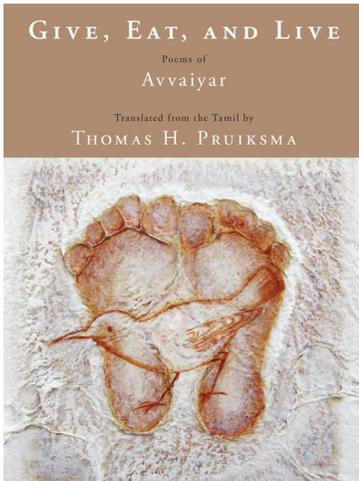


Give, Eat, and Live: Poems of Avvaiyar

TRANSLATED BY
Thomas Pruikisma



Give, Eat, and Live:

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ISBN: 978-1-59709-097-1

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Give, Eat, and Live is a bilingual selection of poems translated from the 12th century Tamil poet Avvaiyar, arguably one of the most important female poets in Tamil's two-thousand-and-five-hundred years of literary history, and certainly one of the best known, of any gender. Although people across the state of Tamil Nadu know many of her works by heart, she has received little attention outside India, owing largely to the lack of decent translations. The one comprehensive work in English, *Avvaiyar, a great Tamil poetess*, by C. Rajagopalachari (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), has long since been out of print and renders Avvaiyar's poems in accurate but wooden translations. This book, by contrast, seeks to render her finest songs in a supple and poetically charged English that allows both her intellect and poetry to shine.

The selection includes poems from two of Avvaiyar's major books on the good life, *Mūturai*, "The Word that Endures," and *Nalvali*, "The Right Road." It also includes a generous sampling of poetry that was written separately and later gathered into collections. All of them use a Tamil verse form called *venpā*, dating back to the late Sangam period (first to third century C.E.). Though they speak of ethics, they do not cease to be poetry, employing imagery drawn from the Tamil landscape as well as a deeply musical line. These are poems meant to be chanted and sung.

Many of these poems have been published individually, both in India by the country's leading journal of Indian literature in translation and by the Temenos Academy in London. *Give, Eat, and Live*, in turn, will bring her work the wider attention it has long since deserved. Both aficionados of Indian literature and lovers of poetry alike will savor this first literary translation of one of Tamil's best loved poets.

And it was these translations—their subtlety, their delicacy, their deceptive simplicity—that convinced me that in Tom we have a genuine Poet in our midst.

—Paul L. Love, director of the Study Centre for India Literature in English and Translation, Madurai, India

Thomas Pruikisma's translations present ancient wisdom-teaching poems in luminous, sparkling English as lively and rich as they must have been in the 12th century Tamil of their author, Avvaiyar. Read these poems; eat these poems; give them away; live with them. They are a joy.

—Sam Hamill



News from

Red Hen Press

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Praise for *Give, Eat, and Live: Poems of Avvaiyar*

Following the death of the distinguished translator, A.K. Ramanujan, Thomas Pruiksma is one of the few poets sufficiently sensitized and equipped to reveal in English the delicacy and beauty of Tamil verse such as Avvaiyar's.

—Paul L. Love, Director of the Study Centre for India
Literature in English and Translation, Madurai, India

Mr. Pruiksma has returned to one of the great fountains of traditional wisdom-teaching literature, translating poetry that has been a touchstone among South Indian cultures for centuries although virtually unknown in the West. While other scholars have researched these traditional philosophies, Mr. Pruiksma, being a poet in attitude and practice, has brought “the grand old lady of Tamil,” Avvaiyar (12th century CE), to life in American English.

—Sam Hamill



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Author Biography



Thomas H. Pruiksma is a writer, poet, and translator from Seattle, Washington. His other books include *A Feast for the Tongue: Forty Servings of Spoken Tamil with Helpings of Equally Spoken English*, co-authored with Dr. K.V. Ramakoti, and *The Body and the Earth: Notes from a Conversation*, with the artist C.F. John. When he's not reading or writing, you can find him working in the garden, performing magic, and making music with family and friends on Vashon Island, where he now lives.

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Praise for *Give, Eat, and Live: Poems of Avvaiyar*

Because he has studied the evolution of the Tamil language (and poetry) from ancient to modern, he brings both the etymologist's scholarship and his poet's ear to meet his task. The result has been simply marvelous: poetry full of traditional wisdom addressing right mindfulness and right practice presented with elegant simplicity—which should by no means be misconstrued as simplification of the original. Avvaiyar's elegant simplicity of juxtaposition and comparison, of metaphor and practical philosophy is no accident. Mr. Pruiksma embodies exactly such mindfulness and practice himself.

—Sam Hamill