Kenneth Lincoln

FOREWORD

There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization, . . .
EZRA POUND,
"Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"

The war was over. Eight and one-half million men lay dead in trenches. The imperial West had blown and scrapped itself to a wasteland. In this nadir of 1918 George W. Cronyn found an alternative to the devastation. He turned to "Indian" transliterations from Bureau of American Ethnology reports and anthologized them within a collection first called *The Path on the Rainbow*. He borrowed the anthology's title from healing Navajo "night chants," originally translated by Washington Matthews, the cowboy surgeon:

In Kininaéki.
In the house made of dawn.
In the story made of dawn.
On the trail of dawn.
O, Talking God! . . .
From the base of the east.
From the base of the Pelado Peak.
From the house made of mirage,
From the story made of mirage,
From the doorway of rainbow,
The path out of which is the rainbow. . . .

Cronyn's sampler of native literary wares was the first major collection to make headlines. Daniel Brinton's "Aboriginal American Authors and Their Productions" of 1883 lay stranded in academia, and Natalie Burlin Curtis's ethnomusicology in *The Indians' Book* of 1907 got far less press, though Theodore Roosevelt wrote from the White House in longhand as a frontispiece: "These songs cast a wholly new light—on the depth and dignity of Indian thought, the simple beauty and strange charm—the dream of a vanished elder world—of Indian poetry."

Why Indians in 1918? Tens of thousands of American Indians had volunteered for the First World War, though they were not even U.S. citizens. In fact, the United States government had declared war on many of their mothers and fathers from 1860 to 1890, when the Census Bureau finally verified that the frontier was closed. Congress granted all "Indians" dual citizenship in 1924 because of their native loyalty, making them "American" Indians in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West billing: that is, both ethnic aboriginals, among some five hundred (legally speaking) "domestic dependent nations," and "native" Americans, taxpaying veterans to be exact.

But what landed Cronyn's anthology at the eclectic threshold of Western literature? Indeed, how did *The Path on the Rainbow* eventually take the position of lead text in Jorge Luis Borges's classes on the American canon? Why culturally include, rather than exclude in the old frontier way, some four million pre-Columbian "Americans" who had been decimated, along with a few hundred remaining bison, to a quarter of a million political refugees in 1900? Xenophobia, racism, and genocide festered in the West on the flip side of the Buffalo Head nickel, when such a cultural scion as Frederic Remington himself could snarl, "Jews, Injuns, Chinamen, Italians, Huns," echoing Chivington and Custer, "the rubbish of the earth I hate." Indians had been made prisoners-of-war on reservations from the 1880s on—stripped of their clothing and culture and spirits by grizzled Civil War colonels, hardpan pioneers, make-over missionaries, sleazy traders, and hardass bureaucrats. These patriots figured that the only "good" Indians

left (better dead than red) better get civilized, fast, before they disappeared. "The Indians must conform to 'the white man's ways,' " the Commissioner of Indian Affairs menaced in 1889, "peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must. . . . This civilization may not be the best possible, but it is the best the Indian can get." Listen up, pilgrims. When Edward Sheriff Curtis began catching their photographic "shadows" by the end of the century, he saw them as "vanishing" Americans.

Sorely, to be sure, the West needed a revised myth to supersede New World carte blanche (those who got the largesse of gold, land, power, and trade didn't want it taken back). So in a curious turnabout, the mythographers reached into the presence of the past and reinvented the Indian at the heart of this continent's humanity. The resurrected noble savage, reduced by a factor of sixteen since 1492, would rise above the ruins of anarchic Manifest Destiny on literary wings.

"From *Poetry, a Magazine of Verse*," Cronyn acknowledged, "came the inspiration for this anthology." These "genuine American classics," freely adapted not as translations but "interpretations" elsewhere *(McClure's, Scribner's, Sunset, Others)* by such as Carl Sandburg, Lew Sarett, and Amy Lowell, were grazed into rebirth by the February, 1917 "Aboriginal" issue of the country's premier poetry journal. "Suspicion arises definitely that the Red Man and his children," Sandburg tweaked readers in his praise of Frances Densmore's ethnomusicology, "committed direct plagiarisms on the modern imagists and vorticists." Ezra Pound published three of his early cantos and a review of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the August, 1917 *Poetry*, and Wallace Stevens printed "The Anecdote of the Jar" in the January, 1920 issue under the mock Victorian heading, "Pecksniffiana":

> The wilderness rose up to it.
> And sprawled around, no longer wild.
> The jar was round upon the ground
> And tall and of a port of air.

Further inspired by Cronyn's *The Path on the Rainbow*, Harriet Monroe in 1920 gathered yet another "aboriginal number" of *Poetry*, where Mary Austin and company personally revised nativist verse. Emma Hawkridge waxed neoprimitive in "The Painted Desert":

> Over the wasteland a strong wind goes;
> Like captured heat lies the cactus rose.
> The desert sings . . .

Whose paint, which rose? The next year Pablo Picasso and Wyndham Lewis sketched petroglyphic abstractions in *The Dial* (July, 1921), while D. H. Lawrence, newly relocating to the New World (now buried above Taos), confessed his anglophilic pettiness in "Snake." W. C. Williams scratched an American verse speech from what T. S. Eliot otherwise called, after Mallarme on Poe, "the language of the tribe," and W. B. Yeats celebrated an Irish tribal renaissance in early chapters from his *Autobiography*. Ethnographic reviews by Edward Sapir on Max Müller and Mary Austin on Frank Cushing underscored what Austin, midwife to Native American "re-expressions," then termed "the search for native sources of inspiration in the poetry and drama and design of Amerind art." Plumbing "deep-rooted aboriginal stock" and the very rhythms of the land itself, Austin would grouse in "Aboriginal American Literature" that "it is still easier to know more of Beowulf than of the Red Score of the Delaware, more of Homer than of the Creation Myth of the Zuñi, more of Icelandic sagas than of the hero myths of Iroquois and Navajo." Her point still stands.

Cronyn's sources had been the field work of Franz Boas, Daniel Brinton, Natalie Curtis Burlin, Frances Densmore, J. W. Fewkes, Alice Fletcher, John Peabody Harrington, James Mooney, Washington Matthews, H. H. Schoolcraft, Stephen Riggs, John R. Swanton, and other pioneering linguistic anthropologists godfathered by European-trained social scientists. Ruth Benedict, Ruth Bunzel, Ella Deloria, Charles Eastman, Francis La Flésche, Pliny Goddard, A. L. Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Elsie

Parsons, Archie Phinney, Paul Radin, Knud Rasmussen, Edward Sapir, Frank G. Speck, Herbert Spindon, Ruth Underhill, J. R. Walker, Clark Wissler, and scores of others would add their translative genius to the field of American Indian Studies. They would today lead to such contemporary Native American writers as Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), Jim Barnes (Choctaw), Diane Burns (Chippewa), Louise Erdrich (Chippewa), Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa), Joy Harjo (Creek), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), nila northSun (Navajo), Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Wendy Rose (Miwok-Hopi), Leslie Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Mary TallMountain (Inuit), Luci Tapahonso (Navajo), James Welch (Blackfeet-Gros Ventre), Roberta Whiteman (Oneida), and Ray Young Bear (Mesquaki), among several hundred more visible writers.

In her introduction to *The Path on the Rainbow* Austin spoke of Americans instinctively seeking "a deeper footing in their native soil." As a kind of New World neoclassicism—grounded in Native American cultural bedrock—she appealed to a sense of "the resident genius" of the native cultural terrain, the pre-Columbian literary landscape. Here Americans would find their own Homer, Plato, Diogenes, Sappho, Dido, and Demeter in the tribal epics, philosophic parables, trickster picaresques, grand satires, heroic romances, and creation myths of some five hundred Native American cultures. Frances Densmore's translations were among the most moving examples:

Soldiers,
  you fled.
Even the eagle dies.
LAKOTA

The bush is sitting
  under a tree
  and singing.
YUMAN

The water bug
is drawing
the shadows of the evening
toward him on the water.

YAQUI

In *Papago Music* Densmore recorded the "Song of Owl Woman," a shaman, and later raised the ticklish issue of re-creative translation: "The word 'rattling' was said to be a literal translation. To us the word means simply a noise, which darkness could scarcely make, but the sound of a rattle is associated with magic and mystery in the mind of the Indian. When the poem is quoted in this anthology the word 'rustling' is used instead, but this is gentle and soft in its implication, and there is no vigor in the corresponding verb. This is the song of a terrified spirit, facing the greatest mystery that the mind can conceive. The subject is worthy of Dante. In the 'great night' the spirit heard sounds of fearful and stupendous import. The darkness 'came rattling.' " *The Path on the Rainbow* renders it thus:

In the great night my heart will go out;
Toward me the darkness comes rustling.
In the great night my heart will go out.

PAPAGO

What is the difference between "rustling" and "rattling" darkness? Which would Owl Woman choose, were she bilingual and gifted with a poet's ear in both languages? What works better in English? Which audience must a translation satisfy? What kind of medicine does the chant work in either culture? If Densmore stays true to the Papago and betrays the poem's generative spark in English, the translation fails as a poem. If she freely adapts in the second tongue, the "poem" no longer speaks from or for its source, but plays Indian. Can there be an authentic crossing?

"The poem's form is the sound it makes when spoken,"

H. S. McAllister suggests. The further question of aesthetic form comes up in Densmore's translation of Sitting Bull's "last" song:

A warrior
I have been;
now
it is all over.
A hard time
I have.

SONG OF SITTING BULL

What was the original "song"—singing for power, as Ruth Underhill titled her Papago collection—unrecorded by Tatanka Iyontake ("Bull Sitting" in Lakota, a mystic name from the four ages of human life)? Used-as-a-Shield told Densmore at Standing Rock in 1914, twenty-four years after the martyr's assassination, that he heard his Hunkpapa *wicasa wakañ* or "man holy," also a military genius, also a great healer, speaker, and singer with a high tenor voice, chant the song through the 1880s. What did it sound like? Densmore's musicology scores the key in E-flat minor with a descending fourth and two cascading thirds—something like a prophetic meadowlark's song (Sitting Bull's oracle bird, the Western meadowlark, warned him from childhood of danger).

I-ki-ci-ze wa-oñ koñ he
wa-na he-ná-la ye-lo he
i-yo-ti-ye ki-ya wa-oñ

The first Lakota word means "head warrior" (confronting face-to-face) and the second "to know how," the third "to want." Occurring twice at the ends of lines, "he" is a vocable. *Wa-na* is "now" and *he-ná-la* means "all gone," terminated with the stress particle *ye-lo*. The long verb with its auxiliary ("make to be") in the third line means "to suffer, to find it hard," literally "to crash against." The last word, *wa-oñ*, means again "to know how," as in the opening line—and the nickname for a bear de-

rives from it, *waoñze* (bears are known among the Lakota to be wise healers and warriors who sing with powerful hearts).

So, how does Densmore translate all this? Literally. And what about form? Freely. And the vocables? Untranslatable. The original? Each line rides on eight syllables—could they be syllabically musical? Most telling, can we sing Densmore's translation in the original musicology, as transcribed? Hardly. Perhaps this eight-syllable triad sounds better and better approximates the original:

> So I have been a warrior
> And now it is all over so
> I know to bear against hard times.

As Dell Hymes argues *("In Vain I Tried to Tell You")*, we may have to translate everything all over again, once the bilingual model is accepted and social scientists learn from verbal artists how to distinguish a verse line from a stump.

By 1929 Dorothy Demetracopoulou was collecting Dream Dance songs among the California Wintu around Mt. Lassen. "I recorded them intermittently," she wrote in *Anthropos* (1935), "chiefly as an expression of literary art, partly for their ethnographic value, partly for linguistic purposes. I secured them in text and translated them as literally as the discrepancy between Wintu and English would permit." Sadie Marsh lost her best friend, "who a little after came to her in a dream with a company of other female spirits, weeping, dancing, and singing this song":

> Down west, down west we dance,
> We spirits dance,
> We spirits weeping dance.

And the traditional Anonymous sang these translative pearls:

> Where will you and I sleep?
> At the down-turned jagged rim of the sky you
> and I will sleep.

Hymes asked in 1981, "Do these texts, restored to something like their true form, have power to move us, as part of the first literature of our land?"

Something has been moving Westerners toward American Indians for a long time now. Since the Renaissance, Europeans have shared American fascinations with the "native" American as the newest and oldest, most "free" and mostly "wild" peoples of the New World. It is as though a native Adam and Eve reappeared for a second chance in the Garden. D. H. Lawrence came down west with his runaway German wife, Frieda, to New Mexico in the 1920s, where they relocated among Pueblo Indians around Taos. It was a postwar move emblematic of Euroamerican migrations to the New World for three centuries. This godson of Raleigh returned to Italy, where Amerigo Vespucci was commissioned by the Medici to exploit the green breast of the Garden. Lawrence published *The Plumed Serpent* and *Mornings in Mexico* about "Indianizing" or Americanizing the White Man, in the wake of Cronyn's *The Path on the Rainbow*, and died before he could complete his writings on the original Americans. His ashes lie next to Frieda's in the Sangre de Cristo mountains today.

Thoreau died whispering "Indians" and "buffalo," they say, before he too could finish his masterwork on American natives. He left twelve cryptic notebooks in code. Walt Whitman worked in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1864, and Marianne Moore taught four years at Carlisle Indian School while Jim Thorpe was a student there. Isak Dinesen's father lived in Wisconsin in 1872 among *"les sauvages,"* as he called them, and she moved to Africa to find a native home. Ezra Pound, W. C. Williams, H. D., and the Imagists refashioned American Indian visual and verbal arts via *Poetry Magazine* and *The Dial*, through the translative insistences of Mary Austin and compatriot anthropologists, budding students of Franz Boas. This modernist neoprimitivism capped four centuries of Western organic thinking, as Diane and Jerome Rothenberg document in *Symposium of the Whole* (1983). Such neoprimitivism, in fact, was registered

early this century among the Fauvists in France, the short-lived Vorticist movement of Pound and others in England, Picasso's prodigious wonder over native African masks ("Les Demoiselles D'Avignon" in 1907, for example, and 18,000-year-old cave paintings discovered in southern France). T. S. Eliot salvaged his *Waste Land* from these runes and ethnological models, via Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Weston's grail mythology within a regenerate Christianity, and the linguistic anthropology coming from Europe by way of Boas, Sapir, and others.

In short, the "primitive" or "native" concerns of modernist rethinking, particularly in the arts and social sciences around the First World War, can be focused in discussions about the American Indian as cultured wild man. The speeches and oratory in Peter Nabokov's *Native American Testimony* remind us that the first recorded "American chronicles," as Constance Rourke noted, took place among Red-White ceremonies where the New World made treaties "at the forest's edge" with resident native nations. "By what names are they distinguished," Roger Williams catalogued in the 1643 *A Key into the Languages of America*: "First, those of the *English* giving: as *Natives*, *Salvages*, *Indians*, *Wild-men*, (so the *Dutch* call them *Wilden*), *Abergeny men*, *Pagans*, *Barbarians*, *Heathen*." Caliban, a name corrupted from *Carib* and *Khan* and *Canis* and "cannibal" (signifying to Columbus, it would seem, a dog-headed emperor-aboriginal gorging on human flesh), has long been a symbol of native nobility and concomitant savagery, from Montaigne writing on misconceived cannibals, to Shakespeare's Prospero as the shamanic artist-surrogate of the Renaissance, to Rousseau's noble jungle savage, to Robert Penn Warren's American epic *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* in 1982, when he was appointed America's first poet laureate. Prospero adopts the wild man as his bestial son, and in so doing echoes cultural cataclysms first superimposed on the Brazilian Tupinamba, carried forward today: "this thing of darkness I / acknowledge mine" (*The Tempest* 5.1.275–76).

Rousseau and ensuing cultural romantics, Schiller, Schlegl, and Coleridge among them, godfathered native visionaries in America, from Cooper to Thoreau and Whitman, on to Hem-

ingway, Snyder, Creeley, and Bly, among many others. These have artistic compatriots in Europe, from Gauguin in the riotous jungle, to Gaudier-Breska sculpting primal animal forms, to Stravinsky drumming the rites of spring, to Jawlensky painting Inuit and Hopi masks, to Miro's childlike play. Kafka sparked his "wish to become a Red Indian" in the unfinished *Amerika* of 1927: "If one were only an Indian, instantly alert, and on a racing horse, leaning against the wind, kept on quivering briefly over the quivering ground." In 1970 at UC Berkeley, recalls the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, now holding a Harvard chair, "There was a strong sense of contemporary American poetry in the West with Robert Duncan and Bly and Gary Snyder rejecting the intellectual, ironical, sociological idiom of poetry and going for the mythological. I mean everyone wanted to be a Red Indian, basically" (1979 *Ploughshares* interview).

"Know then," Johann Herder wrote a friend at the end of the eighteenth century, "the more alive and freedom-loving a people is . . . the more savage, that is, alive, free, sensuous, lyrically active, its songs must be." Cronyn caught the drift in Densmore's Chippewa translation:

> As my eyes
> search
> the prairie
> I feel the summer in the spring.

Puccini went so far as to write an opera with an Indian chorus in 1910, *La Fanciulla del West*, "The Golden Girl of the West," featuring a female Indian chorus. A Prussian convict, Karl May, wrote perhaps the most widely read "Indian" fiction in the world—about the noble Winnetou and his Caucasian companion, Old Shatterhand—and it competed with Longfellow's Hiawatha and Cooper's Leatherstocking tales for top Indianist billing abroad. Karl May was the favorite author of no less than Karl Marx, Bertolt Brecht, Adolf Hitler, and Albert Schweitzer. Finally, Dylan Thomas acted out the "Red Man" myth of the wild child at home in Wales in "the Gorsehill jungle" of *Por-*

trait of the Artist as a Young Dog: "On my haunches, eager and alone, casting an ebony shadow, with the Gorsehill jungle swarming, the violent, impossible birds and fishes leaping, hidden under four-stemmed flowers the height of horses, in the early evening in a dingle near Carmarthen, my friend Jack Williams invisibly near me, I felt all my young body like an excited animal surrounding me. . . . There, playing Indians in the evening, I was aware of me myself in the exact middle of a living story, and my body was my adventure and my name."

The Path on the Rainbow would spawn Margot Astrov's *The Winged Serpent* at the end of the Second World War, both poetry and prose culled from B.A.E. reports of the 1880s through the 1930s, with snippets of contextual notes and a serviceable introduction. In a Stanford dissertation published under the title *The Sky Clears* (1951), A. Grove Day collected even newer materials under Yvor Winters, who went on to tutor Scott Momaday to stardom (one of the five best poets to write a great poem in the American language, Winters thundered in *Forms of Discovery*). Day's monograph was a step toward an emerging bicultural sense of native poetics.

By the end of the 1960s, Indian anthologies were popping up like wildflowers: Jerome Rothenberg's inventive *Shaking the Pumpkin*, William Brandon's a bit too freely reworked *The Magic World*, John Bierhorst's pellucid *In the Trail of the Wind*, Robert Dodge and Joseph McCullough's contemporary *Voices from Wah'Kon-Tah* and the newer Indian writers in Dick Lourie's *Come to Power*, Duane Niatum's *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*, and Shirley Hill Witt and Stan Steiner's *The Way*. Brian Swann's *Song of the Sky* (1985) "re-expressed" native song-poems improvisationally, "shadows of shadows," à la Nancy Curtis, and brought the translative cycle full circle. Geronimo, the Apache warrior in his 70s, told Nancy Curtis: "The song that I will sing is an old song, so old that none knows who made it. . . . The song tells how, as I sing, I go through the air to a holy place where Yusan (the Supreme Being) will give me power to do wonderful things. I am surrounded by little clouds, and as I go through the air I change, becoming spirit only."

through the air
as I move
changing
I go to a sacred place
this is the way
going up
little cloud me

If our *first* literatures are native, and our translations echo old worlds colliding with new ones, the "power to move us" still resides in George W. Cronyn's *American Indian Poetry.* Read it well. It serves as a cornerstone to our multicultural diversity and ancient rootedness in this good land.

K E N N E T H L I N C O L N
Professor of English and
American Indian Studies, UCLA

Kenneth Lincoln was born in Texas and grew up in northwest Nebraska where his great-grandparents homesteaded along the North Platte River and ranching sandhills. He graduated from public high school in Alliance, Nebraska, a cattle and farming town south of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation. Lincoln was adopted into the Oglala Sioux by the Mark Monroe family and given the Lakota name, *Mato Yamni.* He went to Stanford University for an B.A. in American Literature, to Indiana University for a Ph.D. in British Literature, and to UCLA in 1969, where he teaches Modern and Native American Literatures. Kenneth Lincoln has developed American Indian Studies curricula, published widely in the field—*Native American Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1983), *The Good Red Road* (Harper & Row, 1987), UCLA Native American Poetry Series (1975–1991)—and chaired the country's first interdisciplinary Master's Program in American Indian Studies. Oxford University Press will publish his *Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America* in 1992.