said, "I can't accept her without letting my mother know about it. I'll go tell her and then later I'll come back and take the girl with me."

But the girl's family insisted, and he got a little frightened.

"No, I can't do it that way. I'm going home."

He got in his canoe. The girl wanted to go with him, and started crying as he was going away. When he got home and told his mother what had happened, she said, "Why did you go there? They could have killed you!"

They gathered up their things and moved to another house.

*

A Siona went one day to fish in Cuyabeno. The Tetetes were there and welcomed him.

"Come on up," they said. "We have meat and fish; come inside."

He went up to visit them. There was a four-month-old baby.

"Heal the baby," said one of the Tetetes.

"Don't give him fish to eat until he's bigger," said the Siona after healing him.

They were conversing there when they saw another Siona approaching on the river. That one was wearing a hat of woven leaves. By the style of the hat, the Tetetes knew he was from the Aguarico, and they got really angry.

"You're one of them too!" they shouted at the visitor.

He headed out. They punched him but didn't manage to hit him in the head. He made it to the river and dove in, swam a little way and then submerged. The Tetetes threw spears at him from the riverbank. He was hit in the arm and the impact spun him in the water. The Tetetes laughed, but the wound wasn't serious. His wife had taken their canoe out into the water, and she helped him into it. The other

Siona who had arrived was also lightly wounded in the back.

Later on, the families of the wounded men went to take revenge on the Tetetes, who fled into the woods. In their flight they abandoned piles of clay for making pots. In the clay they'd spat phlegm, hoping to infect their persecutors with cold germs. From that time on the Tetetes have never showed themselves again, except once when my friend Vitoriano saw three of them in the headwaters of the Pacayacu.

Earlier there had been a time when Sionas and Tetetes lived together at Zancudococha. That lake is large and had to be crossed in silence. Otherwise a strong wind would come up that could sink the canoes.[18][18]

Zaparos and Secoyas

The Zaparos were very good with weapons. They were great warriors. They fought against the Aucas for a long time and, sometimes, out of pride, attacked the Secoyas. This was a long time ago and the Secoyas defended themselves with their spears, seriously wounding the attackers.

Zaparos and Secoyas fought, for example, in Pekeya, the Lagarto River. Because Secoya spears have sharp edges, the Zaparos couldn't defend themselves in their usual way, knocking them aside with their arms, as they did against the Aucas. The bamboo blades of our spears cut them like knives. Also, the Secoyas who lived at the mouth of the Aguarico said to the Zaparos, "Don't attack those people. They're our relatives. It's better to be good friends with them."

After that, the Secoyas and the Zaparos never fought again.

A world of short lives

Traditional Secoya house

A WORLD OF SHORT LIVES

Descent from great healers

In ancient times the Secoya groups lived around the mouth of the Aguarico, on the Napo. In those days there were no Mestizos. My family lived there, a group with great shamans, healers who knew the animals. My family drank a lot of yage.

One day the head of the family observed that his daughter was making a necklace with nuts from the forest. He said to her,

"Wait, don't do that, I'm going to get you some good ones. Those ones are worthless."

He went and bathed, then drank his *yoco*[19][19] while sitting on his stool of pambil wood. He began to transform himself into a wild pig, a *huangana*[20]. He imitated the grunts too. Suddenly he was holding a branch laden with nuts. Because there were others present, he distributed five nuts each to his close relatives and three each to the more distant ones. To his daughter he gave enough to make a necklace. Those are nuts that humans don't know about. Only the wild pigs can get them.

The man who did that was a relative of mine who lived at the mouth of the Aguarico. His younger brothers were also healers. The women of the group, too, had visions and knew how to heal. From the mouth of the Aguarico, the Secoyas extended all along the Napo to Limoncocha.

We had all kinds of plantations: chonta, yuca[21], corn, sugarcane, plantain, and other edible fruits. We had dogs that hunted tapir, and the tapirs were fat because they weren't from this earth. The healer summoned them when he drank yage [22].

On one occasion the shaman summoned a tapir in his yage visions. When the ceremony was over, the family went out to look for it. Five hundred meters from the house, a dog picked up the trail. The tapir went into a stream and they killed it. They went back to advise the shaman and the whole family went out to look at it. The tapir had *achiote*[23] on his forehead because when the healer had called it in his vision, he himself was painted that way, and it passed in front of him. They cleaned it and butchered it, giving the shaman the fattest and

best piece because he had summoned it.

I saw all that when I was a child. I remember something else that happened as I kept my father company drinking yage. I was next to him in his hammock when he began to drink. He drank and drank. At dawn he transformed himself into a tapir. I saw him eating leaves and also whistling like those animals, like a high, fine flute. I was there, watching. Later the tapir vanished. My father did things like that.

How they acquired salt

The Secoya groups didn't know about salt. They cooked meat simply: they boiled it in water and added chili pepper. They lived that way for many years. Later some gentlemen arrived from the Peruvian area and another from Ecuador.

We didn't know about those countries then because there were no borders. There were no Whites, only people [24]. The Secoya nation was large, its villages extending from the mouth of the Coca to the mouth of the Wahoya.

Those men who came were Quichuas and they had granulated salt with them. They were surprised to see us eating without salt.

"My friends, you eat without salt?"

"We never eat that. We don't know what it is."

Hearing that, one of the men who came from downriver gave them pieces of salt. Then he told them that near Iquitos there were hills of salt.

"Come with me, I'll take you there and you can bring some back."

They agreed. Four canoes set out on the voyage, starting from the mouth of the Aguarico. They left very early in the morning and made the River Wahoya by nightfall; in a week they had reached Iquitos. There they met some Mestizos who questioned the man who guided the Secoyas. He responded,

"I'm bringing these gentlemen so that they can take salt for their consumption. I invited them to come with me because they eat without salt."

Hearing that, the Mestizos lent them an axe to break up the salt. Then the party traveled three days up another river. There's a hot river in that are.[25]. On the way to where the salt is, there are cascades in the river. They left the canoes there. Some of the Secoyas returned home, but the others continued over land. The first cascade is small, the second large.

To go back they built big rafts and tied the salt chunks to the logs. All around there they saw great numbers of Quichuas, like vultures, collecting salt [26]. The next day two rafts laden with salt made their way down the river. When they came near the cascade they got ready. They sat back to back and tied themselves down securely. The first raft went over the cascade and was driven deep into the water. Twenty meters downriver they went ashore to fix the raft. The second raft passed over the cascade too and the men came out alive. They all went over the next cascade more calmly, because they had passed the more dangerous one.

In Iquitos they loaded all the salt they could onto their canoes. The rest they left in the care of a local Mestizo until others could return for it. The whole trip took three months. When they got home they told the people that there was more to bring. So three more canoes went down to pick it up.

That's how they acquired salt. Afterwards, the Sionas would go down the Aguarico with rolls of *chambira*[27] and trade it for salt.

Another version

One day a Mestizo who had come from Iquitos asked the people,

"Do you have salt?"

"No, we eat without it. We use the sweet juice of the yuca."

"I brought you a little."

It was a salt with large grains. He gave a little to each family.

"Down below, in Iquitos, there's salt and you can go bring it back. I'll take you there."

Up to that point they had eaten without salt and saw no need for it, but when they tried it, they liked it.

"You can travel with four large canoes."

The people were enthusiastic and went for the salt. When they got back, they informed other families living upriver on the Aguarico, who came to trade hammocks for it. Others from Limoncocha on the Napo also brought hammocks to trade. They didn't need much salt. In the next trip they made for salt, they almost all came down with measles. After that they didn't dare go again because they had no vaccine against that sickness [28].

Fire and fishooks

Wa'itsẹme[29] is a dark stone. The ancient people struck two of them together to make sparks. They did this next to very dry leaves to make fire. Other times they got fire in the great storms: lightning sometimes hit dry wood and they took this fire into their homes.

The ancient people didn't have fishhooks like we have now. They tied together two armadillo bones, one sharpened, and then attached a line That's how they caught *sabalo*[30] and all kinds of fish. Nevertheless, from the time I was a child, I knew the fishhooks the Mestizos used.

Secoya houses

The Secoyas lived in big houses with many families inside. Each couple had its own fire and cooked separately. The floor was the ground itself. They hung up the hammocks next to the wall and slept off the ground. The center of the house was an open space that was used when they had a fiesta or drank yage. Although each family had its own hearth, the relatives shared meat and fish and corn chicha. They lived as a group.

The construction was carried out by everyone together. Some people who wanted to live alone built individual houses with raised floors. Each big house had an authority or chief, the shaman; he gave the order to build, and they all obeyed. The work in the gardens was also communal. When they were all burned, ready to plant, the chief allocated an area to each family to do their planting. They kept the gardens clear together, and that way they were able to work without suffering or great difficulty because people helped one another.

At around three in the morning, when the currasow[31] sang, or the rooster crowed, the women would get up, drink yoco with their husbands, and start twisting chambira. That's why in those days everyone had their own hammock. If there were enough hammocks, they would take some chambira to Iquitos to trade for machetes, axes and clothes. Little by little, everyone would get up. The chief would converse with the others and organize the work or activities of the day. The young people, too, drank yoco, and learned how to work alongside the adults. Most of the girls didn't drink yoco. That's what I knew.

Afterwards people started building individual houses. They didn't want big houses. When I lived on the River Siecoya, we still had a big house with a dirt floor. Only those who lived on the big river, the Napo, imitated the Quichuas and built houses with high floors. It's because on the banks of the Napo there are a lot of mosquitoes and they did that to protect themselves[32]. But in those days, still, only very few Secoyas imitated the Quichuas. Now things are very different. People make houses with boards and zinc. I prefer to live in houses with palm-thatch roofs like in the old days, because the new ones are very hot on sunny days, while the old-style ones are cool.

Orphaned

There were several healers who did evil to my father. They thought themselves superior, and killed him with their magic, but the spirit of the dead man reached them on the path and caught them. One of them returned home already sick; by then he couldn't speak. They brewed yage to heal him, and a relative wanted to treat him, but he couldn't do it because the spirit that was at his side said to him,

"You want to treat him? If you do, you'll pay for it. You'll die with him!"

So that man drew away without treating the patient. An older man, a higher level shaman, drank thick yage and tried to drive away the spirit, but the spirit came back against him and he fell ill. Both he and the patient died.

There was another man nicknamed Ca'tae. *Ca'taë* means a weapon like a rifle. He was one of those who heard malicious gossip from my father's enemies and worked evil against him. My father defended himself, and Ca'tae died too. I had gone to that man's house to kill him, but he escaped. Nevertheless he died soon afterwards, killed by the same spirit that had killed my father. I had been chasing him a long way, like from San Pablo to Puerto Bolivar, but his son hid him and I couldn't finish him off.

It was a hard day for me when my father died, even though the spirits avenged him. Well, I know that this world is not a place for long lives. Death will come to everyone. I'm an orphan and I have few days left to live. My mother died and was buried in Cuyabeno. She was done in by Siona witches.

Once there were many of us

When I lived around the River Siecoya, there were many deaths among the Secoyas. In those days there were a lot of healers who drank yage. That's when I began my apprenticeship. Some witches were in a constant state of war with each other. But in my family, we lived happily. We would visit our relatives in the more distant houses. We had no outside enemies then because the Aucas lived far away on the Napo. Only when someone killed someone's relative with magic did their family avenge the crime. There were many of us Secoyas, but when people started killing each other with witchcraft, the numbers started going down. There was a big group of us around the Siecoya, and then the group was dying off because of the sorcerers.

Later, when I went to live in Pantoja, I met other Indigenous people: Quichuas, Macaguajes... we worked side by side. We Secoyas didn't make trouble with any of them, or with the Mestizos.

Fernando in Cuyabeno

THE NOMAD

Like my tribe, I've been nomadic.

I was brought up around Mestizos, too, when I was a child, between the borders of Ecuador and Peru; the Mestizos had reached there by that time. When we crossed the border, the Ecuadorian military men wanted us to stay.

"Why don't you come live over here? Your boss Mauricio doesn't pay anything."

"Where do you come from?" they asked us another time.

"I was born in Peru, but my father lived on the Aguarico and the Napo."

"Why don't you live there, then?"

The military men advised us like that. In the end, tired of working, we ran away from the boss. At that point I had already migrated from place to place quite a bit.

First homes

I was born next to the small river known as Siecoya. I remember, from my childhood, that we lived in various houses along the river. And sometimes we would live for a few months next to one of the streams that ran into it The names are not erased from my memory: P<u>i</u>simoaya, Mecopë, Gataya. In that last place I saw Peruvian soldiers for the first time. They were cutting a trail through the forest, and they slept in our house. One or more of them had a cold when they arrived, and they infected us; we abandoned the place.

We returned to Mecopë, where we spent several years. Bored of that area, we went in search of a better one, and settled in C<u>a</u>tëpo. There we built a house and planted gardens, but we had to return to the old place until the plants were mature. When the corn was ready to harvest, we moved in for good.

I drank yage for the first time as a child in the place called Mawa'ira. Later we moved back to C<u>a</u>tëpo again. Every time we moved, we had to work hard to build a house and plant new gardens.

When I became a teenager I drank a lot, I planted yage vines and practiced the rituals. That was the time of my first visit to Cuyabeno. We stayed there only four months; there was a Mestizo there who used to harass us, saying, "You're Peruvians, go back to your own country."

We built rafts and rode them down to Lagartococha. From there, I walked on ahead, the others behind me. I spent the first night next to a site where someone had been buried. Before dawn I heard a noise like a door opening. The ghost had gotten up, and he went to bathe in the river. I listened to him washing himself. Then he shook out his tunic and went back to the grave.

We settled in a place we knew, P<u>u</u>itëaya, and we stayed there a while. In the next place, Soasaoya, my father was attacked with witchcraft. It happened during a fiesta, when some slanderers asked a witch to attack him. I was an orphan when I went to Toñahoraya on the banks of the Napo. I worked for a Mestizo and the military men made me work maintaining the wide trail that ran from Pantoja to Guepí[33].

Jaguars on the trail

I went with my brother-in-law and some other relatives to work on that trail. As we went along, we crossed swamps. In the late afternoon I said, "I'll stay here and build a shelter. This job is going to take days. It's best to make a place to stay."

My brother-in-law and another relative stayed there with me. Soon we were hanging up the hammocks. It was late, about 5:30. The sun was just above the trees when I sensed that jaguars were coming to eat my relative, a man named Oké. He was a shaman too, but the jaguars were very close, just about to get him.

"Listen," Oké said suddenly, "it's a bad night and I feel something strange. Is your rifle loaded?"

"No, it's empty, and it's just a muzzle-loading shotgun anyway."

I sprang out of the hammock and went twenty meters down the

path. Suddenly at least ten jaguars appeared, one of them the wife of a shaman who had died.

She said, "We're going to devour that man because when he used to get drunk on chicha, he would beat us. We're going to eat him up. My husband sent us here."

"No, you may not hurt him," I told them.

"Well, where are there other humans?"

"Some went on ahead."

"We'll go eat them."

"You won't be able to harm them, but you may go."

They went along the path following my relatives who had gone on ahead. They weren't able to hurt them because I had ordered them not to. The people were frightened, and climbed up on the roof of a small hut so they could fire their shotguns down at the jaguars. The jaguars showed no fear. I could see what was happening, and hear the roars, from where I lay stretched out in my hammock. In the middle of the night I transformed myself into a jaguar and went out to drive those animals away. Afterwards, everything was quiet; the people got down off the roof and lay down in their hammocks. They didn't even see me.

The next day, when we caught up to them, they told us, "There were jaguars here last night. They were jumping around on the bridge over there and turning in circles. But this morning there are no footprints, no trace of them at all."

Last movements around Wahoya

Tired of living that way, we went down the Siecoya River to another place, Pacuropë[34], near some other relatives. I had a lot of trouble planting yuca there because the ground was so full of stones. So soon after we Kënayoropë[35], where there was no lack of food. We stayed there a long time. Later, I got bored there and moved to the Wahoya River, to a beautiful spot, a little hill with streams on two sides that poured into the river.

We lived there peacefully until the boss[36] came and demanded that we tap (huancosa) rubber for him. At that point we went back up the river to the place called Watiwueh, (Spirit House). I had lived there as a child; after so many moves. I returned to the place of my infancy. But very quickly I decided to leave for someplace completely different. I had already planted yuca and plantain, but I left those gardens to move once and for all to Cuyabeno.

I was tired of working as a rubber tapper and decided to quit. Before I left, I told some people I knew, "I've seen about twenty rubber trees; you can work them, because I'm getting out of here."

My wife made yuca flatbread for the trip while I waited for the boss in case he came around to make trouble. I was ready to eliminate him, because he treated us like slaves. But he didn't come, and we left. It was a long, difficult journey. I had to walk ahead, carrying our things, then retrace my steps to help my wife.

Paco Carmona

When I was young, we had only spears to hunt wild pigs, but if you're good, it's like having a shotgun. If I brought two spears hunting, I killed two pigs; with four spears, four pigs. I was a good shot with the spear, and with the blowgun, too, although I didn't know how to make *curare*[37]. The boss, Paco Carmona, brought it back with him from Iquitos when we asked him to. We bought it with the rubber we tapped and we kept it in a little pot above the fire. I remember how strong that curare was. It killed monkeys like a shot from a rifle.

In those days there were three families of us who lived at Mecope. Paco Carmona was the boss and Mauricio Levi his stepson. We called the boss "Taita Carmona."[38]. He employed us tapping rubber. I worked in the headwaters of the Siecoya. Others worked with me. The Secoyas went to the Wahoya and to the River Lagarto. Carmona paid us well. We could trade an *arroba*[39] of rubber for a rifle. Later the boss got old and Levi grew up.

Levi's mother was named Rosa. She treated us like her children. "You can treat me like your mother too," she said. "As long as you work here, I'll cook for you and you'll have food."

One day Paco Carmona said to his workers, "I'm going to my land, to Spain, to die there. I want to leave my bones in my own land." And he advised Mauricio, "Be like me and don't treat the workers badly. You're still young. I raised you and they've known you since you were a child."

Later he went off on his journey. We heard that he had gone to Europe. But four years later he came back to where we lived. He was only there a short time before he was stricken with an illness that wouldn't go away[40]. The people said, "Let's cure him."

They gave him remedies, but he didn't get better. One day an Ecuadorian arrived from that frontier.

"I have a remedy for that," he said.

But Carmona didn't improve. Finally the Ecuadorian made him a poison to kill himself. Carmona said to his cook, Petrona, "That man made a medicine to cure me once and for all of everything. I won't drink it now, but keep it for me, don't throw it away."

At last, Carmona could barely get up, and he decided to die. He called Petrona. "Bring me that drink. I've gotten too old, I have to die."

Before taking it, he told her, "Since there's no remedy for what I've got, this poison has been made for me so I can stop suffering."

When she saw him drink it, she didn't believe him, but the man insisted, "Of the two of us, only you will see the sun rise tomorrow."

Before he finished drinking it, he fell unconscious. The servant, terrified, ran to advise Carmona's wife, who lived nearby in another house. "Your husband is very ill. Yesterday a man named Valdemar came from Ecuador and made a poison for him. Today he asked me for it and now he's passed out."

When the woman came to where he husband was, he was barely breathing, and soon after, he died. They notified the Peruvians at the military post in Pantoja. Paco Carmona was like a chief to them. The soldiers came and fired in the air in his honor. Later they wrapped him in blankets and buried him in Pantoja.

When they made the dead man's bed, they found beneath it an official mesage that had been sent from Güepí. It seemed he had kept it there for a long time. The paper said that the Angoteros[41] had killed a missionary around the Putumayo River and fled to the Napo; it ordered Carmona to investigate those men. When the soldiers read that, they wanted to kill the Secoyas, who some time before had spent time on the Putumayo. In that moment, the boss's wife came home and told the captain not to do it. "What do you think they are? Pigs? Animals? If you kill them, you better eat them! These people didn't kill the missionary, and if you kill them, I'll go tell the Ecuadorian soldiers and they'll come for *you*."

She spoke to them very angrily and the soldiers left without hurting us [42].

The Peruvian priests

The first one I saw was at the mouth of the Aguarico when I worked for Paco Carmona. I was still little then. The priest came from downriver and stayed in Paco's house. He only stayed a day and he didn't visit our houses. I remember another one afterwards. I was about fifteen then. He came and stayed at the boss's house. He wasn't interested in helping us. He held a mass for the natives who worked at the hacienda. When he arrived he was dressed in black, but for the mass he put on a white robe. All the adults were supposed to gather for the mass. They made that prayer in adoration of God [43].

That missionary was fond of us Secoyas. He put us close to him, and the people who lived along the river on the other side. Taita Paco's wife Rosa used to pray, too. She had a painting of God on a board and she had people pray in front of it. I learned to pray when I was a child and I remember that I saw that board when I was grown up too. Later, when the lady died, they threw it away in Iquitos. She used to pray every evening with the women who cooked in the house. Sometimes other Secoyas who lived farther away came too. She invited the

women, and if others wanted to attend, she let them. I can't remember the songs or prayers. Too much time has passed.

With Mauricio Levi

Afterwards we started working with Mauricio Levi, Carmona's fosterling. He made us clear vast plots of land to plant corn and rice. There were groups of Secoyas and Quichuas. We worked separately. I remember we felled an enormous grove of *ungurahua* [44] palms. We planted rice, harvested it, and came back and cleared it again to make a pasture. But that boss didn't pay us like Carmona had. He only gave us a tunic, and a dress to the women. I had to work toasting yuca flour. He said,

"I'm going to pay you a lot because it's hard work. I'll give you a big piece of cloth."

But he just gave me a tunic. He made us work on the other side of the Napo, a swampy place full of caimans which we killed for food. Years went by. We worked all week; we only had Sunday free to go hunting. On some big islands in the river we planted corn, and then later on, sugarcane.

"Each of you will get a ration of honey," he told us.

It was a lie. He didn't give us anything. We suffered a lot. The Quichuas did too. They ran away from the boss to a place at the mouth of the Wahoya called Cepeta. Mauricio didn't react. Among the workers was a Waorani, but our sorcerers eliminated him [45].

When I was still single, a friend of mine invited me to visit Archidona with him. We made the trip in four weeks and I returned to the house at the mouth of the Aguarico. With Mauricio I made another trip, to Iquitos; we paddled all the way down the Napo looking for the barge that used to go up to Pantoja and didn't find it. Mauricio's mother was living in Iquitos. He asked her,

"When does the barge go to Pantoja?"

"The Chinchirroca sets out next week"[46].

I asked Mauricio's permission to show Iquitos and the salt river to the Secoya who was traveling with me. We went by canoe, and passed a very hot river on the way to the Huallaga. The boss told us,

"The best salt is found on this river."

There I could see the white mountains of salt. Later we returned to Pantoja on a barge that was ten meters long by five meters wide. It was very strong. That's why they called it Chinchirroca. It rode hard. The whole voyage was beautiful. When I got back I worked several more months and was given my wife. Then I couldn't travel any more because I had to take care of her.

The flight to Cuyabeno

At the end of my time with Levi I was clearing some land and planting yuca and plantain and, at the same time, tapping rubber for the boss. We Secoyas didn't like living with him. I had a hut that I had built right on a trail used by tapirs and in those days I was cutting down the tall trees that were nearby so that the winds wouldn't blow one down on top of my house. One night I sensed a dark shadow moving among the fallen tree trunks. I shot at it and was very surprised not to hear a tapir running away.

"What animal could that be? It doesn't seem to be a tapir."

My wife didn't wake up. I heard something like the cry of .... an animal? It sounded more like a human, or maybe a deer, moving away through the trees.

"Maybe I shot a spirit," I thought.

At dawn I went back there and surprised the tapirs feeding. They ran when they saw me, but I whistled and they stopped. A young one even came toward me, and I killed it. I smoked the meat. I also found a very bitter, strong yoco vine that would help me work, because I wanted to finish up the rubber tapping work quickly. At that moment, people from Cuyabeno arrived and said,

"Let's go! We've come here to accompany you"[47].

I immediately got ready. We carried the smoked meat of the tapir. I showed a relative of mine where he could find ten or twenty rubber trees, and also where the yoco was. After that I waited in the house a while, with the shotgun loaded, because the boss was on his way. I had decided to argue with him or even eliminate him before leaving for Cuyabeno. But he didn't appear. Meanwhile, my wife was getting ready. She ground the corn, then mixed it with yuca and made flatbread. The next day we went in a canoe upriver on the Wahoya. A storm had knocked a lot of trees into the river, which made the journey very hard. In the headwaters, we ended up on a stream that was so narrow that, finally, the canoe couldn't navigate its turns.

"Let's get out," I said. "The military trail to Güepí has to be nearby."

After half a kilometer on foot, we found it and went walking along it. My son and your mother[48][47] had been born by that time, and besides them we were carrying a lot of things. It took us several days and nights to reach the lagoons and the River Lagarto, or Pëkëyá in our language. There, we cut down a tree and made a canoe to go down a shortcut between two bends of a river known as Emuñá, "Place of Manatees," and end up on the River Aguarico. Soon after we reached Ecuadorian territory we met a soldier.

"We're on the way to Cuyabeno where our family is."

"Go right ahead."

That night we reached the mouth of the River Lagarto, and a house there belonging to Javier Duque, a Mestizo.

"I've got work for you," he told us.

We worked there for several days. Continuing on, we went up the Aguarico to Cañon de los Negros,[49][48] going very slowly. In Montufar we only met one person, whom the men from Cuyabeno called Tambero.

"We've come to live with our family."

"That's fine, you can stay."

He gave us dried *paiche*[50] fish and we went up into the Cuyabeno area. We had only been there a short time when Duque came with some lies:

"Go live on the River San Miguel, because the Peruvians are looking for you."

We believed him, and I hid in the lagoons; the rest of my family hid in some nearby swamps in what is Puerto Bolivar today. While we were in hiding, my uncle and some other relatives went back to Peru without telling us. When I learned that, I decided to go back too, and built a raft of pambil palm wood. When I got to Montufar, a Cofan[51] from San Miguel, a man we knew who lived there, was surprised and asked,

"Didn't you come here to live? Why are you going back?"

"I'm really angry. Someone's been bothering us, telling us that the Peruvians are going to come and catch us. That's why I'm leaving."

"Don't pay any attention to that fatso."

The new life

When I arrived from Siecoya, I had recently graduated as a healer. From the yage house I would call the white-lipped peccaries and they would come. We would kill them nearby, despite the fact that in the beginning we didn't have shotguns, but shot them with blowgun darts. On the darts we put a strong poison bought in Peru. We had constructed the yage house a bit distant from where we lived, on a hill on the other side of the Cuyabeno. It had a dirt floor. Its dimensions were five by five [52], because there weren't many of us; it was big enough for us to gather and drink. We didn't cook with water from the river, but got it from a stream, very clear. We'd prepare a lot of the brew, so I'd drink all night without finishing it until the next afternoon at around five. At dusk I'd return home.

Cuyabeno was where I had the last yage house, because when we came to San Pablo we didn't have one. Now the people practice the evangelical religion, and there's a kind of conflict between that religion and yage. So we had a yage house only until Evangelism came. It was amazing in those days how the herds of peccaries and the tapirs

would respond to the call and come near, almost right up to us, and let themselves be hunted without showing any fear!

Sionas from the Putumayo used to come to my house to drink yage. I remember on one occasion they practiced with me for a month. Those visions were beautiful, as we cured sick people and transformed ourselves into morpho butterfly spirits to be able to travel great distances. In those days I was able to cure a boy who had gone insane. He had been treated by other healers, but when they gave him yage he got even crazier—he took off his clothes, ran into the forest and was gone for several days. His mother brought him to me and I brought him back to sanity.

In those days on the Cuyabeno, the military didn't bother us at all.

"You people can live in this territory because you don't make trouble with anybody. We know you're natives of these lands."

When we had been there for a little while, a Siona suggested to me,

"Why don't you ask to be appointed governor of this area?"[53]

I thought about it and immediately went to the Putumayo where the major lived. He made me welcome.

"Can you do me the favor of obtaining the nomination for me to be the guardian in Cuyabeno?"

"Yes, I can do it."

I returned home. Soon afterwards they advised me from Montufar:

"Call the major so you can go to the Putumayo. Your nomination arrived."

I returned quickly to where the major was.

"Here I have your nomination," he told me in the presence of all his officials whom he had gathered there. "We're going to give you our vote so that you will be governor of your village."

They all got to their feet, voted, and gave me the certificate.

"If anyone comes from the Napo to bother you or your people, show them this nomination and they will respect it."

I didn't get a salary, but I took the paper with me. That happened more or less at around the same time as the missionary came [54]. Af-

ter I received the nomination, the military men would always drop by my house when they were in the area.

"Can I come up?"

"Sure, come on up" [55]

"Would you give us some plantains, some yuca...?"

"No problem."

They would greet me politely and take some things away; they respected me.

The missionaries arrive

I made a garden in a place called Tari'cawa [56] and spent over a year there. I raised pigs, animals which you have to keep penned up, because otherwise they make the patio around the house filthy. My brother-in-law Cecilio had made his garden lower down and he sent a message to me:

"Your sister is alone here. Come join us. It's a nice place."

I went down then, cleared land and planted another garden and built a house. A long time passed, and then my brother-in-law wanted to move again.

"Let's go now to the mouth of the Cuyabeno, stay there for a while and then go back to the Siecoya."

"Well, we were talking about staying here forever, why do you want to go back? I don't see any need for that. I came here as a permanent move and now I can go anywhere I want on the Cuyabeno and Aguarico rivers"

In any case, we did move to the mouth of the Cuyabeno, using a path that was still open from when the military had been there. One day a seaplane appeared in the air. It flew in circles. It flew very low with the window open, and the people inside made gestures with their hands.

"It seems like they're calling us," I said. "What do they want to say?"

The machine flew away, but right afterwards we heard about the

arrival of the missionary, Johnson, and that we were asked to go to the lagoons. I said to my brother-in-law,

"You go on ahead, I'll straighten up my things and then follow."

I was worried about some salt I had stored in bottles. I wanted to bury it so it would be preserved well. After that I went to where the missionary was. He barely knew any Spanish, though. I spoke with his wife Mary.

"We have come to live with you," she said. "The government sent us to this area. Build us a house so we can stay here."

We made them a palm-thatched house and then started to clear a landing strip following the gringo's instructions. We had a contract for that. We felled trees and dragged them to the edges of the area we were clearing. We even pulled up the trunks. Afterwards he had us cut a heavy trunk and cut it so it was flat on all four sides. We had to hold it by the ends and drag it to level the ground, at the same time as we pounded the ground with smaller logs to harden it. When the airplane came for the first time, it couldn't land. It just flew very low and dropped food and supplies, including tools: machetes, shovels, picks, mattocks .... those things made the work easier.

One day while we were clearing brush, a snake bit my brother-in-law.

"Carry him to his hammock," said the gringo. "If he walks, the poison will work faster. He should remain calm."

For his part, he started reading a big book. After studying it, he gave Cecilio some medicines against the poison, and then gave him some coffee. Cecilio was quiet.

"Maybe this medicine will kill me," he said.

"It could be that the gringo knows something, and that's why he gave it to you," I said. "I don't think anything bad will happen to you."

He remained in pain for a while, and then got better.

The missionary paid us well. With that money I bought a dozen pots, a bolt of linen and a shotgun. I still have a tunic made from that material, and the shotgun too.

To build the permanent house, he asked us for posts of cedar, adding that the soldiers stationed on the Putumayo would saw them.

For beams, we brought logs of *balsamo* [57] and *huambula* [58]. Later the gringo asked us,

"In Colombia, I bought sheets of zinc for the roof from Londoño. Go to the River San Miguel and bring them here."

We went up the Cuyabeno to the stream called Hormiga, then walked to San Miguel. For my part, I took the opportunity to buy one hundred pounds of salt. The zinc ended up being very heavy to carry, but we did the work and he paid us. From then on I did other jobs for the gringo: he tape recorded me telling stories, and he always paid me.

After the gringos, Father Anastasio arrived in Cuyabeno. He made a big house where he gave classes to children and teenagers. However, that Father envied Mary Johnson. Sometimes he didn't even accept the food she sent over. He was angry. Also, there was one girl that he bothered a lot, and so we complained to the authorities. He told me,

"I'm going to Quito, then coming back."

A Brother stayed behind waiting for him, but he never did come back, and later that mission was closed down for good [59].

One time the gringos took my daughter, your mother, with them to Quito She was the first Secoya to visit that city. Before leaving, they told me,

"If you want her to come back quickly, you can send a message via the radio at the Putumayo Military Command." At that time they hadn't yet installed their own apparatus in Puerto Bolivar.

Five months passed and then I sent my older child, my son Delfin, to call on the radio for her to come back. Three days later my daughter arrived with Mary Johnson. When the plane landed, Rogelio Criollo commented,

"She looks like a little lady, she looks like a Mestiza."

"You think she's been living with people like us? She's been with people from outside, that's why she looks different."

Maruja said she'd been homesick in that distant place and that she had heard sounds in the house like the voices of parrots.

"We've never seen anything like it," Mrs. Mary said. "When she arrived, strange things started to happen."

The last stage, San Pablo

During the time that we lived at the mouth of the Aguarico, on the stream Guariyá, and worked for Mauricio Levi, we had no school. The boss thought,

"If those Secoyas learn to read and write, they'll surpass us. Then they won't want to keep on working for me."

In Cuyabeno, on the other hand, the lady missionary taught children, teens and adults. I learned to count to seventy. I could even write. My wife, however, could not.

"No, she won't be able to do it," Mrs. Mary said.

She was kind, that woman. The missionaries took my nephew Celestino, and Simon Piaguaje from Campoeno, over to Limoncocha to study, and they graduated as teachers; that's how they know so much Spanish. Now I see the children studying. It's good! They should have their scholastic studies so that they can know more and be able to understand the language of the Mestizos and talk to them when they come here making trouble.

On the other hand, there were other customs that got lost: for example, the yage ceremony. When she learned of it, the missionary went around repeating:

"It's bad to drink yage, it's harmful."

At that point, some people became evangelicals. I couldn't build another yage hut on my own; so we let it go, despite the fact that I can still heal people.

After we had been in Cuyabeno for a long time, we went downriver on the Aguarico to Cañon de los Negros. However, we never lived off the gardens we planted there because the missionary came to invite us to land with better soil. Here's how that happened. In those days Johnson was going back and forth between Limoncocha and his homeland. He almost never visited us. On one of his visits he learned we had left Cuyabeno. He told us:

"There's not enough land here to work. I'm going to fly with the plane to find a better place."

And he went and flew over the land where we're living now, ob-

serving that there were no *moretales* [60], or swamps. When he got back he announced:

"I've seen some good land! Let's move there!"

"And how am I going to move with all this?"

"I'll help you move your things."

Some people went straight to San Pablo, including my daughter Maruja. Others followed. I was being left behind. For my part I was afraid of not finding fish.

"Yes, there's a lot," a lady from the Aguarico assured me "You can catch them right from the port!"

In the end I made up my mind, and Johnson took my things in his plane. I followed by canoe. It took me seven days to get to Shushufindi. Vitoriano Criollo had warned me:

"The river rises quite a bit there, so much that sometimes you can't even bathe, and the hunting is scarce. I know what I'm talking about, *compadre*; if it looks good to you, go, but I'm not moving from here. May it go well for you, *compadre*!"

In this area, there used to be Sionas, but after we arrived, there were few of them. A thousand meters behind our houses we rebuilt the missionary's house with the same sheets of zinc he had in Cuyabeno.

Fernando, 1989

THE YEARS OF APPRENTICESHIP

What I heard as a child

If someone wants to be a drinker of yage, and a graduate, or wise one, he needs first of all interest, and also bravery and the capacity to bear the suffering [61]. Here's how it happened to me. My father, who was the healer or chief of the family, said to me one day:

"You should initiate yourself in yage so that later on you can be the chief of your people after I die."

Hearing these words, I became interested.

"Your obligation as healer and chief will be to take care of your people, especially if they get sick. There are witches who drink yage, but they only take care of themselves, they're not even capable of looking after their own families. You shouldn't follow those steps, but pay attention to what I do and follow my example"

I was a child then, but I never forgot that advice.

"Above all, you should work hard learning to drink yage; when you have attained knowledge, you will be able to give yage to others who want to see, you will be able to instruct other healers."

In my family there was one relative, much older than me, about whom my father said,

"I'm not going to continue teaching him, and he won't drink anymore, because he doesn't have sufficient interest for the visions."

He warned me like that from the beginning.

Moments of initiation

In the place called Mahua'ira, when I was still a child, I drank yage for the first time. It was *tarayage* [62], a plant which is miraculous, because a healer had received it in a vision It ended up being very strong for me, the drunkenness lasted a long time. Afterwards I went along drinking watery yage, cup by cup. Later in C̲atëpo I started again with strong, thick yage; but I only drank continually in P̲isimoaya. I had a

garden planted with yage and I set out to finish off all the vines. If you drink continuously it's very beautiful. You don't want to stop and it seems like a vice. You're always thinking about drinking. At that point in my apprenticeship I was already big, I was about sixteen years old. My father prepared and directed the ceremony, giving yage to the whole family.

I quickly became interested in all that. I increased my dosage and learned how to brew the drink. My uncle, too, had a big garden of yage, and we used to bring members of the family there until we had finished it. I drank large quantities, generally pure, sometimes with admixture plants. My intention was to be chief of the family one day, and the best healer, and that's why I drank week after week. It was the time in which my visions increased. I not only saw beautifully-colored birds, but also perceived certain images from the upper world, for example a *wiñawai* (angel), as small as a frog or even smaller [63].

When I was drinking continuously, I made my first trip to Cuyabeno, just for a visit; when I came back I tried pehi. With only one dose of that you can see all reality, to the ends of the earth and sky. The visions of the earth end and the visions of the sky begin; you rise up, level by level, where the intoxication leads you. I reached the highest level, the furthest reaches of the sky.

Besides my father and my uncles, I had another healing teacher. His name was Salmo, although in our language we called him *Mi<u>a</u>kë* (Whitey). He was an Angotero, a Secoya from downriver, a good man. First he invited me to drink chicha and later he began to teach me to see; he was a distant relative of my wife [64].

One of my first ceremonies

My uncle helped me to adorn myself for the ritual. On my crown he used bluebird and toucan feathers. We also had feathers through the holes in our ears. The ritual leader had a special necklace for the ceremony.

I waited all day and we began to drink at nightfall. There were two of us there to be initiated; the other was also the son of a healer. All the adults in the group were there, including women. I was the youngest participant, but I was very interested. On the yage table were two cups. The other boy picked up one with little liquid in it and brought it to the leader, who "cures" it or "arranges" it [65]. Soon the healer gave it back to the boy to drink. When it was my turn, I drank all he gave me without any fear. The intoxication hit me very hard, violently. I didn't throw up, though, but lay down in my hammock. Moments later I lost consciousness; I was unaware of anything and felt nothing until dawn.

The other boy, also drunk, vomited up everything as soon as he lay down in his hammock. Bad luck for him. I held mine in as if it were food, without spilling a drop, despite the fact that I was rolling around unconscious. I was trying to get up, but they had tied me into the hammock so that I wouldn't fall out. I awoke at dawn, turned to face the ground, threw up everything, and fell asleep again. In those cases it's best to throw up after the drunkenness, not before; that's what I did. Several hours later I got up sober as the ceremony was ending.

I went down to the river to move my bowels, then washed my face and my teeth. I was still a little dizzy. I found myself up on a log above the water; at that moment, my vision cleared and I saw in the riverbed something like an underwater house, whose roof seemed made of water lilies, a beautiful house that I believed was real. I've never forgotten that. When I returned to the house they were brewing yage again.

"You will drink again tonight," my father said.

"No, I'd be afraid to now, but next time I will".

I was true to my word and kept on drinking and learning. A short time later I started preparing it myself and inviting others to drink, though I hadn't acquired much knowledge yet. Little by little I taught myself to drink and to see what was in the visions; I ended up liking it so much that I drank not only with my family, but also in other houses in that area.

It's not easy to graduate

To be able to graduate, it's necessary to drink yage at least fifteen times over a period of several months. At that point you should be able to cure any illness. But to gain that ability, you pass through many privations and sufferings.

For example, I was married, but I couldn't sleep with my wife. If I wanted to be the highest and wisest healer, I couldn't go to her. I lived near her but in a different house, ceaselessly preparing and drinking yage, because my obligation was to perfect myself more and more. The same thing happens later too The healer often suffers for not being able to take care of his family. Sometimes he has to be apart, because he has to keep himself well and take care of his health. He will never be able to use a vessel used by a woman who is pregnant, and he should keep his distance from her. Otherwise he will get a headache and other problems. The same is true when a woman is on her period. During that time, a healer's wife should be hidden and remain apart from her husband until that illness passes. Then she will bathe with hot water and leaves of guava[66] and other plants. If she does that, she can give food to her husband again. Pregnant and menstruating women also should not walk near the yage house when the ceremony is going on. They should stay inside their homes. Otherwise, the chiefs of the fish or the forest animals won't respond to the call of the yage. They should also not walk around while yage is being brewed. All these are rules for women to follow. However, they can drink or be healers, and it's good for them to be able to heal snakebites and things like that to take care of their family.

While drinking yage, you keep a strict dietary regimen. Few fish may be eaten. For example, the *singo* [67] may not. Few meats, as well. Also forbidden are mature chili peppers; only green ones are permitted. If you eat any old thing at all, you don't learn. You need to be patient and suffer through it. Very often you have to stay in your house and not go visiting, so that they don't offer you something prohibited. The apprentice also needs a new pot just for himself. His hammock should be hidden away. If he leaves it out he should raise it up and tie

it so that women or visitors don't sit on it. Your teacher warns you about all these things. Otherwise, it could happen that when you return home, bathe and lie down in a hammock that has been improperly used, you could suffer pains, and at the same time lose the power of the visions. That's why you have to protect yourself.

Other times you can feel the envy that our power to cure produces in others. I heard a relative of mine say in a house one time,

"Is there any shaman here who can heal a snakebite?"

"No," I said, "there's nobody around here who knows how, least of all me."

At the same time I was thinking, "That bite is really easy to heal." But I didn't open my mouth, just went around thinking to myself, "Does he think he knows more than I know? No, he doesn't know anything, he's just envious."

In any case, it's not only the preparation of yage that's hard. The cultivation is hard too. Then you have to store quantities of it. It's also necessary to have a lot of firewood to cook it. Two people work all day to prepare it. One cooks a thick brew and the other a watery brew. During the drinking season I prepared it together with my nephew, day after day at that work. Sometimes we'd take off a day or two when we needed to go hunting. Immediately afterwards we'd resume. It's normal to initiate the period of drinking with the moon before August; that's the best time for graduation. It's summertime, with its fireflies and butterflies. The spirits are above the trees, nearby; the angels move across the face of the earth. When you drink yage, you see clearly the spirits in the fireflies and the other summer insects. The drink shows them as they really are, celestial spirits, though some of them are also instructors or conductors of witchcraft. Others appear like tiny people, like children, or like dolls.[68][67]

The drinking season usually lasts two or three months until the stock of yage is exhausted. During the other summer, in December, the celestial spirits are in the sky, around the firmament, and don't come near. That's why that's not a good time to be instructed in the visions.

Now, some people drink yage only to gain the power to make

witchcraft. With those arts they can kill people. That's bad. You need a very superior effort or ability to reach the highest level where you have access to the visions and the power to cure. To learn to be a witch is quick and easy. I didn't aspire to that, but to be the wisest one. My idea was to become the chief of a large family or clan, some ten or twenty families, and be able to take care of and heal all of them. Only with that thought in mind did I find the strength to rise to the highest level[69].

When you have drunk enough, the teacher who's directing you generally lets you know. "Don't drink any more, just take a rest and drink again in two or three weeks."

That's what happened to me, because I'd made progress. Around that time I became able to see visions of swallow-tailed kites, those birds that glide as they fly. I could take out a bone from their wings and play it like a flute. That particular bone has a stronger sound than any other.

Family of drinkers

I lay down in the hammock and everything began to gleam, like on a cloudless day. Next the visions came, and then they passed. This happened in the yage house, which was a bit removed. I returned home from there and fell into my hammock. My uncle Sebastian came by and said, "I can't stay to chat, you're still intoxicated."

Later on my uncle Saulerio dropped in and sat with me in the same hammock. He told me about some work he was doing, although I didn't respond, still feeling the intoxication.

Finally, he said, "I'm leaving."

At nightfall, lying in the hammock, I felt a noise like that of someone falling in the river. Shortly afterwards I heard the communication of angels and understood what it was saying:

"A strong wind is going to come over this area."

That's what happened. Without getting up, I felt the hurricane. I

saw trees falling around the house. Later the storm passed. At dawn I contemplated the fallen trees until my uncle asked:

"We had a hurricane last night. Did you see all those trees falling down?"

"Yes." But I didn't tell him what I had heard.

I got up and went to see Mauricio Levi. He said:

"What have you been drinking now? Did you get drunk on strong yage?"

"No, nothing like that. I just had a little".

"I'll give you the cloth to pay you for your work".

He gave me some for me and my wife. Only the next day was I able to go to where my family was. My mother was intoxicated in her hammock, having drunk yage; other relatives had the same look about them.

"Why didn't you arrive on time?" my father asked. "You could have drunk with us. We were able to see very beautifully. Your mother even played flutes with the bones of a bird that appeared to her, blowing through those wing bones so beautifully: *pi, pi, piró*...."

The temptation of violence

You're reclining in the hammock, but, at the same time, you're in another world, seeing the truth of everything that exists; only the body remains behind. The angels come and offer you a flute. You play it; it's not the healer who teaches you, but the angels themselves that make us sing when we're inebriated. How beautiful it is to see the totality of the animals, even the ones that live beneath the water! How could it not be lovely to distinguish even the people who live in the interior of the earth? You can see everything! That's why it's exciting to drink yage.

But it's not easy. When I drank thick yage, the strong stuff, I was able to see the sun, the rainbow, everything. That vision ended and I felt my heart as hot as a newly fired clay pot. I felt the heat inside,

burning me, and although I wasn't working, I sweated all day. Visions continuously assaulted me. From time to time I bathed. I felt myself capable of bewitching and killing people, though I never did it, because my father's advice restrained me.

"If you use that power now," he said, "you can kill people, but you'll never get beyond being a witch."

In those days I was devoting myself to drinking yage. I would go visit Cuyabeno and then return home to listen to my father's warnings.

"When you feel a little drunk," he would say, "you should suppress the anger that comes to you. Then you won't become violent or hurt anyone."

"No, I'll be able to restrain myself."

For days I endured this heat inside. I felt like I was drowning in my own sweat. It's a dangerous time, you have to prepare for it. You can't even look directly at people, only listen to them.

"Now I'll bring a different kind of yage," my father said "It's the moment to try it."

We brewed it very thick. When we drank it, he extracted those magical darts I had inside [70]. I stopped sweating and became like an innocent child. That's how my father drew the violence out of me so I could heal and not harm. At that point I went up a level. Now I could see sorcerers like a sun; the healers were mirrors. That's how when I moved to Cuyabeno I was able to discover a Siona sorcerer from the Aguarico River. Sorcerers don't look at people face to face, directly, but keep themselves hunched over. It's that kind of people who created so much conflict in the old days.

Customs for the yage ceremony

In the old days, the Secoyas would adorn themselves to go to the yage house. They combed their hair, they painted their faces with freshly-picked achiote, highlighting those designs with *curí*, achiote cooked and mixed with other aromatic herbs. They made long stripes

in the same way. All these designs had no greater meaning; they were just designs. They dyed their lips black and, with cooked achiote, adorned their feet, calves, arms and hands. They dressed in new tunics and decorated their hammocks, and they wore flowers and fragrant plants on their bodies. At the end they put on feathers, crowns and necklaces.

At around four in the afternoon they would perform these preparations and leave their houses dressed like this, if they lived near the yage house. But if they lived far away, they would set out dressed normally, and then, a short distance away from the yage house, they would adorn themselves. No participant entered the house unadorned. Once inside, they would hang up their hammocks and remain in them from the beginning of the ceremony at dusk until it ended at dawn. In the morning, breakfast was served, and then the guests would return to their homes, where they would bathe to remove their designs.

Families who had someone sick would bring him to the yage house. He'd lie in his hammock in a corner of the house. Then, at a given moment, the shaman would give him prepared water[71], fan him with leaves[72], and, finally, say to his father,

"Your son is going to get well. That sickness will not come back".

The father would thank the healer, and when the son was all better, he would pay him with a hammock, because everyone was aware of the suffering he had to pass through to graduate. That's the reason to pay him. Sometimes, if someone falls ill suddenly, he can be healed in his own home. The healer smokes tobacco and blows the smoke on the patient. If he's a good healer, he knows immediately what illness he is faced with. Occasionally, if he has no yage prepared or is in a hurry, he can drink hard liquor, although the drunkenness is not the same. It's necessary to be careful with the quantity: with a small glass, you can cure, but if you drink more, the drunkenness comes on and you can't do anything at all, much less have visions. Liquor is very different.

There are diverse yages and various ways of using them. One customary way is to cook yage on one side and on the other side **yai** (*uhahai)*[73]. That is scraped from a plant, wrapped in a leaf, and, when the

yage itself is cooking, put it in the pot and keep it there a long time. Afterwards you keep boiling the yage at least half a day or more until it's very thick. It should be bitter, concentrated, because that way the visions acquire more potency. You take out the plant matter and let the brew cool and take it home.

Uhahai should not be cooked. You take off bark with a knife and put it in a bowl of water and leave it out in the sun. After a while you can drink it because it inebriates.

Despite being very strong, *pehí* [74], is easy to prepare, although it should stay on the fire a long time. You cook it in a large clay pot. A long time later you take out the plant matter and cook it down until it looks more like a food than a drink. Its smell, appearance and taste are very disagreeable.

People who are accustomed to drinking yage are not gripped by the drunkenness, but drink it as tranquilly as if they were drinking chucula [75]. The person who directs the singing never drinks pehí, though he has drunk it previously, to learn to sing, because it softens the body and the voice. After drinking it, you're not afraid to sing because you've acquired all the knowledge. If the graduate is young, he'll drink standing up, walking with the cup in his hand through the open space of the house, proud, drinking and singing, because the drunkenness cannot defeat him. Because it's not he who's drinking anymore, but the angels.

Yage is drunk in darkness, without lighting a lamp; the only light comes from the flames or the coals of the fire.

Pehí reduces you to ashes

After meeting all the spirits of yage, you drink thick pehí to perceive the innermost aspects of reality and fine-tune your voice to sing well in the ceremony.

To drink pehí, you scrape the bark like with yoco, and you wash the roots well and peel them. You toast this material and then put it

in a pot to boil. Later you let it cool down, discard the plant matter and cook it down further until it's so thick you can almost chew it.

Meanwhile, the yage is cooking in another pot a certain distance away. During the ceremony, the director will abstain from drinking pehí, but he will offer it to those who want to see. The fact is, it's frightening to drink pehí that thick. It smells terrible and tastes worse. It's so bad that you immediately throw it up. That, you have to do right back in the gourd you drank it from so you can drink it again. If you vomit the pehí on the ground, you don't get visions, the only thing you can see is an immense land in which you seem to be buried. The pehí is so pasty that you can't swallow it easily; you have to push it down your throat with your fingers This makes you disgusted, ashamed, and afraid.

Sometimes they mix tarayage, wa´iyage[76] and pehí so that the result is very concentrated. When you drink it, the drunkenness hits you before you finish the gourd. You feel burns all over your body like you're being hit with burning logs. Then the body catches on fire and is reduced to ashes. When the flesh is destroyed, only then does the soul emerge and begin to see. At that moment the most fantastic visions begin.

I drank pehí when I was very young, at an age when some people were afraid of drinking even the weakest brew. On that occasion, three graduates accompanied me. They didn't drink. They gave me a big gourdful. I drank it and was immediately struck blind. They gave me water to get rid of the bitterness in my throat and helped me lie down in the hammock. I felt a terrible drunkenness and continued not to be able to see. They lit a tobacco for me and I took it, but I was unable to smoke it, and I threw it away, still blind. Despite everything, I withstood the fear without crying out. I held still, waiting for the visions.

My drinking companion had to drink sitting down, and not even that way could he drink more than four swallows. The gourd was still full when he stood up, frightened.

"I can't take any more, I'm drunk already!"

"You have to finish it".

But he started to cry and put the gourd down. Then he lay in his hammock and stayed that way for hours. Later on he got up and walked around the yage house as if he had gone insane. At dawn he went outside, saying, "I'm going visiting." But his whole body shook with spasms and he stayed that way, as if insane, until late in the afternoon.

Young people should drink pehí to culminate their initiation; it's the only way to reach the celestial visions. Yage is not sufficient.

With yage, it's like a school. Until you finish studying, you don't know everything. Only people who drink pehí to the end know the ultimate visions of the world. I was intoxicated for a night and a day, during which time I was able to see all the devils in existence. In the same way I saw all the jaguars, even some that no one had seen previously or described to me—one with a very thin belly, another with a twisted tail. I met the underground jaguars, the ones that devour people and then disappear, which makes them impossible to kill. Another is called the *sẹsetuiyai*, the white-lipped-peccary-chaser-jaguar. At first glance it can look like a wild pig, but if you cook it, the meat turns out white. If you hear it roaring below the ground, you should run away immediately, because that animal bursts out of the ground and rips people apart before disappearing. If anyone encounters it in the forest, it's alone, never in herds. Also, it has a tail, unlike the pig. Another animal is the collared-peccary-jaguar. Sometimes the Quichuas have killed it, confusing it with a collared peccary. My friend Gabriel, a Siona from Campoeno, had this experience. He blowgunned a lone animal that he'd found near the Aguarico and brought it home. He advised the people:

"I killed a pig that was on its own".

The healer lived nearby and came to look.

"It's a sẹsetuiyai. Don't eat it, just throw it in the river".

My friend had already eaten some out of ignorance, but now he obeyed and threw the rest in the river.

To attain wisdom

I had passed through my initiation when, as I was visiting some relatives, an aunt of mine told me,

"My husband has good visions, and he even knows how to heal, but he hasn't learned to sing while he drinks".[77]

It's that the angels hadn't taught him. She asked me to prepare yage and teach him. We drank. I got up and walked around the whole house singing as the angels had taught me in the visions. I stayed up singing until dawn.

If you're a healer, you can teach others, but for that, you have to have reached the highest level. For example, I trained myself alongside my uncle Miguel. We had the same visions, but he didn't dare to drink pehí. And he got married and didn't stay apart from his wife, and he also ate any fish at all. On top of all that, this man lied to the teacher. Then he got pale and sick. Those kinds of foods make you lose the qualities that the angels give you. That's why you get sick. When my father saw him, he asked,

"Why are you so pale? You look like you're about to die." And then he advised him, "You shouldn't sleep next to your wife. Do like your nephew, who sleeps apart. That's the reason you're sick."

He gathered some leaves of a bush and passed them over Miguel's body. After healing him, he warned him:

"Now you won't be able to be a family chief, nor in the future will you be able to sing in the ceremony. You'll drink in silence like anyone else who hasn't graduated. And you will not be able to prepare yage to instruct others. That's how you'll live from now on".

Interior of Fernando's house in San Pablo

AT LAST YOU SEE GOD

Many of our young people don't know our beliefs and don't know about our gods: Paina, Muhu who aspired to be like Ñañé, the god of heaven, the god of everything (everybody). (Other) Those gods fought with Ñañé and lost. Because those gods of the earth bothered him so much, Ñañé burned the world to cinder, although, later, he made it into a forest again. In the end he told the gods, "Well, I'm leaving you because you've bothered me so much. I'm going to the sky." And to the humans, he said, "I'm leaving to you the earth, where death reigns. Where I'm going, there's no death, only eternal life. That's how it is in the sky above the earth, and also under the earth where there's another sky."

Now the young people don't know our traditions, but not even the adults who heard them can see God. Because he's a spirit, they can't see him. Only the good drinkers can.

The real world

I've said that my preparation was long because I was a brave drinker. I drank up whole gardens of yage before having visions, but in the end, I was able to graduate even though I was young[78].

After drinking, the first thing you notice is light. The mind opens like the dawn of a splendid day, everything is gripped by sunlight, and colors shine with great intensity. Next you see butterflies flying in that luminous air. The first time I saw them come near, I thought they were persons. I thought they were the angels I'd heard others speak of, but no. Only later can you contemplate those angels walking through the air. At the beginning, you see only butterflies, beautiful birds... you can also hear sounds resounding, very lovely, or the murmur of celestial beings. The drinker can become proud, saying "I have acquired the visions," and it's true, but they're only the first levels. I didn't say anything because I wanted to see more.

Afterwards, if you have a good teacher, you can reach, little by little, the truth, and the most complete possible knowledge of reality[79].

The guide should bring us first to the celestial spirits, and later teach about the multitude of devils that exist, since the graduate has to know about everything. If the teacher introduces the student first to the world of devils, he'll never be able to make his way out of there, much less reach the sky; everything's finished; he'll never be able to direct the ceremony.

The animal kingdoms

When the lessons advance toward graduation, you can see any type of animal. In the midst of the intoxication, you see yourself climbing a tree or following the trail of the animals, or perhaps transformed into a *sajino*[80], (a collared peccary), eating the same nuts that they eat.

Continuing along the path, you cross a swamp full of morete palm fruits. On the other side is where the *huanganas* [81], (the white-lipped peccaries), live. Their chief says, "Welcome!" The drinker who experiences these visions remains lying in his hammock, but his companions in the yage house can hear the sounds that the huanganas make. The drinker begins to eat nuts in his hammock, splitting them between his teeth: at that moment, he has teeth like a huangana. He can't move any part of his body other than his head, and when he raises his head he spits out dry leaves like the peccaries do. Those animals live in places where there are a lot of nuts. If they eat on a riverbank, they let rotten leaves and the heads of shrimp fall in the water. Now the same thing happens with the drinker. His teeth change color, the nuts dye them, just like a huangana's teeth. The drinker who undergoes these transformations gives a show of his power.

Although those animals live in that swamp full of palm tree fruits, they rest on a hill further along. Over there, the plants that produce nuts produce them very low to the ground, and the huanganas can't finish them all, such is the abundance. The same thing happens to the sajinos—they can't finish all the red nuts, all the yellow nuts.... Sometimes the magician picks up those nuts, already scraped, and

brings them back to the house to make a necklace. Other times, a magician doesn't have enough power to reach the place where the animals live, but is still able to call them, so that they come near where his family lives and can be easily hunted.

The deer live in a place of their own and eat the nuts of the pambil palm. Further along, when you reach the place where the *huatusas* [82] live, you can hear them speak. Their voices are like the sound of the forest when fruits are falling from the trees, something like that. In another place live the armadillos, and in another place the *huantas* [83] under the command of their chief or guardian. Still further along is the home of the tapirs, a clearing where you can hear the singing of frogs together with the sound of the wind. On one side you seem to hear a voice, and another god answers it in front of you with a strong voice. Raising our eyes, you contemplate a kind of immense pasture where countless tapirs graze like cows. You can observe among them different types: red ones, white ones, striped ones; others are made of nothing but bones, and those are the tapirs of death. There's a great feeding place for the tapirs, a hole in the ground several meters deep and about five meters wide. There's a constant sound of tapirs whistling in this cave; it's got plenty of water and mud, and you can hear them splashing around constantly.

After getting to know all the things of the earth, you pass into its interior and can see the people who live in those depths. They really are people. After getting acquainted with them, you go deeper to see if there is another inhabited world, but now you don't meet anyone. There's only water, a kind of ocean. So you submerge yourself in the waters and in a single glance you can contemplate the entrails of the rivers, and all the animals that live there—boas, caimans, water jaguars, et cetera.

You can see a man there, Ocomé, or Tsiayakë, the chief of all the fish that exist, from the smallest to the largest. But listen, be very careful with that name! On the banks of the Aguarico there's a yellow and brown bird that tricks yage drinkers. It sings, "I'm Ocomé! I'm Ocomé!" But that's not true, and you can't summon fish with the help of that bird.

There's also a spirit, whose true name is Uncuisike Wati, who passes himself off as Tsiayakë. It's another trick. Only he who can see into the deepest waters will observe Tsiayakë, because he has his home in the deepest place. After you get to know him, when you call on him, he won't appear in person, but he will send fish.

The *mecoye´yë* appears in its true form. It's not a person, but a kind of boa. It doesn't go looking for people to eat, but attacks all who come near it. It sports 20-centimeter fangs with holes in the points; the fangs look a bit like the tusks of peccaries. Apparently people in Archidona like to eat that animal. That's what a man from there told me. His name was Lucucho. One day he showed me a fang.

"What animal is that from?" I asked.

"From the *mecoye´yë*".

He said he used to find mecoye´yës in a kind of pasture and hunt them with dogs. First he'd shoot them, then he'd harpoon them and then he'd tie them up. According to him, only the part of the body that's wounded actually dies. When the animal pulls away, the part that's still alive separates and could still reach the water and escape. For that reason, Lucucho would keep on cutting and shooting the live part until reaching the tail, where the animal's life would end.

"My friend, don't you and your people eat the *mecoye´yë*?" he asked.

"No, my friend, we don't eat it, we only like the meat of animals that taste good. That thing is hideous, filthy—how could we even try it?"

"You're mistaken. It's not filthy, it's very tasty, very agreeable. It's my family's favorite, and that's why I'm always keeping an eye out for it. But around here there aren't any."

We had this conversation downriver from the lagoon of the river Aguas Negras; I believe Lucucho died without eating *mecoye´yë* in that area.

The *mecoye´yë* sometimes has a double tail, like a scissors, two meters long. The tail has teeth like a saw. With that tail, it grips people before swallowing them. Besides that, it will generally get ahold of someone here in the Aguarico and swim through caverns to the Napo River

where it eats him, or the other way around. It's a dangerous animal. It has markings on its body like a boa, but the head is the head of a jaguar. It can chew up a person's bones and eat his whole body.

So once the drinker is back on earth, he sees spirits hanging in hammocks between the tall trees. Those spirits have no fixed dwelling place. They live anywhere at all, for instance in an opening in a fallen log or a dry tree trunk. That's like a window to see them. They don't need much in the way of food, they just eat the funguses that grow on rotten wood. It's impossible to know how many of them there are: there are too many to count. Now, we do know many of them by their personal names, and we also know that they don't attack people on their own initiative, but only if a sorcerer forces them to do so.

The celestial regions

One day my father prepared another class of yage, the one with blue flowers. He cooked it until it was very thick. I drank it and immediately lost consciousness. I remained that way for many hours, and before waking up, I was able, at last, to encounter other aspects of reality. I saw the whole firmament, and the rainbow. Then the spirit brought me to the highest place, and I saw the earth from there; the earth appears with a rainbow halo around it.

The visions depend on how the intoxication develops. Now, nothing is as powerful as the intoxication of the pehí. I had a plantation of pehí 50 meters wide by 20 meters long, and I finished almost all of it off in my sessions, until a relative said to me,

"Don't drink so much. You've already graduated and shouldn't abuse that drink. That's enough."

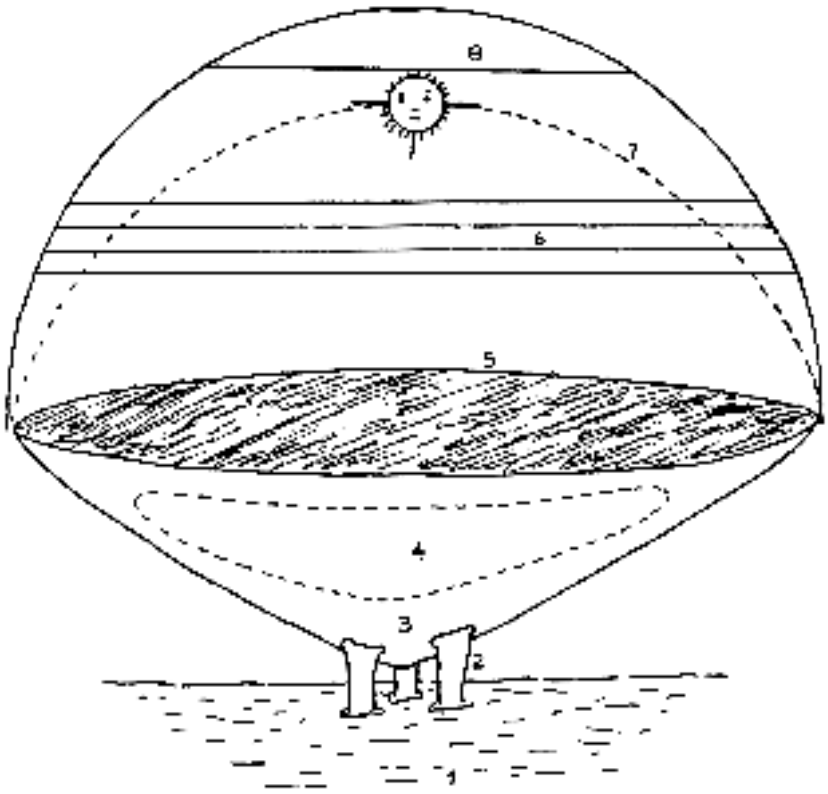
That's how I was as a young man: interested in the visions, brave, enduring the difficulty of drinking, and always desiring more knowledge In this way I was able to reach the sky. That happened above all when I drank thick pehí (jaro pehí). I drank so much that the drunkenness lasted more than a day and a night. Although I was breathing, I lost con-

sciousness. For that reason, I didn't see things the way I see them now, as I'm talking to you, but instead I contemplated them after having died. Yes, one dies after drinking so much to be able to know everything. The body is reduced to dust and the spirit is freed to reach the maximum wisdom, to know more, and ultimately to meet God.

In the visions is a ladder that you can go up with the shaman's guidance. Now, the pehí took me up above the firmament to meet the things there and take a trip around the sky. The sun appears as a man—the drinker who reaches him has the power to ensorcel—; I saw the house of the sun, and that of the rainbow. I've seen everything, more than any of these people who take themselves for witches. Next to the house of the sun are other people; they're the ones who dry the pointed palm nuts [84] and deliver sorcery darts to witches for them to kill people. Nevertheless, up to the same house of the sun go the highest graduates to test the sorcery darts and be able to drink yage adequately to defeat them.

Further along, you reach a truly beautiful place where sky people live, a kind of separate earth where the real people live. These days, our Piaguaje and Payaguaje people don't see them, because we've abandoned the house of yage and don't even cultivate the plant. Only the people of the Putumayo [85] reach them; there are no other wizards at this moment. My father was trained by a man from the Putumayo, and that's how he taught me. I saw how he saw. None of the others had contemplated celestial life, not even the highest sorcerer of those days, named Yaitari. Not even him.

I, on the other hand, reached the place of the , sky people who enjoy all kinds of hunting and have abundant chambira. When one of their dead arrives, he still retains many memories of the earth and always wants to return. Then, so that he forgets his relatives here, the celestial beings take him to the great river, visiting their people along the bank. That way he forgets his home on earth and stays with them happily. The Nunipai go fishing and traveling in iron boats, into which not a drop of water enters. I've seen the Peruvian launches, and some water always leaks into them. There, no. Those boats are so dry that people can live inside. Plus, the sound of the motor is gentle.



The earth as it is seen in the visions of yage. Some of its principlal elements include:

1. Ocoda´ca: great water or ocean
2. Toasa´huëa: ceramic pillars that support the earth like a pot over a fire
3. Yejapë: earth
4. Yeja huë´ehijete´te: subterranean region
5. Yeja: surface of the earth
6. De´ohue´ña: layers of colors in the atmosphere
7. Ëse ma´a: path or route of the sun
8. Ma´tëmo: heaven.

Some of the boats are white, others are pink. Each family has its own, and they travel or go visiting in them.[86][85]

The river? It's immense. It can't be measured, or even described.

The houses of those people seem to be made of zinc, but they're not, because from the inside, you can see the palm fronds. They receive the materials for those constructions from God's hands.

As I was seeing these things, I was accompanied by angels. They are small but they have crowns. Their size depends on their category: the ones who live in the most favorable places are the smallest.

Beyond, further above, you can't see anything, because there's nothing to see, except the red dart spirits. Their paths look like cotton threads, and they have their houses some fifty meters from the edge of the sky.

Up there, the angels said to me, "Go around the zinc roof." That's what the firmament looks like, as if it were an upside-down pot.

I obeyed and made the whole circuit, returning to the place where I had started; then I did the same thing in the other direction.

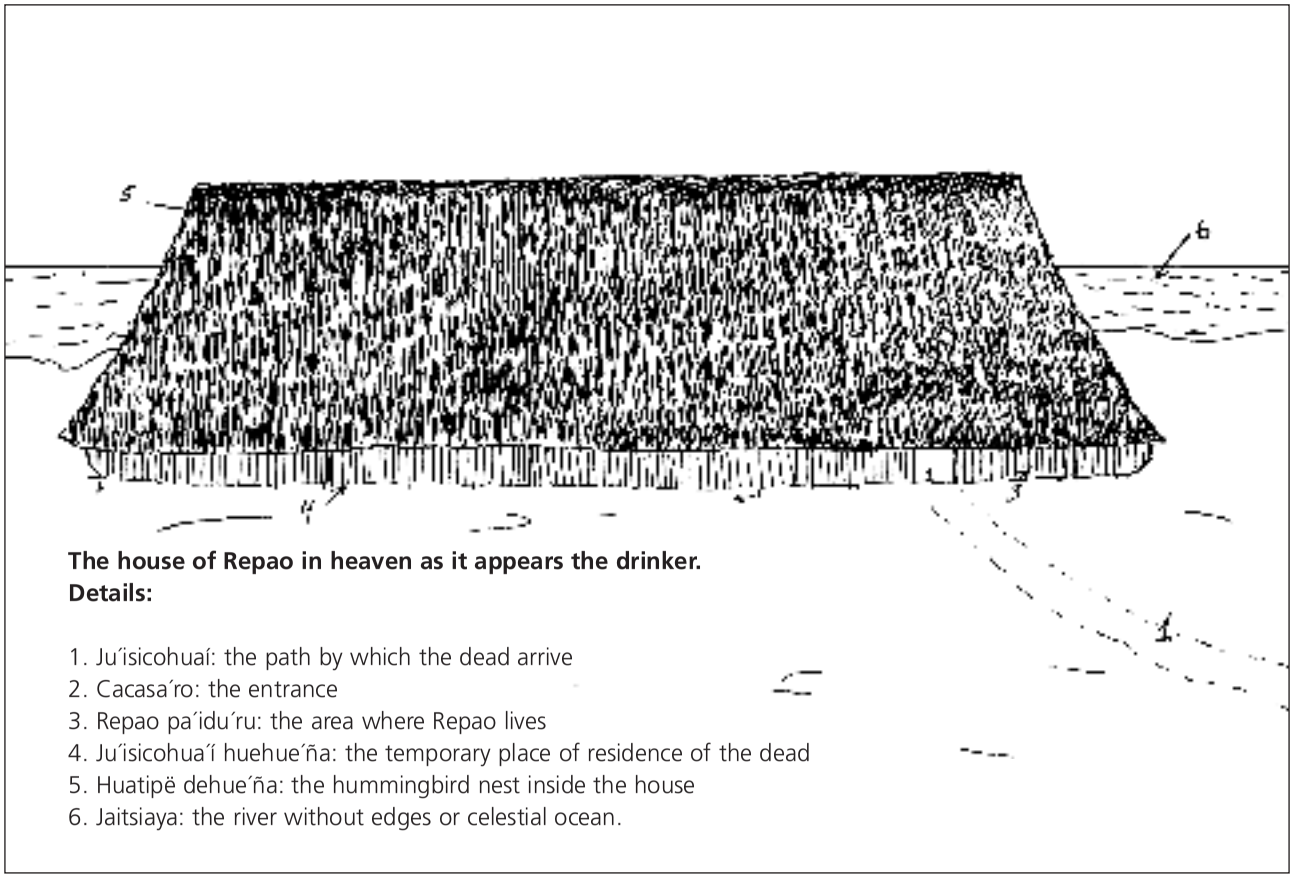
In any case, to get from where the **Nunipai** live to God's house, there's a direct path, but it's dangerous because a big hole appears in the middle. Through this hole, which is about ten meters in diameter, you can contemplate the earth. You have to cross it if you want to get to God's house. For this, there's a footbridge of white iron, with railings to hold onto as you go. I crossed it looking down, out of curiosity to contemplate space, despite the fact that the angels warned me:

"Don't look down below; watch where you're putting your feet."

Ignoring this prohibition, I looked around me and found that space is nothing but air.

The angels took me from there to God's house. He greets everyone who visits him in their own language. God lives with his wife. He has one room, that is, half the house; the other is his wife's, where she prepares food for him. He is Ñañë, the God who fought the Thunder; there is no other God who can exist. His wife is Repao, the Tapir's (hu̲equë) daughter, whom he brought up from the earth [87].

Suddenly the angels said, "Look, son. Look at God." Of course, I didn't go near him, because you can't if you're not an angel or a sky



The house of Repao in heaven as it appears the drinker.
Details:

1. Ju´isicohuaí: the path by which the dead arrive
2. Cacasa´ro: the entrance
3. Repao pa´idu´ru: the area where Repao lives
4. Ju´isicohua´í huehue´ña: the temporary place of residence of the dead
5. Huatipë dehue´ña: the hummingbird nest inside the house
6. Jaitsiaya: the river without edges or celestial ocean.

person who lives there. But I heard what God said to me:

"You're going to be a healer, you'll have the power to cure. And for that reason, you must love people and do good to them, never evil." That's what God said. And then. "Take this and you'll be able to cure any illness."

And he sent me something like a little packet of chunks of salt. The angels brought it to me, repeating, "Don't go near."

But then they took me by the hand, and I saw God seated on a throne. It wasn't exactly a chair. His clothes were resplendent, white, and—how can I explain this? The house was totally illuminated, but not like White people's houses; everything shone by itself. God stood up, touched my arm, and said, "Spit!"

I spat and the saliva sounded on the floor like music. His footsteps were also marvelous sounds. I was paralyzed, admiring God in the vision. Then I heard him again: "We're in our home. It's time you returned to yours."

Another time, after I had graduated, I visited God. He welcomed me and invited me into his house. He offered me an incredibly white chair. Later, he said, "Stand up and walk."

I took some steps, which sounded like the ringing of little bells, an enchanting sound. Then I heard God's blessing. "You graduated because you were brave. Now you have to follow my laws. Some of your people live in bad company and worse comportment, though they walk around telling people that they have seen God. They saw the benches in my house shining, and thought that was me! The joke was on them because I only show myself to people of good conduct, giving them instructions for increasing their wisdom."

That's how it is. Do you know why we become healers? It's because when we visit God, he washes our mouths, he rinses them; in that moment one becomes a healer. He washed mine with salt, symbol of healing; my saliva sounded like music and transformed into shining gold. But what has happened now? My people have become Evangelicals. Well, I don't know who their God is. Mine has red shoes and lives in his own house. He said to me as I was leaving,

"Son, now you, too, are God."

Gods and the dead

Mühü, or Thunder, has his house in the sky, away from Ñañë´s house. He looks like a young white man. When he goes home, he beats on the walls of his house with an iron staff, and that's the sound that we hear, the thunder. The lightning bolts, he produces himself: he closes and opens his eyes, and the bolts fly out of his lashes.

The place of the dead is elsewhere. The dead come by the path that leads to God's house, and he sends them to Repao's house, about a hundred meters further along. Repao examines them. If they arrive anointed with nuní, they have the same design they had there and they go to their people in the sky. If they're not anointed, they stay in a hammock at Repao's house for four days. On the fifth day, she sends them to the other side of the river, and, although to cross it they have to die again, once they're there, they live forever, though with some suffering. It's hard to cross to the other side and not even the best healers can do it; only Numi këye [88] can do it. For the crossing, the dead wear blue tunics and crowns. They lose consciousness to cross, change their clothes, and, once there, drink the chicha of the dead. But I'll explain that better.

In Repao's house is an enormous nest of wasps. The wasps fly around the dead person for four days. Their noise is like that of an airplane, a terrible sound. In the peak of the roof is the nest of the watipú, a bird like a hummingbird, the same size; under the nest are hung the hammocks that the dead lie in. The dead stay there in the hammocks while the hummingbird flies around them. Entwined in the sides of the hammocks are four vines full of leaves. With the flight of the hummingbird, the leaves multiply prodigiously, so that the dead person ends up hanging from the vines, which have grown to a length of forty meters. After observing the dead person, the Watipú returns to its nest, and in that moment, the vines and leaves shrink again. On the fifth day, the woman [89] says to the person,

"Leave the house and go to the bank of that river, great as the ocean, and wait there. A strong wind will come and carry you to the other side"

Hearing this, the person walks to the bank of the river. There he feels himself dying again, and loses consciousness. The first wind comes, then the second, and then the third wind blows him across the waters to the other side. When he lands there, he's not a man anymore; he resembles a three-year-old child. The people there ask,

"Whose child are you?"

They examine his whole body, his hands, his nails, everything. Suddenly, one exclaims,

"He's your son!"

They've recognized him by his hands, and they give him to a woman who will take care of him. She takes him home and gives him plantain chucula or black corn chicha. Those are the drinks of the dead.

It seems that our ancestors were able to visit that place, and they advised not to finish the gourd of chicha that they offer you there, but just to have a sip, because all the women there will offer it to you. Another thing about those people is that they barely have any clothing, just a rag that doesn't cover them completely. They have been like that for centuries. They have nowhere and no one to buy clothing from, and they can't even make it themselves. They are always sitting down when you see them.

I observed all this in the sky, and I wanted to keep walking, but an angel warned me,

"This is as far as man can go; if you pass this point, you may die. We have to return."

He had an oropendula bird [90] in his hand. He put it on my shoulder and blew on it; it flew me back to my house, but not before I heard the angel say,

"You have graduated. You have reached the limits of knowledge."

All this can be acquired with a single session with pehí. You don't need more. Afterwards, even if you drink yoco you can have visions and hear the sound of the angels, because the graduate always keep himself close to the celestial spirits.

Scraping a piece of yoco

HEALING IS MY PROFESSION

A healer can see someone's illness just by looking in their eyes. To a healer's vision, sickness forms something like a spiderweb that envelops the victim. Those threads of the spirits are what cause the various illnesses, and if you manage to get rid of them, you cure the patient. I can still heal any kind of illness: snakebite, witchcraft, evil air,[91][90] etc. It's my profession and I don't forget it. Nevertheless I don't parade around in front of people repeating "I'm the best healer!" Instead I live tranquilly, silently, like anyone at all who doesn't know how to heal.

Behind every illness is a spirit. If you can identify it, and if you know the right words—that is, if you have power over it—you can make it abandon its prey. Then the patient is healed. Of course, the healer has experimented with all the plants of the forest. Often he has taken them himself and knows them for what they are. The spirits of sickness are innumerable, but I will tell you about a few of them.

Wiwatí

To heal snakebites, you have to speak directly with the chief of the snakes, Wiwatí, and then with the spirit of the individual snake. Wiwatí is a person, a spirit who is the chief of all the snakes of the forest. You have to know where they live to be able to talk with him, and that's not possible without drinking yage. However, it is possible to cure a snakebite by learning the precise formula, by asking the healer. For example, one remedy is to drink two doses of water infused with the bark of the *añayo'ki* [92] vine, and wash the wound. That calms the pain and reduces the swelling.

Catëte´wero

There's another spirit who is the owner of the *catëte´weros*, the whip scorpions. He lives in caves and only he knows the healing formula. The sting of the catëte´wero is very poisonous. The person vomits without blood and can die. But when the healer administers the formula and blows on the sting, infusing the patient with life, the blood calms down, the swelling goes down, the patient is healed.

If the sting is in the foot, that part swells and the swelling reaches the trunk. It's not like a snakebite, where everything swells up. Later the victim starts spitting black blood, which is the sign that the venom has reached the heart Certain snakes can make people bleed this way, and even some spiders, but this animal is very different. It walks with its claws held back, because that's where the venom is. When it grabs someone, it injects them with a kind of poisonous spines. In the snake, on the other hand, the venom is in the fangs, as it is in the spider whom we call 'snakehead'.

The bite of the snakehead isn't hard to heal if you know the formula for snakes. The healer blows and rubs on the place where the bite is, and it heals immediately.

All these animals are poisonous. If they attack in a place where there is no healer, you can proceed in the following way. Take the roots of the *sehua* palm [93], wash them, chop them up, and drink an infusion of them.

Well, if the coral snake stings you, probably not even a healer can save you. I've heard the Quichuas say that you can drink red clay mixed with water; I don't know. The coral snake stings with a big needle hidden in its tail [94].

Pai hoyo watí, the spirit of a dead person [95]

Sometimes there comes an all-but-incurable illness. It's very dangerous for the mediocre healers, but for the wise ones, it's not impossible to cure. It's brought on by the attack of the *pai hoyo* spirit. This spirit carries off the heart of the victim and stores it on an iron plate covered with a fan. If the healer doesn't locate the spirit in time, or doesn't know the correct formula for demanding the heart back, the plate is turned upside-down and the victim instantly dies. At that point, the spirit hangs the heart from a string in his own house as a memento. Now, if the healer has good knowledge, he'll find the spirit and force it to listen to him and give him the heart and, with it, another healing.

This spirit has such power that it can look at a man from far away, up to 80 meters, and the man will crumple to the ground with his tongue sticking out toward his chest. He'll stay that way, unconscious, biting his tongue; although he won't have a fever, his heart will sound like he has bronchitis. In those cases, the healer takes a spoon and applies a certain treated liquid, and those drops loosen the tongue.

"Brew yage for me to heal him," the healer says to the patient's family.

That evening or night he drinks and heals the man, who regains consciousness and asks for chucula, because he's very thirsty.

The Mawaho huatí spirit [96]

Some sorcery consists of the attack of this spirit, by means of which the sorcerer damages a person, causing him strong pain or even death. If you want to heal the bewitched person, you have to find the solitary man, Esëpai. He comes near when the healer is seated, blowing on the patient, warming him up. The healer stands up and, without touching the patient's body, takes out the sorcery dart and gives it to Esëpai. Esëpai then stores it in his own house so that the sorcerer can't use it again. In those cases, the healer is able to see clearly who sent the dart. What he does is to ascend to the house of the sun and look into the large mirrors that Esëpai has there; the sorcerer appears in them.

Now, if the dart has passed through the victim's body, no healer can save him from death. If, on the other hand, it's still inside, the healer proceeds as I have indicated, and afterwards gives the patient water cured with the herb nuní once a day for three days; with that, he will recover completely.

In this type of healing, only one healer should intervene, because it should be paid for with a hammock.

Yage: health and abundance

What I'm going to tell about happened in Wahoya and was my second healing. We were in the yage house. From there I directed myself to the house of the sick man, near the river. I found him on the bank, defecating with much diarrhea.

"My cousin is crapping everywhere!" laughed a young man.

"Don't make jokes, we're in the drunkenness of yage. A bit of silence, please."

At that moment I heard the sick man's mother weeping, and her cries frightened me because I was intoxicated. She begged me to help him. I took a gourd of water, blew on it, cured it with precise words for the sickness he had, and gave it to him. The next day he awoke relaxed in his hammock. He came over to me.

"How do you feel? Still sick?"

"No, I'm feeling stronger. I'm going to get well."

"That's good."

Later he got up and walked around without any problem.

When I had recently arrived in Peru I used to drink a lot of yage, but in Cuyabeno I didn't have it planted and the yage that was around was weak, it barely got you drunk. In those days my wife got sick and I could see, in the clarity of the yage, that it was the spirit of an ancient dead person that was troubling her. In the vision I criticized the spirit and drove it away.

Shortly after that I found a better yage vine in the forest and planted a garden of it. It ended up being quite strong and with its help I used to summon herds of white-lipped peccaries. The people didn't need to walk far, just shot them with blowguns near the house. Shotguns were not common then, though I had a muzzle-loader. Sometimes, tired of eating pork, we would go fishing, because the fish were abundant in Cuyabeno. The people were happy. When they went hunting, they would bring me some of the meat. "This doesn't belong to me, but to you, Fernando," they would say.

Other norms for health

You have to be very careful with women who are in their first pregnancy. The husband shouldn't construct anything in those months, or tie anything. Or eat the meat of a collared peccary if it was chased underground by dogs, if that happens in the first days or months of the pregnancy. He should fish with a hook without a barb, and so forth. Similarly, he should do without certain other meats in that time, howler monkey and armadillo. When he bathes in the river he shouldn't move against the current, but with it. The same for the woman. They shouldn't spend a long time in there, either. It's a bad habit to strip naked and stay that way for a long time in the river out of laziness or because it's cool in there. They should take short baths. If they comply with these requisites, the birth will be easier.

In the hammock, the mother-to-be should lie only on her side. At the head of the hammock she should place a rattle or a little necklace. Later, when the baby is still tender, the father can eat small fish, minnows, not *bocachicos* [97] or old fish. Otherwise, the baby will get pimples in its mouth or on its head. It's better to take precautions than to cause the death of a child. Terrestrial and aquatic animals have different properties. For example, a father brings home a wild pig from the forest on his back. If he has a small child, the pig's bristly skin can make the child sick. Something like that happened to your mother when she was little and I ate huanta: she got sick, she cried, she thrashed around, she couldn't sleep. I had to drink a pot of yage and heal her.

The sábalo, another example, eats larvae that fall into the water from the trees, larvae of crickets and other insects; if you eat the sábalo, you make the child sick with the illness of the larvae. That's why the best thing is to go to the healer, who can administer a prevention water. After drinking it, you can eat safely.

His son Delfín, 2004

WITCHES HUNT HUMAN LIVES

Sorcerers and healers

In the old days, sorcerers boasted of knowing everything, and they killed people with their arts. Then other Secoyas would kill the sorcerers. Many people were killed by sorcery and many sorcerers were persecuted and killed for it. The good teachers were careful to "cure" the recent graduates, giving them more yage to drink so as to make them more tolerant and not ensorcel people. The teachers would extract the stronger sorceries, referred to as the male ones, and leave the female ones in the body, because those are useful when one is doing healing work. Afterwards, the graduate can't go back to drinking strong yage, because if he does, the male sorceries can return.

The sorcerers only know the lower levels of the cosmos: that of the forest, and of the level beneath it; that of the clouds, and above that, the house of sorcerers. They know the sky only up to the house of the sun. They have never seen the celestial people, the ones who live well, the loving people. Instead they make contact with inferior beings, including the spirits of sorcery.

For their part, the healers don't linger at low levels of knowledge, but drink more and more yage. Not for the pleasure of doing it, because it's a great sacrifice, but because they desire greater knowledge. They try all the varieties of yage, boiled down thick and strong, until they're able to meet the healing spirits, the celestial people, contact with whom makes them reject all sorcery and stay forever in their friendship. Thus they acquire the power to heal.

Once the healer is empowered, it's not he himself who divines the identity of the author of a sorcery attack, but the sorcery itself which informs him*: Such-and-such a person sent me*. To heal the victim of an attack like this, he calls certain spirits, combining himself with them so as to locate the darts which are causing the illness. Once the darts have been taken out, he hands them over to his guardian spirit, who will keep them from returning to the sorcerer.

In the old days there were false healers who believed themselves very wise, and proud ones who boasted of visions they hadn't had. The authentic shamans would put these people to a test: they would brew yage and offer it to them all night to see if they lost control. If that happened, they would be caught in the lie, because a true graduate can drink yage continuously and sing from dusk till dawn. Those false shamans used to bring bamboo flutes from their houses. They'd hide them under the stools where they sat in the yage house and during the ceremony they'd pretend to catch them out of the air, receiving them from a vision; then they'd play them. In those days there were many drinkers, but very few reached the highest level.

Sorcerers' evil practices

There are certain techniques used by sorcerers. They know how to take powerful plants that render them invisible. In the nighttime they go to people who are lying asleep, and they leave their magic poison on the sleeper's hammock or on his chest. When he wakes up, the person feels feverish. Later on it gets worse and in two more days he can die.

Other times the sorcerers put themselves in contact with the mawaho people, four spirits that go around in the air; the sorcerers unite themselves with those demons and they fly. The demons whistle to trick and lure the chosen person. When that person appears, the sorcerer fires off his magic darts. If the person is a healer, he can tell

that it's demons that are whistling in the air, and he'll be able to defend himself. In any case, the flight takes place in an instant. The sorcerer can be in his home, reclining in a hammock, smoking a hand-rolled cigar. The tobacco burns while he flies with the demons, and he returns without anyone noticing.

Those who accustom themselves to killing people in this way become addicted to doing it, because after piercing a person's body, the magical projectile rises up to the sun and from there returns to its owner, passing underneath his nose while he smells it. Sorcerers get to like that smell of pierced human, a very agreeable perfume that gives pleasure.

The magical projectile never stays in the body, but pierces the heart, cutting it. This is because it has what are like two extremely sharp bamboo edges. If the sorcerer doesn't want to kill the victim but only make him sick, he sends a dart with only one edge. There are also darts that can cause damage even without hitting the mark. Just the breeze from their passage causes sickness. If, however, they score a direct hit on the heart, not even the most expert healer can save the victim.

There is another sorcery called *nekërawi*. It kills, and then rots the victim's flesh. Often only the bones remain to be buried.

People say about sorcerers that some of them have a thing like a blowgun with a single barrel to do evil to one person, while others have a blowgun with two barrels, and those can finish off two people in a single day. But, in reality, the sorcerers don't need any blowgun to fire off their sicknesses. Their fingers work for that, and even their eyes. One glance is enough.

Finally, there are occasions on which a sorcerer can transform himself into a jaguar. For such an animal, there are no distances, so that the jaguar-sorcerer reaches the house of his enemy and kills him as if he were simply leaping down off the limb of a tree. In that condition, he can cross the jungle in the time it takes us to walk around a tree. He kills, usually without eating the flesh of his victim. But if he does eat it, he becomes addicted, and can't stop killing.

I will tell you some stories about all that....

A jaguar-sorcerer on the Yubineto

This happened on the Yubineto River. Two brothers were clearing land to plant a new garden. At one point, the older brother went to collect some achiote.

"There are just a few saplings left. You can finish up."

He was holding onto the first achiote branch when he heard his brother scream.

"Did he cut himself with the axe?" he wondered. "I'll go see."

He ran to look. A jaguar had killed his brother and was ripping out his heart.

"He's going to eat my poor brother!" he thought, and he gave a shout.

The jaguar sprang at him. But he knew how to defend himself. He threw himself to one side and the animal missed. Then, because the older brother was a shaman, he transformed himself into a jaguar too, and he confronted the other one. The murderous jaguar ran away, pursued by the shaman.

"I'm going to cut off his tail," he thought.

But he couldn't catch up to him. The other fled to the Putumayo River, then turned suddenly and headed south again. He didn't stop running, and the shaman didn't stop chasing him. He got to the river Wahoya and started swimming, with the shaman behind him. At last he reached a garden where a woman was digging up yuca. When he entered the garden he rose up on his hind legs, gave a half turn, and transformed into a man; the man stood there with a machete in his hand, cutting ungurahua. His wife screamed at him:

"I ask you to cut ungurahua, and instead of that, you run off and eat people! Those things people say about you are true!"

At that moment, the jaguar who had pursued him was about to say something, but he thought, "If I speak up now, he'll know that I've followed him, and he'll run away again." So he stayed silent, hidden, waiting to take his revenge.

The jaguars of war [98]

Earlier, I told you about some fights our ancestors had with the Auca groups that lived across the Napo River from where our people lived. Over on their side the Aucas had a path which they took to go down to the bank of the Napo to dig up turtle eggs. The Secoyas were careful to stay away from there. But sometimes the Aucas would cross the Napo to our side and there was nothing to do but wipe them out. Despite being repeatedly defeated, the Aucas never got discouraged, but attacked again and again. And because in certain seasons of the year their attacks were continuous, the Secoyas had recourse to the assistance of their sorcerers. These in turn would summon the jaguars of war.

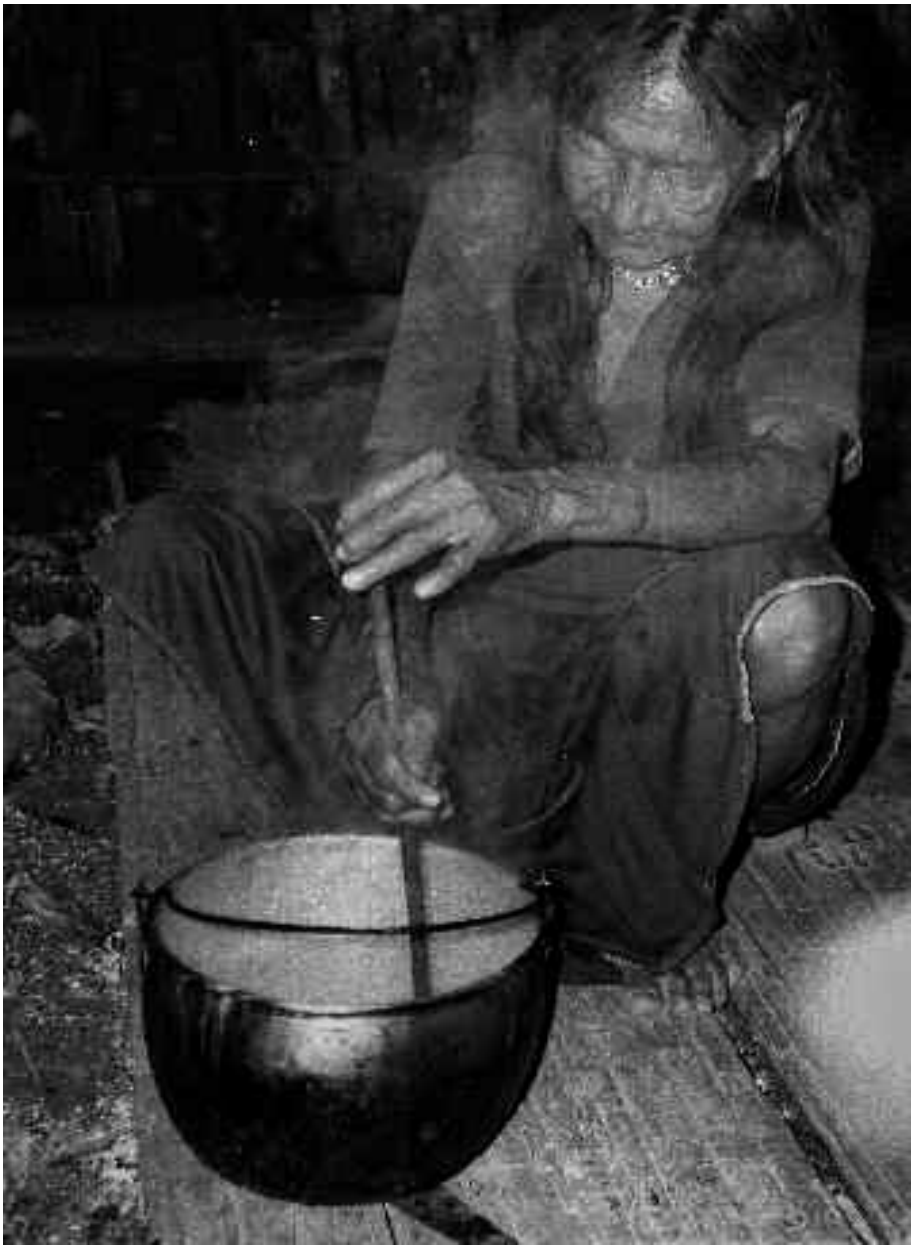
There are great differences among jaguars, as regards their ferocity and size and with respect to the forms of their dens.To attack human beings, the healers prefer the Sëomeayai, [99] small and fierce; never the paiyai [100] because those big jaguars are afraid of people. They're like dogs, they run away with their tails between their legs. When our healers wanted to attack the Aucas, they used to summon the puñuyai,[101] which are extremely aggressive and have no respect for people. The sorcerer enrages them, and he can gather a large number of them together to attack. Sometimes, these same magicians turn themselves into jaguars. When they get tired of fighting, they scramble up a tree and catch their breath where the Aucas can't reach them. When they've rested up, they spring down again to attack. If the Aucas were too numerous and the battle became more dangerous, the shaman would summon another jaguar spirit named Sekëyawiri[102].

As I said, there are a number of different varieties of them. Another ferocious animal with which the Secoyas helped their cause was the *periyaic*, which is to say, the cockroach jaguar. This beast rips apart Aucas and, when it gets tired, turns into a cockroach and disappears among the leaves on the forest floor. After a while, it gets up and attacks again. Wise people in old times would make use of these tricks to defeat their enemies.

When the battle is over, these beasts, on orders from the healer,

line up the enemies' corpses and invite other jaguars to join them. First, they eat the genitals. The male jaguars eat the vaginas, and the female jaguars like the penises and testicles. Then they eat the cheeks, and then the rest of the bodies. After the banquet, the jaguar spirits make the jungle grow back instantly in the place where the fight was, and there remains no trace of the carnage.

On certain occasions, the ancient sorcerers used to invite another type of jaguar down from the sky, and another type, very strong, which only liked to eat the brains of its victims. Well, more recently, the Auca shamans have acquired their own magic arts, and so they have become immune to these attacks. There is only one beast, very special, that can hunt even those Auca chiefs. To defeat them, this jaguar first gives an incredibly strong roar, leaving them deaf and paralyzed; at that moment, it nails them with its fangs.



Lucrecia, Fernando's wife, 1989

WHEN THE SPIRIT GOES KILLING

Witchcraft can hit even the highest healer. Nevertheless, he knows who attacked him and can take his revenge.

"I've drunk a lot of yage to acquire power, and now I'm not going to die alone."

The healer's spirit then goes in search of the sorcerer and kills him while the healer is still alive, stretched out in his hammock. Sometimes they both die. All those people who whispered things, or harmed, or refused to help the ailing healer, can die then, slowly or quickly, because his spirit goes killing. That happened with my father, as I'll tell you. And if what happened to him happens to me, I could do the same thing, because I have his wisdom. If I die of a cold or some other sickness, they'll be able to bury me calmly without anything happening, but if people bewitch me, I could finish them all off. When my father admitted to me that he had that power, I thought it was a fantasy or an exaggeration, but then it came true. Still, it's not a good thing. It's better to live peacefully, loving the people and not working evil.

The death of a sorcerer

There was a young man who did nothing but repeat to my uncle,

"Let's go kill that man. He's a sorcerer who hurts everyone."

He bothered my uncle so much that in the end my uncle resolved,

"Fine! I'll go with you. But what do you think he is, an animal for you to kill and eat? He's a Christian[103]. I don't like you talking so much about going off and killing. If it has to be done, it can be done without talking about it so much." He had gotten angry by this time. He grabbed a muzzle-loading shotgun and he yelled, "Let's go!"

With him went the young man, armed with a double-barreled shotgun, plus some other people. When they came close to the sorcerer's garden, near his house, the youth whispered, not daring to raise his voice:

"I've got a little daughter, I can't go kill him."[104]

"What do you think he is, a jaguar, for you to be so afraid of him

now?" my uncle yelled furiously. He grabbed the double-barreled shotgun out of the boy's hands and replaced it with his own muzzle-loader and kept on toward the house. The sorcerer's family was planting yuca. The sorcerer had gone to the river to bathe, and then he went up to the house to hang up his hammock. It was a big house. My uncle entered while the sorcerer was tying up his hammock to the second roof-beam, and immediately fired from the other end of the house. The gun blew up, giving my uncle a powder burn on his face and splitting one barrel. The shot went through the roof.

"What's happening, what have you come to do to me?" said the poor sorcerer.

But one of my uncle's companions fired, hitting the sorcerer in the mouth and knocking him down. My uncle approached and found he was still breathing.

"He's going to recover, he'll be back on his feet."

Nevertheless, the attackers fled instantly. When they had almost reached the garden they heard shots behind them from the sorcerer's house.

"It's useless for them to fire, they can't hit us now"

When they got back to the house, they bathed and lay down. In the nighttime one of the relatives kept watch on the bridge over the Wahoya, waiting to see if the sorcerer's people came and ready to eliminate them.

"They're not coming," he said at last. "I'll go home."

He went back to the house. The people were preparing yoco[105] when the young man who had invited my uncle to kill the sorcerer went to him again.

"Didn't we say that we were going to kill him? He must be recovering now. We should have finished him off once and for all."

"Why don't you shut up once and for all?!?" My uncle was so angry that he nearly killed him.

Meanwhile, the sorcerer's family had fled from their house to another one nearby, leaving him alone. When he was able to rise, he went to where his wife had gone. The whole family was there. He said,

"Where did you hang up my hammock?"

"Here it is."

He lay down and continued talking:

"They're ensorceling me."

"No," said his son-in-law. "It's not witchcraft. They came to kill you because you hurt them with your evil arts. That's why they wanted to kill you."

They rested there for the night. In the morning the sorcerer said to his son-in-law,

"Let's go back to our house."

They took down their hammocks and returned home. Some of the family talked fearfully behind the sorcerer's back. In the end they decided:

"Go look for the people who shot him, and bring them back to finish him off."

The son-in-law went to my uncle and my uncle went back with him. When they got there, the sorcerer was sitting on his stool of pambil palm wood. My uncle shot him and he fell dead. My uncle drew near and cut his neck with a machete.

"Now fix him up and bury him. You can live in peace." He said that and went back home.

In those days a native from the Napo River lived in our house. He was of the Macaguaje ethnicity. Seeing what had happened, he went to his boss to tell her about it.

"They killed Miguel." That was the sorcerer's name.

The boss went to the house where the killing had taken place, and found traces of blood.

"Let's see, I'll try some."

She dipped her finger in some of the blood that remained on the wall and sucked it. Later she fell sick, and, as she was half a witch herself, she nearly died. Back at home, she told what had happened to Paco Carmona and he sent an official message to the military asking them to capture my uncle. I was at home when the soldiers arrived.

"Why did you kill him?"

"He killed my brother with his sorcery. I had to get revenge."

"You're going to jail for a month."

"But he killed my brother!"

They didn't respond. Later, old Carmona ordered them,

"Yes, you have to jail him."

"A woman made him attack my brother. She's guilty too, but I had to kill the murderer."

I happened to be sick then, but my parents took me to the Napo where my uncle was detained. They were investigating him at Carmona's house before bringing him to the military base. The soldiers tied his hands and put him in a wooden stocks. They had the young man there too, and they were giving him the same treatment. They were tying his hands when the corporal intervened.

"Don't tie him so tight. I don't think he's killed anybody."

So they left his wrists loose, almost without pressure, and they put the two of them into a room made of bamboo.

The soldiers went to have dinner. The night came on, and the two prisoners were left alone, with no one watching over them.

"Did they tie you very tight?"

"No."

"Then free yourself, and pull out this piece of iron that goes through the stocks."

That's what he did. The two of them managed to escape while the soldiers were eating. When the fugitive Secoyas were crossing Carmona's pasture, some soldiers went for a look and saw that they had escaped. My father was in Carmona's house when suddenly shots rang out. Another man from there said, laughing,

"Get ready for this! They just killed that guy."

"That's my brother. You better shut up."

"Yes, don't joke about that," Carmona put in.

At that moment the soldiers came in with lanterns to advise Paco Carmona of the escape. He sent them after the Secoyas to capture them. The well-armed soldiers started out walking, but because it was already nighttime they stayed at the edge of the property without daring to enter the jungle; they hung up their lanterns there and went to sleep. My father followed them, saw them sleeping around a campfire, and went to warn my uncle.

"They're following you, though they're still far away Go hide yourself further in."

The next morning, the soldiers went back to Paco Carmona and informed him that they searched all night without finding the fugitives. But the old man didn't let himself be tricked and he ordered them to bring the men back. They had to go out again. My father followed them. They reached our house and, exasperated, shot a rooster.

"You must be starving," commented my father. "You're not going to find anything just roaming around."

"You're right. We'd be better off having some food."

We cooked the rooster and everyone had a good meal.

My father didn't go alone

My father died for a reason. A sorcerer named Ca'taë killed him[106]. One night some sorcerers got together to drink yage and one of them was asked to kill him by the others. "He has to be killed. The people like him too much."

It's that my father had a lot of wisdom, unlike them. They were only witches, a much lower category. That night, they sent him a witchcraft dart. This happened while we were living in the area called Newanireapü. The house was named Pu'suwuëe. That day my father went to cut the bark off a tree to make a grater for yuca. When he got back home, he fell sick. "That man's doing evil to me," he told me. "But it seems that I'm still going to live. I can still walk."

He went down to bathe. Later at night he fainted. He called on the spirits to cure him and although the sorcerer lived far away, he spoke with him. "Why do you want to hurt me?"

It looked like he was talking with someone else face to face, and the other person was very worried. "I didn't want to, but the others made me do it."

That night my father knew the names of all the people who had

requested his death, those who were envious of his power. "If I die, he won't live much longer either," my father threatened.

He improved a little but without getting all better. My family started to say, "Let's take him to the boss's house on the Napo."

"Why?" I said. "You think they're going to be able to heal him? This is no ordinary sickness, this is witchcraft."

They brought him in to the boss's wife anyway. She tried to cure him, giving him various medicines, but nothing worked. "I don't know a remedy for that," she said in the end. "It's a sickness caused by spirits."

Back at home, my father promised us, "Even if I die, I won't stay in the tomb. I'll come back."

He got a little better. He could eat, and drink chucula. Two witches came over to our house pretending that they wanted to cure him, but on the way, they had been talking together:

"What are you thinking?"

"What am I thinking? I don't know how to answer that question."

"You're thinking the same thing I'm thinking. Why don't we finish him off? He's suffering needlessly. Anyway, he's a bad man."

"No, I can't do that. He's a relative of mine."

And, as the other kept insisting, he repeated: "I can't hurt him because I have to think about my life. I've got children and I've got a wife. If you want to do it, go ahead, do it. You will know how to solve the problem later."

They reached our house and the one who didn't want to hurt him started to heal him. I begged him: "Do everything you can to make him better."

We cooked a pot of yage and offered it to the witch and he started curing. The other man just looked on. He didn't try to cure my father and we didn't ask him to, either. Me, I stayed up all night, watching them to see if they tried to hurt my father. In the early morning hours, the one who wanted to hurt him passed a gourd of water to the other one to cure[107]. And he took that opportunity to put the bad sign into it[108]. He offered the gourd to my father. My father looked into the water and tried to sit up from where he lay on the floor. Finally he drank

the water, although he had seen what was in it. When he managed to sit up, he said angrily, "You didn't cure this well, you put the bad sign in it! I knew the water from my relative was fine, but not this one!"

The two visitors quickly said goodbye and left. Soon my father's mouth began to swell up. The next day his condition was critical, and he couldn't see anything. Before dawn on the third day, he died. That house was near the Napo, but when he died, we hung his hammock from a pole and brought his body to Mawaira, I remember that the River Siecoya was very high, and we went there across its waters. As soon as we got there, I started to think: "Right now, without waiting any longer, I'm going to kill that witch."

I prepared my spears and set out walking, accompanied by some relatives. It was a long way. We were about to reach the witch's house when it started to rain violently. We had to stop and make a shelter with leaves We were there when the witch's son appeared. As soon as he saw us, he started to run away into the forest. I yelled, "Come back here!"

He stopped and then began to draw near, very fearfully. We were greeting him when his grandfather, the witch's father-in-law, appeared.

"What are you coming here for?" he asked, suspicious.

"I'm here on a visit because this is a delightful day for me," I answered him furiously.

When he heard that, he became frightened, because he already knew about my father's death.

"Did you see my son-in-law in the yage?"

"No! My father told us while he was sick who had bewitched him. Now I'm coming to kill him."

He stared at us, frightened and angry; he had only a single spear. Suddenly, the witch's son escaped to warn his father, who was then able to flee to another house. The father-in-law kept insisting,

"Don't kill him! I'm old! Who will take care of me? There won't be anyone to take care of me!"

We were close, but the rainstorm had kept us from arriving unseen. Now it wasn't worth the trouble to go to the house, because the

witch had been warned, so we left. The night was very dark because my father had died. I still wanted to kill that witch. My family had been trying to dig a grave, but without success because the rain kept filling the hole with water. At dawn we dug a grave in a dry spot. We didn't lay his body on the soil, but hung him in the grave in his hammock, and there he remained.

Some months passed and the man who killed my father fell ill. When they brought freshly-killed game back to his house, and his wife started cooking the meat, as soon as the first foam appeared atop the boiling water, he thought it was fat. There was still blood in the soup, but he had it like that; he took out the liver and ate it dripping with blood. He had lost his senses or his heart, and he lived in suffering. Other times, although he hadn't drunk yage, he'd exclaim, "This yage you've brewed is very good!" On those occasions, he would sing by himself. He'd take up the leaves that are used in the yage ceremony[109] and sing while shaking them. He had a big house, with many relatives living there. His people thought, "He's gone mad because he killed that man."

One day, early in the morning, when his wife was kindling the fire, he said,

"Now I'm going to have you! When I die, everyone else will have you, but now I'm going to!"

And he grabbed hold of her, although she resisted. "You're crazy, you've got no heart! What are you going to do?"

They were fighting, pushing each other. He got the upper hand and forced her down on the ground and raped her in front of all the other people in the house. When he finished, he repeated, "Now I'm happy. When I die, the others will have you."

He suffered from this madness for a month and a half before dying. That's how that damned witch finished his life.

My teacher Salmo

My teacher Salmo made a deal with my father-in-law to take my wife away from me. In those days I was working for Mauricio Levi on the Napo. Someone came to tell me that they were taking my wife away, so I returned to the Siecoya without finding Salmo. The people who told me about this had been drinking with him and heard him say that I had bewitched someone; they said he was very angry and threatening to bewitch me. The conversation took place while they were drinking fermented chicha and were all drunk. I went with them back to Levi's to tap rubber. On the way there, they insinuated:

"Your father knew a lot of witchcraft, along with curing people. Ask him to kill Salmo, because Salmo hurts the people here."

I didn't answer. My relatives left and I built a hut. Salmo was also building a hut at the same time and, as he was returning to his, the following thing happened to him. He was carrying a bundle of yuca flatbread; he put it down and left the path to relieve himself; when he came back, the bundle was gone. He detected the smell of nuni in the air, but he didn't think anything of it. Maybe his son had taken the bundle.

"I'm sweating. I'll just have a bath," he said once he got home. He got into the spring, soaped up and rinsed off. A man appeared, standing on the bank, and Salmo went to talk to him, but when Salmo was putting on his tunic, the man vanished. The man was my father. Salmo went up to his house and lay down. At that moment the sickness hit him. He lost consciousness and stayed that way for several hours, although then he seemed to recuperate. He got up, combed his hair, and put on a crown. His son came in from hunting and, not noticing anything, cooked the meat and they sat down to dinner. With the first mouthful, the sickness hit Salmo again and he lost consciousness as before. His son left him in his hammock, tied the hammock to a long pole, and brought him to the house of another shaman, where he lasted three more days and then died.

Fernando, 1993

RIVER MONSTERS

The añapëkë boa lives at the bottom of whirlpools. It hides its head inside a cave and leaves its tail out. It looks like an enormous catfish, though its tail is like that of a manatee. Someone goes along the river and the añapëkë lifts its tail and wraps it around the canoe, holding it fast. If the añapëkë is hungry, it draws the prow of the vessel toward itself with the magnet it has in its mouth, and simultaneously sinks the stern with its tail; the canoe whips around and all its occupants disappear.

When these attacks used to happen, our wizards would cut the magnet's rope with a machete and free themselves. The magnetism is like a kind of rope or net that holds the canoe. For a moment the añapëkë would lose its power, and then it would get it back. This boa doesn't constrict to make its attacks. It prefers to sink canoes and swallow up swimmers. It breaks people's bones and skulls, then swallows them whole, because it has no intestine, it's empty inside. So it keeps people in its belly for several days, then vomits them up and leaves them floating. The boa waits in the water below to eat the fat that separates off the corpses; when that's gone, it leaves the bodies to decompose entirely and sink.

This is something I've heard from people who have seen it: the añapëkë lays an egg, in which its baby develops. A girl once found an egg on a palisade, the mother having gone away for a while. The girl brought the egg home. One day it hatched and the little animal appeared. Very happy, the girl kept it in a pot of water, where it grew to the size of a finger. Her father said, "Dig a hole in the ground, fill it with water, and keep it there."

She did. Every day she would play with it and give it fish to eat. One day the mother añapëkë tunneled through the ground to reach her young while the girl was playing with it. When the girl put her hand in to grasp it, the añapëkë coiled around her and swallowed her and took the little one away.

Only in those days could you find añapëkë eggs. Now they live where they can't be seen, and they hide their nests.

*

A man went out into the jungle on the other side of his garden to hunt birds with his blowgun. He was walking along, looking up, and taking aim. Suddenly he fell into a big hole, and hung there, holding onto a vine. Looking into the bottom of the hole, he saw that a cave opened out on one side, with water flowing from it, and on the other side was another cave into which the water was flowing. When he turned his head again he saw the boa. At that moment the water rose in the hole. The force of it made him lose his grip, and then the boa swallowed him.

Another time, another man was hunting birds just like the first, and he fell into the hole too, hanging onto his blowgun and with a knife tied to his waist. The boa swallowed him and he found himself inside its stomach alongside a deer that had recently been swallowed. The man began to talk to the añapëkë from its stomach:

"I'm cold!"

"Grandchildren, would you like to have some yuca flatbread?" asked the añapëkë jokingly.

"No, we don't want any! We don't like it!" said the deer.

The añapëkë wasn't going to give them flatbread, it was just thinking about swallowing some thorny palm tree trunks to kill the man and the deer. That's why the deer answered,

"We don't want any!" And the man repeated,

"I'm cold! Grandfather, I want to warm up."

The boa obeyed. It rose to the surface and stayed there floating in the sunlight. But the man insisted,

"That's not enough! Go lie up on the beach so we can feel the heat better. We're still really cold!"

The boa went halfway up on the sand.

"More! Lie out in the sun!"

The boa did as the man urged it to.

"Now I'll get warm."

The boa stretched out on the sand.

"Just turn halfway over...."

The boa lay belly-up and the deer said:

"Cut him right there and let's get out of here!"

The añapëkë heard the deer speaking. "Grandchildren, what are you talking about?"

"We said that we're getting warm now."

"That's nice, Grandchildren."

"As soon as you cut him open," whispered the deer, "you jump out first. Be quick. I'll go out second, because I'm faster."

The man slashed open the thinnest part of the belly and darted out. The deer was fast behind, but as it was drawing away, the añapëkë's witchcraft flew through the air like a bee and caught up to it and killed it For his part, the man kept running, zigzagging between the trees to dodge the witchcraft, and in that way he managed to reach his house.

"Where did you just come from?" his mother asked.

"The añapëkë swallowed me, but I cut open its stomach and got out!"

His mother washed him with hot water and went looking for fragrant plants to get the bad smell off. It took a lot of work to get him clean and fresh. Afterwards he took a bath in the river and went back up to the house. At the entranceway was a wire for hanging up clothing. He stayed there drying his long hair; he was thinking that the añapëkë's witchcraft was gone and wouldn't follow him any longer. At that moment he heard its sound approaching. He ran to the house and flung open the door to throw himself inside. The last thing he saw was a vision of the añapëkë's head looming up in front of him, inside the doorway of the house. He smacked up against the head and died.

The animal was already dead by that time, but its witchraft lived on and went looking for him to take revenge. That witchcraft is like a bee. When the boa is alive, it lives on its head and never leaves, even if the boa goes underwater. One way to protect yourself is to grab two big leaves and cover yourself with them. If the boa dies underwater, it releases its witchcraft and also blows, sending a spray of water flying up in the air. If the drops from that fall on a person, it can make them sick. If you're a healer, you fan the air with a leaf and open a pathway between the drops so that you can pass without fear.

*

Something like that happened to a great witch, an expert in jaguars. One day he set out to go fishing at a place on the river Wahoya that we call Stone Whirlpools. He left the canoe and went up on a low cliff to fish from there. He caught a lot of fish, and threaded them onto vines; then he went down to the water to rinse them off. He washed the first bunch, then the second... when he put the third bunch of fish in the water, something took hold of them and swallowed them. The witch fell over on his back. He scrambled up the bank and looked down at the river from above. There they were in the water, two boas, a male and a female. The witch's son was hunting huantas nearby, and the witch shouted to warn him but got no response. So he cut some poles and sharpened them, putting his witchcraft into them at the same time. He threw them at the boas, which submerged immediately; under the water they took all his witchcraft darts out of themselves.

The man ran around calling to his son; he called again and heard nothing. He kept on running and calling until his son replied.

"Tick!"[110] shouted the witch. "Come quick without looking at the boas!"

"What's going on?" the boy shouted back. "Why are you yelling?" He was carrying two huantas; his father told him what was happening, and when they got to the precise spot above the river, they saw the two boas.

"Cut a big leaf without breaking it," the father ordered.

The boy went off and got a leaf. The witch cut another pole and, with a more potent spell, cast it at the boas. The water in the river seemed to split down the middle. The male boa died instantly and the female was knocked unconscious. There were loud noises under the water and many tree trunks floated to the surface. The son got frightened, seeing that the canoe was moving by itself to the other side of the whirlpool; it's that the canoe was stuck on the añapëkë's back. But since the añapëkë was dead, the witch said to his son,

"Swim out there and bring the canoe back!"

The son was still paralyzed with fear, seeing what had happened.

"Don't worry about it. I didn't hit them with just any witchcraft!

They're dead now, and there's no animal in that whirlpool that can hurt you. The witchcraft killed them all or drove them away."

But the boy still didn't obey, and so the father got in the water and swam out to where the canoe was turning around in the whirlpool. He calmly took hold of it and brought it back.

In reality, the female añapëkë hadn't died, just lost consciousness, and later on she came back to her senses and told what had happened to the other animals.

The boa that had died had released its witchcraft to get revenge, and this witchcraft had fallen like a rain over the witch and his son. The witch asked,

"Son, did any drop of water fall on you?"

"Yes, it got me wet."

"Now we've got problems! That's a dangerous witchcraft!"

The boy tried to get the water off himself and his skin started peeling off.

"That's not all that's going to happen. You're going to get really sick and you might infect the people who treat you. In fact, you might finish us all off!"

That night the boy couldn't sleep. Pustules came out all over his face and body. As his father had feared, the others in the house fell ill too. The only one who didn't get sick was the witch himself, because he knew the secret of the añapëkë, and he treated the others. A little later, people who lived in a nearby house saw that the patients didn't have pustules any more. They came over for a visit and sat on the benches That night, they and everyone else got sick again, covered in sores. This time even the shaman caught it.

To cure himself, he went out on the patio and lay down on plantain leaves. Before dawn, a bird appeared, the *añapëkë pesi*. The bird went to the yuca garden to pick up drops of water, and came back and moistened the shaman's body; this way, because he knew the añapëkë's secrets, he completely healed. After that he healed the others and tranquility returned.

*

On the River Lagarto is another whirlpool, called One Eye. Something similar happened there.

Two brothers went fishing in their canoe, leaving it tied up to some palm trees. They put on bait made of the flesh of morete palm fruits and many fish came. As they were pulling them out one after another, suddenly they vanished—because the añapëkë was coming.

"Why did they stop biting? I don't feel a single fish."

"Put on a bigger piece of bait and see if they come."

As soon as the hook was underwater, there was a jerk and it came up empty.

"I think it was a big sabalo."

He put on another ball of bait and that was stolen too. With the third one, he saw the añapëkës approaching under the water. The two brothers jumped up onto the palm trees, despite the trees' spiny trunks. The younger could get barely a meter above the water because his tree was full of spines. The other climbed up two or three meters. The elder was a sorcerer and he told his brother,

"Get down into the canoe and see if they come up."

The younger obeyed. The boas moved under the water and the sorcerer shot his witchcraft, killing the male and knocking the female out. The brothers took out all the spines they could and went home. The younger still had a lot of them in his hands and legs, so he swelled up, although later, when he got them all out, he got better. The man who shot that witchcraft was my grandfather, and although the boa survived, it destroyed one of her eyes, so we call her Ñacomasirá, One Eye. That whirlpool isn't really a whirlpool, but a lake about 800 meters wide that the River Lagarto forms there. The one-eyed female still lives there, and we call the place Ñacomasirá after her. People say she talks to the other añapëkës about what happened to her:

"Look what happened to my eye! You think I can see through it? I can't see anything! And that's why I'm warning you, don't try to eat people! This could happen to you!"

She talks to the boas in different rivers, including the ones here in the Aguarico. That's why these days they don't attack people. The boas are scared by what their friend tells them.

The attack of the water jaguars

This happened to a healer who was invited to drink in the yage house of another family. His whole clan was invited along too. Only the women, and the few men who didn't drink, stayed behind. The ceremony began at midnight; the shaman sang slowly, it was his way. Before dawn he sang of the water jaguars. He invoked them with his music at the same time as he saw the interior of the waters. Suddenly, as he was speaking of the aquatic spirits, and of the jaguars, he fell silent.

"It seems like something bad is happening. I'm seeing people dying in our house. I'm leaving now. The rest of you, follow me when you can."

He left the healer's scepter, lit a tobacco and marched off into the darkness like a spirit. He encountered the beasts when he got home. All the people had been devoured. Thanks to his powers, he was able to kill the animals. At dawn the others arrived in a hurry, having left behind their hammocks in the yage house. They were devastated to see the house empty of life.

"Cook yage. We'll get revenge," said the shaman.

Some of the men started cooking yage while others set about building a house with an elevated floor in advance of what was going to happen. At dusk they drank yage, again calling the beasts of the water. Shortly afterwards a whole pack of those animals came, like a herd of cattle, walking underneath and around the house. Among the drinkers was a witch, one of those who work evil on people. The healer said to him,

"You bewitch people—do it now to these animals! This is your chance to show your power!"

"Right," said the other.

He gathered all his witchcraft darts and cast them one after another, but they vanished like fire in water without having any effect on the water jaguars.

"Why can't you do anything to them? You only bewitch people! Your arts don't work on jaguars!"

He took out his own darts and cast them. All the animals died as if struck by lightning, with their fangs shattered. Afterwards the men went to the other clan's yage house to collect their hammocks, and, since they had no women, they asked for the daughters and the widows of that family.

With his great-grandson Adonis next to nuni plants

LEFT ALONE

From the time I was a very small child I learned to do the various kinds of weaving that the Secoyas knew. When we were little we made strainers or fans that the women used in cooking. We drank yoco between two and six in the morning and worked on those things. It's the first thing one learned before being initiated with yage; because once you wanted to graduate, there was no way to reconcile the two things. As I explained before, there's no time, it's very hard to learn to be a drinker. Now, though, the kids don't know either one. They can't twine chambira fiber or even weave baskets How are they going to learn? An older person should teach them, but only if they want to learn, and they don't want to learn.

Nevertheless, our gods didn't get angry because we abandoned the custom of yage. They only asked me, "And the others, why don't they drink?"

"They're not interested in it; they've been told that yage is bad. Now I won't be able to drink either, because I'm on my own."

That's what I said to the angels when they asked me. For my part I asked myself if the God that we see in the yage is the same as that of the Evangelicals. I don't know, He seems to be similar, but I don't know if there can be another one. What I do know is that I haven't been able to teach anyone my knowledge. There was no time. I've explained to you the long preparation. If you drink four brews one after another, you begin to see as if on a bright day, and you see the first animals; by the time you reach ten, you have more profound visions, and at fifteen you can see everything. My son Delfin didn't get very far, even though I initiated him. He had visions and met the angels, but he doesn't know how to cure well. When we were involved in that, the lady missionary came and put an end to it. I could still teach some

young man who wanted to learn, but I don't see any. Maybe my grandson Jorge could do it; he's serious, and perhaps he's strong enough to.

There are other things that the young people do that I don't like. For example, they wear pants and shirts, abandoning the tunic. The Secoyas used to wear a long tunic and now there is no one who wants to recognize or conserve these traditions. Despite it all, I don't say anything. On the river Siecoya, when I was young, there was none of that. We didn't buy shoes or boots. The boss didn't give us money for that. On the other hand, the clinic seems to me like a very good thing. Illnesses like diarrhea and malaria can be cured very well with the remedies there. Of course, if it's an illness caused by witchcraft, they don't work at all. It would be good if in San Pablo there were also a young man who would study healing with me.

At the moment there is no one who can cure the babies of that sickness from the jungle that sometimes attacks them when they have just been born. It's not possible without drinking yage. When I die there will be no one who can do it. Eduardo's grandfather drank a lot, but one day, his pregnant wife gave him chucula to drink, and now he can't cure. These days we suffer a lot of illnesses because the colonists are very near. That's very dangerous, especially for children. I don't know what the young people are thinking about all this. They could go live far from here, to some place peaceful, where there would still be animals to hunt. We could make a new village, because this one is already very old, and there, we wouldn't have so many of the illnesses that the Mestizos bring. If I were younger I would do it, if I were strong enough to work, but now I can't clear land to plant crops.

I don't like living in San Pablo anymore. There's no hunting or fishing. To reach the animals, people have to walk a whole day, sometimes more. It looks as if in the future we'll have to eat the food that the Mestizos eat, rice and so on. To me, it doesn't seem right to do that instead of drinking yage and summoning the wild pigs. I'm not accustomed to that other kind of food and I feel that it doesn't nourish me as much as wild game.

I also don't like the Secoyas marrying people of other races. I prefer that we keep to ourselves. My nephews married Quichuas, "to be good believers in God," they said, but it didn't work out well for them.

I'd like to go live in Cuyabeno, near the mouth of the Aguas Negras or upriver, but I can't do it without a canoe. The directors of this community are living far from it, on their own lands; the community's members are alone. These directors cannot be called intipaikes, chiefs, because they are completely ignorant of Secoya traditions. They learned to write instead. They can be described as *paiëhaowai*, community leaders. If they wanted, they could all learn our own customs again. But they're dominated by foreign ways.

Because of all that, I don't like living here.

When I came to San Pablo I missed yage. Sometimes the urge to drink it came over me. But there's no one who can cook it or prepare it well I almost don't remember how myself. I used to like it so much! Not for the sake of drinking it, because it's very bitter, but for the visions. So now, sometimes, here's what happens to me: I'm sitting eating a piece of meat and I get to thinking, "Why am I doing this? Am I just living for the sake of living?" In those moments I feel something like a tiredness and a weakness in my body. My body doesn't want to resist it. It's as if my body doesn't even want to live any more. It's the need for yage.

His daughter Maruja next to Fernando's grave in San Pablo, 2004

I'LL RESUSCITATE IMMEDIATELY

How I want to be buried

I keep telling my daughter to maintain the old custom. Under no circumstances should they nail me inside a coffin.

When a healer dies, you dress him well, in a new tunic. You paint him and fix him up, knowing that he's going to rise again in spirit. You gather his old clothing and personal things and you burn whatever's worn out. Dig a hole in the ground as deep as the healer was tall. Put a forked stick at either end and hang him in his hammock from them. Cover the grave with a roof of split bamboo, and cover that with some old blankets so that dirt won't enter. Do all this carefully, because the dead man is a healer. I repeat, the hole has to be deep enough so that he can get to his feet without any trouble. Afterwards you put on a layer of dirt, just a little, because the dead man is going to get up and leave in bodily spirit.

Never nail a well-graduated healer into a coffin. It would injure him. It would prevent him from rising. You can do that with people who didn't drink yage, who didn't see the celestial beings, who lived without knowledge. People like that, when they die, they exit the grave in spirit without body and go to the place called Tiuntupe, which is also called Ocotupë[111]. Five or ten days later they return to the grave and make noises. Then people can hear screams, steps that seem like people walking around, et cetera, and they get frightened. Those dead spirits returned because they didn't go to heaven. Instead they transform into evil spirits and end up being dangerous to the living, whom they can kill with their evil traps.

I tell my daughter to bury me in the hammock, following our custom, not nailed in, because it's certain that I will get to my feet and leave. I never think that my body will remain here on earth. I believe I'll raise myself up, because I've seen heaven, I enjoyed the experience, and I expect to go there.

Of course, when I die, my flesh will die, but my spirit will leave the tomb and go to Ocotupë. Then I'll return to pick up the clothing they buried with me, and I'll go with it to the sky above. I think I have the spirit to travel to heaven after I die. I won't stay in my grave. It will be empty, and I won't go back to it. I'll go to meet the sky people, the angels from up there who never die or even experience fatigue.

When you go to Matëmo, the heaven of the Secoyas, they give you *pai nuni*, some little drugs of life. You bathe your whole body in them, and then you stay in heaven forever—you can't return to the grave. So I'll drink and bathe in nuní, and I'll stay in heaven forever. But I'll do something else too: in spirit, I'll keep on observing and directing you, because nothing escapes him who has eternal life.

When someone who has no experience drinking yage dies, he goes to the house of Lady Repao. You already know: he spends five days there, then he goes directly to the other side of death, and he stays there forever among the dead. That's the life of the dead, to pass over the river without banks, an ocean from which no one returns. There they live, yes, but naked, as if punished, without being able to see, because they fell into the second death. As I told you, there's only one lord of the sky who can travel there and meet those people. His name is Ñumi këyë. But I'll be watching from the sky and when I see that you, the people of my family, die and are brought to Repao's house, I will send a soul to bring you near God's house, where there's a place for Secoyas, our heaven. No one in my family will pass through the second death.

When I die there will be signs

At the moment of my death, or perhaps after my burial, there may be strong winds or even tempests. Watch the sky: if you see black and white lines there, you'll know that the hurricane is coming. Don't go down from your house, don't panic, don't cry out; don't lament when the tempest is on its way, don't weep for me. Wait until it passes and bury my body. If you go out on the patio and make noises and run around, bad things can happen. There could be an earthquake, or the ground might fall in. Be very careful! I'll tell you what I saw when I drank yage.

You should know that things like this have happened when a great healer dies, and people have seen them. Just the house can sink, or just the garden. But if the dead man is very powerful, the earth can sink from horizon to horizon. I've seen an animal like a fetal tapir. It's striped. If that animal gets up, the earth will shake and can sink, because that spirit is the heart of the earth.

There's another personage, a lady named Rutayo, the Woman of the Earthquakes. She can sink the house or garden, leaving only a kind of lagoon there. The tapir, however, has the power to destroy the whole world.

The healer, drinking, can go to where the tapir is, and transform himself so he is like the tapir, with its soft nails and gentle whistles.

"How is it that you have come down here?" asks the tapir.

At that moment, the house where the healer is drinking trembles, and the earth trembles too. The drinkers all freeze. If there was any movement, the earth could sink, because the healer has transformed himself into a tapir with the power to do that. That animal has a name: Wekëyo. But people who have met him should not tell any more secrets, so that unfortunate events do not take place.

NOTES

1. The time belonging to the more or less immediate ancestors of the narrator; time which is difficult to measure and which zig-zags between the mythic and the biographic.
2. Siose'e: This man was named after a lizard, according to Fernando's nephew César Piaguaje (personal communication). The translator has introduced explicatory notes into the original text; these are marked (NH).
3. *Iriartea deltoidea*. See Footnote 15, below. Most of the scientific names in the present text are taken from Vickers, Los Sionas y Secoyas, 1989. (NH)
4. Chicha: a sometimes-alcoholic beverage usually made from yuca (*Manihot esculenta*), an edible tuber. (NH)
5. The Witotos (also spelled Huitotos) are another tribe today living in Colombia and Peru. (NH)
6. *En medio de las visiones* is the Spanish phrase—literally, in the midst of the visions. (NH)
7. We have here several tales referring to conflicts that the various Tukanoan groups had with their neighbors: Witotos, Zaparos, Tetetes, Aucas. In all the narratives, the narrator finds some personal connection, whether it's direct or through his family. Now, without wanting to enter into the complex world of names and (sometimes injurous) nicknames that the various Amazonian peoples of the region used, I want to say a bit about the term *Auca*. It's a word of Quichua origin whose basic meaning is "savage"; it was amply used by Mestizos and by other Indigenous peoples under the influence of the Spanish and Quichua cultures to designate Indigenous people who were remote and impossible to contact on peaceful terms, and therefore "uncivilized."

   But let's let Fernando himself specify who he's talking about here. "My parents called the river where the Aucas lived *Awisiri*. It was across from the Wahoya, and it was named after the trees that grew on the hills above its banks. But we had two special terms for those people: *Campeo* (naked) and *Aiwe* (savages). They were different Auca groups, although all of them painted themselves with achiote. Another group lived in Watacocha,

downriver from Wahoya. The most aggressive of them were the ones who lived upriver. We called them Matsase Aiwe—*ma*, red; *(t)sase*, hair sticking up. They anointed their long hair with cooked achiote, forming with it a red crest like the raised feathers on the head of an angry harpy eagle.

I knew some of those men from Watacocha when I worked at Mauricio Levi's hacienda. The Mestizos had taken them prisoner after some skirmish. They worked as peons side-by-side with the Quichuas and the Secoyas. But there was one Quichua who hated them because they had killed his relatives. Because he was a shaman, he made a trap to kill them. One day, as they were cutting down trees to clear land for a pasture, a strong wind came up. Everyone cleared out except for one Auca, who stayed there, sitting next to a tree that had been cut halfway through its trunk. At that point the shaman summoned a gust of wind and the tree fell, crushing the Auca. When they got back to work, everyone saw him there, and one man said to the dead man's sons, 'They killed your dad.'"

Are these Aucas, Aiwe, etc., the forerunners of today's Waorani? Were they imitating, with their proud red crest, the bird that the Waorani today keep as their symbol—the harpy eagle, the largest and strongest eagle of South America? Without doubt, there is information in the minds of the elders that could fill out that intricate mosaic of the Indigenous people who have survived to this day.

8. The Secoyas refer to the months of August, September, and October as "verano" in Spanish. They correspond to a period of clear, dry weather in Secoya territory, considered the most pleasant time of the year. Another summertime occurs around January and February. (NH)
9. Barbasco is a fish poison made from the roots of a shrub (*Lonchocarpus* sp.). (NH)
10. Up until fairly recently, among the various Indian peoples of this region, the deer has not been hunted, because it was considered the incarnation of a powerful and malevolent spirit (NH).
11. The name means River of Vines. (NH)

12. In Paincoca, the Secoya language, the name is Neaocoya: nea=black, oco=water, -ya=river. (NH)
13. An Amazonian remedy for aching muscles is to hit the skin with nettles. (NH)
14. The Zaparos, today nearly nonexistent, were a people of brave and skilful warriors. On many occasions Fernando showed his admiration for them. The last sentences of this story, where he says they are living with Quichuas, are accurate. The Secoya name for the Zaparos is Airohe, whose literal translation would be "Old Pambil Palm Tree." (The pambil palm is notable for its strong, straight wood, good for making things like blowguns, spears, house supports, and floors. NH.) Some Secoyas interpret this name as meaning "Ancestors of the Quichuas," who are themselves sometimes called Airipain or Doretu.
15. César Piaguaje explained this odd detail in the following way. The director of the ceremony summoned two spirits who are not supposed be summoned—Rutayo, a destructive earth goddess, and Wenkiyo, a being like a tapir with soft nails that lives deep in the earth. They're irritable; human activity, like children running around and playing, offends them gravely. But out of arrogance, the shaman summoned them. They appeared, everyone saw them, and they were angry. The shaman had summoned the Tutubai too, the Wind People. Now the sun clouded over, the wind howled, and the earth began to shake. The attendees at the ceremony ran every which way, and the land there sank and filled with water, drowning half the drinkers (though some were later brought back to life). See also the last tale in this book. (NH)
16. *Bactris gasipaes*. The chonta palm also provides fruit. (NH)
17. Aguas Negras is Neaocoya, the Blackwater River mentioned above. (NH)
18. Regarding the Tetetes, the speaker reports stories told to him by others, in this case by the Sionas near whom he lived in Cuyabeno; nevertheless, the events are so recent that he feels as if they were his own. Today the Tetetes are thought to be extinct. CICAME is preparing a work about the last Tetetes on Ecuadorian soil. For

more on the subject, see *Memorias de frontera*, pp. 22-25 and 189-205.

19. Yoco is the name of a vine that's used very often by Western Tukanoan groups. The top layer of bark is scraped off and discarded, and the next 5-8 mm layer is scraped off and squeezed in water to produce a reddish beverage. It's usually drunk before dawn to shake off sleep, so that the drinker can do chores like twisting palm fiber until dawn, or before any extensive physical work like a long hike, a long trip on the river, or a day spent clearing land to plant crops, because it reduces hunger and maintains energy. The healers occasionally used a very concentrated solution in healing ceremonies or, as in this case, as a means of contacting spirits.
20. White-lipped peccary, *Tayassu pecari*. (NH)
21. *Manihot esculenta*, a food crop like a potato. (NH)
22. During the yage ceremony a powerful magician can travel to the spirit-chief of the tapirs (see below, "The Animal Kingdoms"), asking him to send one of the animals that graze in his mythic pasture.
23. Achiote, or annatto, *Bixa orellana*, is a plant whose seedpods contain a bright red-orange pigment around the seeds. (NH)
24. Each Amazonian group designated itself with a word which expressed the proper human dignity; the Secoyas called themselves Pai, meaning "people." In turn, they denominated their rivals with degrading terms to differentiate themselves and preserve their preeminence. In these histories we find abundant examples of this.
25. This comment is repeated in Fernando's account of his own journey to Iquitos. (NH)
26. In the area, it's common to see congregations of vultures. (NH)
27. The fiber made from the chambira palm, *Astrocaryum chambira*. Used for weaving bags, nets and hammocks. (NH)
28. Among many Amazonian tribes, the quest for salt gave rise to epic tales and notable cultural transformations. Take into account, for example, that the distance between the mouth of the Aguarico and the saline deposit of Huallaga is about 1000 kilometers The sim-

ilarity between the current narrative and another collected in *Aipe Koka* (p. 175) may be observed.

Two further points. Measles, together with other diseases unknown in the Amazon before the arrival of the whites, constituted a mortal danger that decimated or annihilated entire tribes; that's why the oral histories of the area are peppered with references to them. Fernando specified on another occasion: "Measles came like this. A Mestizo went down the Coca River from Quito. The people saw him pass but didn't know his name. Later other Mestizos came, all of them healthy. The fouth group was the one that brought measles. The families of Limoncocha got sick and died, though some Secoyas of that area escaped into the forest before catching it. Because there was no vaccine, the people were finished off."

It's likely that certain very ancient elements—including, perhaps, from the time of the Spanish conquest—are being mixed here with others which are more recent. For example, Fernando's insistence that when he was a boy, he knew Secoyas in Limoncocha. In fact, as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) was building its base there next to the lagoon, Secoya ceramic pieces came to light; one of them may be seen today in the CICAME Museum in Pompeya.

29. Wa'itseme literally means meat-liver; the allusion is to the color of the stone.
30. *Brycon* sp. (NH)
31. *Crax* sp., a black bird like a small wild turkey. (NH)
32. Perhaps because there's always a crosswind in a high-floored house without walls. (NH)
33. P<u>i</u>simoaya: river of vines; Mecopë, lagoon of electric eels; Gataya, river of stone; C<u>a</u>tëpo, place of wild cane; Mawa´ira, pool pf red fish; Soasaoya, long *brazuelo* (a natural channel formed between two bends of a river); P<u>u</u>itëaya, river of roofing palms; Toñahoraya, river of cinchona trees (whose bark is medicinal, the source of quinine). (MAC/NH)
34. Pacuropë, inlet of palometa fish (*Mylossoma* sp.?).

35. Kënayoropë, stony brook.
36. Mauricio Levi; more about him in the next tale. (NH)
37. Poison. (NH)
38. *Taita* is Quichua for father. (NH)
39. 25 pounds. (NH)
40. Paco Carmona had asthma, a progressive and very bothersome illness that led him to kill himself. The date of his burial, March 5, 1929, was registered precisely by a missionary (*Memorias de Frontera*, p. 18), who also noted the presence, at the burial, of many Secoyas. That gesture is a sign of the appreciation they always felt for their permissive and generous boss. These qualities were as remembered by Fernando as the arbitrariness and egotism attributed to his successor, Mauricio Levi, to whom with clear deprication he refers as Carmona's *entenado* or *criado* (fosterling). Matilde, Fernando's sister, recalls with bitterness (Unedited oral stories, CICAME archives, Pompeya) the Peruvians' sexual abuses of Secoya women and the many tactics that Levi used to attempt to gain complete control over the Secoyas. "He whipped a healer to make him force his people to work." These procedings are rooted in the rivalry between the *haciendados* to win the scarce workforce of the area. And, without doubt, they affected Fernando in a very particular and progressive way. The boss, knowing the cultural authority that the shamans had over their people, discharged greater pressures on them—an ancient practice, discovered shortly after the Conquest.

    Teresa Macanilla, an elderly Quichua lady who grew up in Levi's hacienda, contributes new information that can illuminate this era that was so important in the shaman's life. "Carmona had lived near Pantoja, a military post; his *finca* (property) was named Bohemia. Mauricio, though, put his own *hacienda* down below, on an island, and he called it Miraflores. I lived there for many years with some Quichua families and I knew those Secoyas. Mauricio had an enormous, high house; when the Secoyas came in from their work, they used to hang up their hammocks underneath it to sleep. Apart from the fact that he was too fond of women of any

race, he was a good boss; however, there were two reasons why he went bad. First of all, he lived with Flora Londoño, a woman who didn't work and treated us badly. She was very ambitious. Then, Quichuas started running off with a lot of things he had lent to them, and going over to other bosses on the Putumayo or in Archidona. That bothered him so much that he took our small children and kept them shut up in his house I myself took mine away in the night and fled. Afterwards the people told me that when the Quichuas left, Mauricio became violent and punished many of the people who stayed with him." (Personal communication, Pompeya, 1990).

41. Secoyas from downriver. (NH)
42. A critical interpretation of the process of migration among Secoya groups can be seen in Jorge Casanova's *Migraciones Secoyas* (Iquitos, 1980, pp. 4-5). From testimonies of elderly Secoyas from the Campuya, Casanova reconstructs the movements of those natives in the early years of the 20th century. According to him, some group from the Campuya tapped rubber on the Putumayo for a boss who punished them so severely that they ended up murdering him. After that, the natives fled and established themselves for a short time on the Yubineto. Soon after that, a Secoya from the Wahoya came and told them about a good boss whom he worked for and who gave them many things. This was none other than Paco Carmona. Could that account be another version of the story Fernando tells here, in which the murdered man was a missionary?
43. Fernando makes very few references to his contacts with the missionaries. This is due to their very sporadic visits and, hence, their limited influence on the Secoya spiritual world. And it's also because, especially after his initiation as healer, Fernando has maintained up to now a lordly independence with respect to "preachers." In those conditions, Catholic teaching has not left appreciable traces in him, nor has the SIL's Evangelical teaching to which he was exposed in Cuyabeno, despite his long and amiable contact with the missionaries. In any case, it would be in-

teresting to study the Christian elements within his religious thinking, though such an analysis would exceed the aims of these notes. (Some further information on this theme: *Memorias de frontera*, pp. 16-33; *Ecorasa*, pp. 46-51.)

44. *Oenocarpus bataua* or *Jessenia bataua* (NH)
45. See Footnote 8. (NH)
46. *Chinchiroca* comes from *Sinchi*, Quichua for strong or powerful, and *roca*, Spanish for rock. (MAC/NH)
47. The flight starts out over land, because the Peruvians controlled the river. This was in 1941 and there had recently been border skirmishes between Ecuador and Peru. Fernando recalls episodes from this war in Vickers, pp. 70-71. They may be compared, too, with the description by the narrator's nephew, Angel Celestino Piaguaje, in *Ecorasa*, pp. 11-18.

    Jorge Casanova, op. cit. p. 5, notes that others stayed in Mauricio's hacienda and worked for him until his death in 1949. Of those Secoyas, there are eight surviving clans in Peru. Roque and Nicolas Levi, Mauricio's sons, continued their father's work with Secoyas on the rivers Yubineto and Angusilla respectively.
48. The drinker is speaking to his grandson, Marcelino Lucitante, and he refers to Marcelino's mother, Maruja Payaguaje.
49. Canyon of the Blacks. The place is named after an Afro-Ecuadorian family that settled there for a while. (César Piaguaje, personal communication.) (NH)
50. *Arapaima gigas*. (NH)
51. The Cofans are another tribe, friendly to the Secoyas. (NH)
52. Meters. (NH)
53. The title of governor—*gobernador*—is characteristic of the lexicon employed in the Putumayo area, and comes from the Columbian missionary posts. In this case, the healer seems to pursue two complementary goals: to maintain good relations with the military men, so that they continue not to bother him and his group; and to obtain legal recognition of his preeminence as *intipaike* or Secoya chief.
54. Orville Johnson and his wife Mary, linguists belonging to the Sum-

mer Institute of Linguistics (SIL, or, in Spanish, Instituto Linguistico de Verano, ILV), are always called missionaries by the Secoyas. They had permanent homes among the Secoyas and lived there for long periods of time, first in Cuyabeno from 1953 to 1973, and then in in San Pablo from 1973 to 1981, the year in which their organization was expelled from Ecuador. Despite the fact that their presence and their actions represented a head-on collision with the fundamentals of Secoya culture (prayer meeting for yage, medicine for healing rituals, school for traditional instruction, Bible for myths, et cetera) and the personification of these in the figure of the drinker, Fernando recalls those years without bitterness. A harder and more analytical vision of the confrontation of the two religious practices can be read in *Ecorasa*, the autobiography of Fernando's nephew Celestino Piaguaje.

55. The reason for the word "up" (or, in Spanish, *subir*, meaning "to go up") is that the first speaker is speaking from a canoe in the river to a man standing on a riverbank above him. (NH)
56. Tari'cawa, Turtle Cove.
57. *Myroxylon balsamum*. (NH)
58. *Minquartia guianensis*. (NH)
59. The Capuchin mission maintained its post "Nativity of Cuyabeno" in the years 1959-1962; numerous incidents from this time may be followed through the chronicle published, nearly in its entirity, in *Memorias de frontera,* pp. 129-182. Fernando has recalled the terms they employed—Father, Brother—and speaks of them laconically and not without censure. Perhaps this is due to episodes like that related in first person by Father Anastasio in the chronicle of December 31, 1961: "I had a face-to-face verbal dispute with all the Indians and the shaman [*curaca*] which could have ended in tragedy".
60. *Moretal*: a swampy place where morete palms (*Mauritia flexuosa*) grow. (NH)
61. The healers I've been able to hear tend to coincide on these three concepts—interest, bravery, and capacity to bear suffering—to describe the qualities demanded of the neophyte; the pages

that follow explain in good part why. In any case, I'd like to briefly highlight some of those reasons. Initiation is an act of rigorous self-discipline (physical, psychological, social) for the initiate, undertaken before the eyes and judgment of his group; the process of self-discipline, the ascesis, will continue after the so-called graduation (*eta jaisiquë*, to excel, to remain above); the ingestion of the hallucinogens is very demanding physically and not infrequently produces physiological upheavals, and, consequently, fear; finally, we can say that the magician always walks a painful line as a medium and attractor of protective and malevolent spirits, and personifies that ambivalence to his people, for whom he may be alternately a healer or a sorcerer, a protector or a vehicle for witchcraft. His position, ultimately, is equally full of attractive power and of danger.

62. Literally "bone yage," so-called because of its knobby appearance. (NH, after Vickers p. 334) To stimulate visions or healing rituals, the Secoyas drink three basic types of plants. First, yage, the most well-known, used across a wide area of the Amazon, and perhaps more familiar by the Quichua term ayahuasca. Vickers has collected sixteen types or classes of yage among the Secoyas, op. cit. pp. 333-335. Second, pehi (*peji*), known in Quichua as *guando* (or *huantuj*, etc.), called in Spanish *floripondio* or *borrachera*; Vickers mentions four types, p. 335. Third, uhahai (*ujajai*), from the Secoya *uja*, prayers to drive away dangers, and *jai*, many or great. Vickers notes four types. In Quichua it is known as *chirihuayusa*. During his tales, Fernando recalls some of the characteristics of such potions, about which he is recognized as an expert; a more detailed description of their qualities is beyond the reach of these pages. (MAC)
63. [62] It's advantageous to distinguish, at least briefly, two spiritual forms that are very common in Secoya visions. To translate *winiawai* as angel is uncertain and unsatisfactory; in Fernando's opinion, "it can't be said in Spanish." Nevertheless, his grandsons, perhaps because of the Biblical symbolism to which they have access, or because they can't find a more adequate term, translate it as an-

gel (or rarely, as spirit), always with the understanding that they are "good" beings, that is to say, that they are protectors of human life and friends of the drinkers. Another multifaceted Secoya term is *wati*, which is often translated as devil, but is more properly a spirit, even though it frequently adopts attitudes which are noxious to humans, for example serving as a vehicle for witchcraft.

64. The name Salmo, in the memories of the elderly Quichua woman Teresa Macanilla, changes to Salmon; it's not unlikely that it was, in reality, Salomon. The nickname "Whitey" was due to his coloration, so light that Teresa describes him as looking like a Mestizo.
65. By chanting over the brew. (NH)
66. *Inga sp. (Leguminosae)*. (NH)
67. *Semaprochilodus sp*? (*Prochilodontae*). (NH)
68. Fernando refers here to *wiñawai*. (NH)
69. The dichotomy healer-witch is one of the principle and most interesting axes of this story. The drinker takes great care to emphasize his specialization as healer and his rejection of the temptation of violence. Nevertheless, given that he possesses power, and in a high degree, he never escapes the suspicion of those outside his group, especially of the enemies for whom his power is automatically a constant danger.
70. Witchcraft is seen and experienced as arrows, darts, spines, of different materials, which the sorcerer fires at his victim, conveying sicknesses or death. In the exercise described here, the master teaches the initiate to dominate as much his anger as his pride in feeling himself powerful, as both vices would be dangerous for his community; and so the master brings him to a higher level where the celestial beings purify him of his violence.
71. I.e., that had been chanted over. (NH)
72. The leaf fan, *mamecoco* in the Secoya language, is a common tool of shamanic practice among ayahuasca-drinking tribes. Other names for essentially the same thing include *shacapa* and *wairapanga*. (NH)
73. *Brunfelsia grandiflorae*. (NH)

74. *Brugmanisa* sp. (NH)
75. An everyday beverage for Secoyas, made of ripe plantains boiled and mashed in water. (NH)
76. Wai: meat. (NH)
77. Together with the power to cure and the fact of having access to the spirits by means of the visions, the quality of being able to sing well is indispensible for a shaman-chief. Without it, he would not be able to direct the yage ceremony, which is precisely the basis of his power. The importance of song is evident: in it are expressed the formulas of supplication or domination over the spirits, formulas which were received in visions. Furthermore, given that the songs, though substantially the same among shamans, also require a certain amount of improvisation, to be able to perform them or not is no small thing. As far as the participants in the yage ceremony are concerned, the song comes to the shaman dictated by the angels themselves as a sign of mutual harmony. But it's certain that there exists even a further explanation that reinforces the importance of this factor: this resides in the idea that the visions can be directed, conducted, and inspired; that is, the drug amplifies the previous thought of the experienced drinker. Thus the importance of "previous concentration" and the frequent expressions that the shaman "guides," "teaches people to see," "gets rid of bad visions," etc. In this sense, the song confirms the authenticity of the healer's ecstasy and ends up being the only sure guide along the risky path of dreams.
78. The importance of graduating while young should not pass unremarked on. In the first place, we have already spoken about the difficulties experienced in the process; because it's necessary to make a hearty effort to drink ("You were born male, but you're acting like a woman, going fishing instead of drinking yage!"), this speaks for the young man's moral quality. But furthermore, the Secoyas agree that developing early the habit of drinking yage leads to more numerous and superior visions.
79. All the drinkers insist on this: drinking is not a vice, because it's disagreeable and risky; what they wish is to see, to control the

world of the deadly spirits, to approach the happy kingdom of the celestial beings; in sum, to attain knowledge. To reach the truth, because what our eyes see is only an appearance. "If we don't drink, we don't see, we don't dream; if we don't see that other world, we'll die off, there will be a catastrophe." (Testimony of Cornelio Ocoguaje in *Ganteya Bain, El pueblo secoya*, Alvaro Wheeler, Bogotá 1987, p. 274.).

80. *Tayassu tajacu*. (NH)
81. *Tayassu pecari*. (NH)
82. *Dasyprocta* sp. Large rodents. (NH)
83. *Agouti paca*. Larger rodents. (NH)
84. The significance of this is unclear. (NH)
85. The Putumayo River, at the border between Ecuador and Colombia. (NH)
86. Nunipai: nuni people. William Vickers defines nuni in the following way: a class of sacred plants with medicinal properties. He specifies five types of treatment based on nuni (op. cit., p. 337). However, given that we are within the Secoyas' world, let's let one of them, Celestino Piaguaje, Fernando's nephew, explain the various qualities of the plant. "Nuni is an herb that is born from a tuber, which is what a healer received, in one of his visions, from the hands of the angels. My uncle Fernando takes care of that plant and no one has it but him. He doesn't give it away. And if anyone stole it from him, it would have no effect, because it only acquires its power at the will of the healer. When I was a child, he gave some of those roots to my mother, but when she later became an Evangelical, she let them die off. Nuni is employed in the following way: you dig up the roots, wash them and grind them into powder, and then mix them with a little achiote and paint the body of someone who has just died The healer paints only his deceased relatives in this way. I saw Fernando do that in Cuyabeno with my two grandmothers. He painted two lines on their faces, on their nose, also on their arms and feet. Sometimes people who are not relatives can be painted, if they requested it. On other occasions, nuni is employed as a curative Then, you split the roots and let

them drip their juice into water, which is then drunk." (Personal testimony, CICAME archive, Pompeya.) For her part, Joaquina, the younger sister of Fernando (and of Celestino's mother Matilde), discussed the subject with her son Cesar: "Nunipai are the people of nuni, that is, the people who found the path of eternity through nuni. My father acquired that plant, which came from a family of Canteya [river of wild cane, or Putumayo], people who had reached the sky and lived along the banks of the river of eternity. That's why my brother Fernando knows about it now. If you put it on someone who is dying in their hammock, the nuni will bring him back to life; you'll put him in his grave but he'll go out from it to the great river. When the sky people see him coming, they'll go down to the healer and ask, 'Where did this man come from, who has come to us?' 'I sent him to you, because he's a relative of mine.' 'Well, if that's so, he can stay.'" (Personal testimony, CICAME archive).

87. At this point, the drinker's narrative cannot be comprehended precisely without some reference to certain notions of his mythology or religious belief. For those who want more comprehensive information, we recommend Maria Susana Cipolletti's book *Aipe Coca*; here we will enumerate only the general distinguishing features of some of the gods.

Ñañë (whose name also means moon) is the principal god of the pantheon. During his life on earth he was usually known as P<u>a</u>ina (p<u>a</u>i, person; P<u>a</u>ina, meaning something like primordial person). In that time he recreated the world in its present form and suffered from the incomprehension of the people of the era. He married the daughters of a man whom he later transformed into the first tapir. Another personage, Mühü, competed with Ñañë and wanted to steal his wives away from him; Ñañë cut him in half. One of the wives, Repao, ascended to heaven with Ñañë. She receives the dead and examines them before sending them on to their final place. The other wife, Rutayo, who preferred Mühü, was shut up by Ñañë in the center of the earth, where she remains a constant threat.

88. Ñumi quëyë: ñumi, fragrant plant; quëyë, parrot. A celestial being. (MAC)
89. I.e., Repao. (NH)
90. *Psarocolius* sp. A southern relative of the oriole. (NH)
91. *Mal viento*, or *mal aire*, is conceptual category of illness in Latin America said to be caused by evil spirits in the air. C.f. the English word malaria, naming a disease that was once thought to be caused by bad air. (NH)
92. Not identified. (NH)
93. Unidentified. (NH)
94. In contrast to what Fernando says here, whip scorpions are not considered by zoologists to be poisonous, and the coral snake is also not generally thought to have a stinger in its tail. (NH)
95. In Paincoca, *pai joyo huati*, literally person-dead-spirit. César Piaguaje explained it as the spirit of a dead shaman. (Personal communication) (NH)
96. In Paincoca, *mahuajo huatí*, literally morpho butterfly spirit (NH). In this text appears Esepai, son of Nyanyuh, burnt and transformed into the sun.
97. *Prochilodus nigricans*. (NH)
98. Fernando told other, much more extensive and complex versions of this episode, which belongs to a genre of tales whose details are very flexible, limited only by the healer's imagination.
99. Sëomeayai, hungry jaguar.
100. Paiyai, people jaguar.
101. Puñuyai, piranha jaguar.
102. Sekëyawiri, spirit of the trees.
103. The term *cristiano* was used in the region to mean a civilized person, i.e., not an Auca. (NH)
104. When he comes close to the fateful moment, the youth thinks, no doubt, of the immortal, venegful spirit of the shaman, and feels fear. This whole episode illustrates with fateful drama the contradictory sentiments provoked, even in the people closest to him, by the man of wisdom: need/fear, gratitude/hatred, respect/resentment. The story has a secondary point of interest,

that (it) illustrates the relationships between Secoyas, their employers, and the military, relationships that the drinker explains with details full of observation and realism.

105. I.e., the time was nearly dawn. (NH)
106. At the beginning of the autobiography, Fernando affirmed that his father's death was caused by the activity of various sorcerers, and he cited the name of one of them, Ca'tae. Here he gives a longer version and adds other names. I heard him tell the story other times with more intricate details. All these things are characteristic of a basic reaction to the death of a great shaman. If the process of dying begins at an advanced age, it will probably be accepted and even, on not a few occasions, accelerated by the shaman's will. "I've lived long enough, and now it's time to live with my relatives in the sky." In contrast, a premature death is never "natural," but always caused by some enemy, given that the spirits don't act on their own. "My father didn't have to die; he could still comb his hair without a single white hair in it," recalls Matilde, the narrator's sister (personal testimony, CICAME archives, Pompeya). Given also the great wisdom attributed to him, the intervention of multiple adversaries in his death was also beyond question.
107. I.e., to infuse the water with some particular kind of medicinal energy, a common technique among Secoya yage drinkers. (NH)
108. I.e., a poisonous energy. The Spanish phrase is *la mala seña*. (NH)
109. The mamecoco or leaf fan described above. (NH)
110. The witch's affectionate nickname for his son.
111. Tiutupë is the stump of the mythic tree whose fall gave birth to all the rivers of the Amazon basin. The stump can be seen in visions. Ocotupë is another of its names.

Crown

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Yage house

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