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Book Review: Louis Owens: Literary Reflections on His Life and Work

Kimberly Roppolo
University of Lethbridge

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Louis Owens: Literary Reflections on His Life and Work. Edited by Jacquelyn Kilpatrick. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004. viii + 257 pp. Photograph, bibliography, index. \$39.95.

Beginning with poet Neil Harrison's outstanding "5 Canadas," this volume is a tribute to the late Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish novelist and theorist. Kilpatrick's introduction stresses Owens's academic accomplishments—which, though cut short by his suicide in July 2002, are impressive—and situates Owens's creative and critical work, positioning him with those mixedblood critics, who, like Gerald Vizenor, work in a nexus of postcolonialism, postmodernism, and hybrid identity on the cultural "frontier." The volume also includes the last interview with Owens, "Outside Shadow: A Conversation with Louis Owens," the first in a series he had agreed to do with author A. Robert Lee and an invaluable resource to students of Owens's work.

Some essays—Kilpatrick's "Taking Back the Bones: Louis Owens's 'Post'-Colonial Fiction," Elvira Pulitano's "Crossreading Texts, Crossreading Identity: Hybridity, Diaspora, and Transculturation in Louis Owens's *Mixedblood Messages*," and Susan Bernardin's "Moving in Place: *Dark River* and the 'New' Indian Novel"—are tribute in critical form, engaging Owen's texts in a manner mirroring Owens's own engagement of the works of other Native authors. Gretchen Ronnow's "Secularizing Mythological Space in Louis Owens's *Dark River*" treads ground that in Native Studies is extremely treacherous: despiritualizing Apache belief while analyzing Owens's treatment of it in his novel. Linda Lizut Helstern's "Re-storying the West: Race, Gender, and Genre in *Nightland*," however, explores new territory in the intersections of Native and Gender Studies from a perspective relatively informed by Cherokee history and belief, and Renny Christopher's "Louis Owen's Representations of Working-Class Consciousness" examines a noticeably present aspect of Owens's work with which no one to my knowledge has dealt.

John Purdy's "Wolfsong and Pacific Refrains" provides an overview of connections between Owens's work and that of other Native authors that only a scholar of such vast experience in the field could offer and includes biographical narratives of Purdy's interactions with Owens that those of us who knew him will treasure. Paul Beekman Taylor's essay, "The Ludic Violence of Louis Owens's *The Sharpest Sight*," is as fine in most respects as his previous critical work, though it does have some limitations in regard to accurate cultural knowledge. David Brande's "Not the Call of the Wild" is a well-done analysis of the indigenous philosophy of nature Owens's writing expresses. And Jesse Peters's "You Got to Fish Ever Goddamn Day" blends criticism and personal narrative that honors Owens's work and life while plumbing the depths of both.

KIMBERLY ROPPOLO
 Department of Native Studies
 University of Lethbridge