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## Review of *Grave Concerns, Trickster Turns: The Novels of Louis Owens* By Chris LaLonde

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*Grave Concerns, Trickster Turns: The Novels of Louis Owens.* By Chris LaLonde. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. xiii + 220 pp. Illustration, notes, works cited, index. \$34.95.

In the last paragraph of his last chapter, "Endgames," Chris LaLonde articulates an idea implied throughout his text: the fiction of Louis Owens is "trickster activism." This was indeed Owens's personal approach to changing how the world at large views American Indians, and how he felt the world at large (including American Indians) do (or should) view the environment in which they live. LaLonde earns high marks for this and many other lucid observations about the fiction of American Indian author and scholar Louis Owens (1948-2002), in the first book-length examination of Owens's five completed novels. "Language has the power to create a world," says LaLonde of one of Owens's beliefs. Owens used language deftly, but his novels are not easy to read when compared to much of popular literary fiction today. He often wrote in a manner to exclude the reader from the privileged center. *Grave Concerns* is an excellent companion to those novels for the reader who wishes to get to the heart of the matter.

Each chapter of this volume, number 43 in the American Indian Literature and Critical Studies series from the University of Oklahoma Press, addresses an individual novel and therefore can only cover so much of Owens's clear yet deceptively sophisticated style. LaLonde demonstrates his own wide reading and careful thought as he illustrates precisely how Owens was doing what he was doing with

words. Influenced by many American Indian novelists, Owens often alluded to other authors' ideas and put his own environmental Choctaw-Cherokee spin on them. His literary references were frequent and subtle, but readers who did not notice them never came up short, wondering what had just happened. LaLonde has carefully teased out and illustrated some of these storytelling transactions, most particularly focusing on Owens's references to (and appropriation of) a wide range of canonical American literature, thus celebrating Owens's reinvention of the canon for his own ends. Owens also used family stories in his novels; his mother, Ida Brown Owens, a Cherokee mixedblood from Oklahoma, told him stories he incorporated in *Nightland*, lending a Great Plains connection to his oeuvre.

LaLonde tracked down and provided photographs of several places referenced in the novels. One set of geographic errors did creep into the book, by way of his use of a portion of an essay about *Wolfsong*. Lee Schweninger incorrectly attributed some of the novel's action to the wrong tribe and river, and LaLonde has repeated this. Owens admitted to twisting the map a bit himself, but not in this manner. But, all things considered, *Grave Concerns, Trickster Turns* provides a fine foundation for the study of the literary bricolage of Louis Owens.

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