Dark River: A Novel. By Louis Owens. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. 296 pages. $22.98 cloth.

"Hollywood never ends," observes the wisecracking Black Mountain elder Shorty Luke, one of the cast of memorable characters in Louis Owens's fifth novel *Dark River* (p. 270). Shorty should know. He worked as a Hollywood extra, but unlike his famous predecessor Nector Kashpaw, Shorty never soured on show biz. One of the two only surviving twins given different language names to confuse the gods, Shorty Luke is Apache tradition reinvented—a distinguished member of the lineage of truth-speaking elder humorists that populate Owens' work. Shorty still loves Hollywood. Maybe that's why his best friend is the Jewish anthropologist Avrum Goldberg, who has spent most of his professional life reenacting the pre-contact tribal lifestyle, authentic from his knee-high elk-hide moccasins to his wickiup and dried plums.

Avrum probably owes more than his name to the early-twentieth century scholar Averam Burton Bender, and owes his position as respected elder to a longstanding relationship with Black Mountain's matriarch, Mrs. John Edwards, who was once briefly married to a hell-fire-and-brimstone preacher come to missionize the tribe. Shorty wryly notes that Mrs. Edwards got so tired of hearing "Fuck the anthropologist," that she finally did (p. 63). Shorty's conversation, seeded with Italian phrases and memories from the back lot, frequently and lovingly exposes all the creaky machinery of Indian representation. Inveterate storyteller and story thief that he is, Shorty is even willing to expose the tradition-grounded plot that he and his two cohorts have concocted to cut off the tribal chair's illegal income from privately sanctioned trophy elk hunts. They haven't yet discovered that Xavier Two-Bears has more than one source of illegal income. But these elders and Two-Bears suggest only two of many possible perspectives on the relationship between tribal tradition and contemporary reality. Every character in *Dark River* offers a slightly different take on the subject, as if this novel itself has become Owens' signature magpie, turning its latest find over and over for a complete look.

While there is traditional power at work in *Dark River,* its workings are not exposed to view, though its limitations are. Best supporting actor in the role of spirit animal is Jessie James, homegrown Black Mountain entrepreneur and vision-quest producer. Jessie knows that the idea of an Apache vision quest is as fake as his acrylic wolf suit, but even after he is killed by bumbling wannabe militiaman Peters, Jessie hangs around with the staying power of a Disney cartoon to fulfill his contract-for-vision, smiling broadly as he disabuses us of our illusions about the power of magic realism. No supernatural help can ever take the place of personal responsibility, learns Jessie's paying customer Sandrine Le Bris before her ordeal in the Dark River Canyon ends. *Dark River*'s real magic lies in its genre-bending. As he has done so successfully in previous novels from *The Sharpest Sight* to *Nightland,* Owens twines humor and classic Hollywood-style action/adventure, defying the conventional wisdom about unity of tone that dates back to Edgar Allen Poe.

False illusion, indeed, is what Owens the satirist, even more than Owens the post-modernist, is trying to destroy as he ranges over the realm of

contemporary Native affairs and contemporary literature. The tribe in question here is, after all, the Black Mountain tribe. Among contemporary Native writers, perhaps only Gerald Vizenor has achieved similar scope in his considerations of mixed-blood identity and Indian simulation. While Owens and Vizenor have much in common as fiction writers, from their tour de force pastiche and focus on action rather than motivation to their faith in the healing power of humor and non-conclusions, Owens' lyricism is unique. It is manifest in his landscape writing and in the most important emotional moments in his novels when he guides characters and readers along the nebulous bittersweet margin between deepest sorrow and profound joy.

In *Dark River*, Owens proves an outstanding guide through the landscape of late capitalism. All the Hollywood trappings, historic and contemporary, are present—vision quest, military maneuvers in Apache territory, damsel in distress, blond bombshell, and even a Jewish Indian—but so are all commonplaces of contemporary reservation life, from Spam and basketball to tribal casinos, corrupt officials, and decorated veterans of US wars. The erstwhile hero of Owens' thriller, looking every bit like a Hollywood antihero, is Jake Nashoba, a Mississippi-born Choctaw mixed-blood and Vietnam vet with a taste for Hemingway. The meaning of his name is just one link between *Dark River* and Owens' first novel *Wolfsong*, another story that speaks to the difficulty of forging a meaningful tribal identity in the absence of a tribe. Jake is a loner with almost no close ties to the reservation or anywhere else. His job as tribal game warden is designed to keep him in wilderness isolation for weeks at a time—as if Jake doesn't do a fine job of keeping himself isolated. Even a game of pick-up basketball asks more emotional intimacy than Jake is willing to give.

Jake Nashoba, better known at Black Mountain as Lone Ranger, was originally welcomed into the community by a modern incarnation of traditional Apache womanhood. His ex-wife Tali worked as an exotic dancer until Jake, recently returned from Nam, instigated a barroom brawl to rescue her. Their marriage long ago succumbed to the post-traumatic stress that still haunts Jake, as it haunts Attis McCurtin in Owens's second novel *The Sharpest Sight*. Ghost sickness, Tali calls it. She finally put Jake out of the house for her own protection after he refused to seek any kind of cure. Now Tali, a respected tribal matriarch, moves in and out of his life like a spirit, for the decades have dimmed neither their love and desire nor what Tali's granddaughter calls Jake's male chauvinism. Rescuing damsels from places he thinks they shouldn't be still gets Jake into serious trouble. When he heads into the Dark River Canyon to rescue Alison from the land he knows so well, Jake discovers that she has already been rescued from her non-traditional vision quest. More properly, she has been captured at gunpoint by members of a militia unit in training.

The story becomes more complicated when Jake is captured, only to realize that the unit is under the command of two of his Vietnam comrades, men who can personally attest to Jake's heroism in combat. For Stroud and Nguyen, pretensions to heroism have long since given way to the comforts of the golf-course suburbs, and name recognition has led to a comfortable second income. While they talk the talk, Stroud and Nguyen have never reckoned with

a militia-true believer quite like Lee Jensen. Jensen adds a new dimension of verisimilitude to their combat simulation, making Jake the target of a kill-or-be-killed militia operation. While Jensen himself carries a high-powered rifle with an infrared scope, Jake is armed only with the remnants of his special operations survival training. Jake may not have a sophisticated weapon, but he does not want for helpers. The women and old men who come to his aid, Indian and non-Indian, have the power of story behind them, and through story they bring Jake home, though the ending, like Owens' contemporary Indians themselves, is not quite traditional.

It is impossible to tell the story of a returned veteran in a contemporary American Indian novel without inviting comparisons to the stories of Abel and Tayo. Even as Owens honors *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony*, story thief that he is, he makes it clear that there is another type of veteran in Native communities and one every bit as authentic—the veteran who will not be healed and still survives. Perhaps Jake's closest kin in *Dark River* is Uncle Domingo Perez. The novel's second only surviving twin is a decorated World War II veteran and hairspray addict who, like Tayo's mother, once made his life on the fringes of Gallup. Even if he still lives in his own world after Tali and Mrs. Edwards bring him home to Black Mountain, Domingo is never tragic. Indeed, he and his dog, with shampoo and hair dryer (but no spray), team up to create one of the novel's most hilarious moments, a worthy new verse for "The Cat Came Back." But then, a good story is never dead and buried. It always plants its own seed.

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The Enduring Seminoles: From Alligator Wrestling to Ecotourism. By Patsy West. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998. 150 pages. $24.95 cloth.

This slender monograph by popular avocational historian Patsy West is best placed within a genre that might be described as Boutique History. Rather than attempting a comprehensive treatment of the cultural history of Florida's Indian peoples, the author has produced a tightly focused study dealing with one salient aspect of Indian life during the middle decades of the twentieth century: the development of an economy based on tourism. Moreover, it is an aspect of Indian life in which West is acknowledged to have a great deal of expertise. Drawing on many years of intimate interaction with the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes, including stints working for the Seminole tribal school and the *Seminole Tribune* newspaper, she established personal contacts that enabled her to secure first-hand accounts of how some Indian families adapted to placing themselves "on exhibition." West offers an interesting analysis of how an "invented tradition" such as alligator wrestling ensured the economic survival of the Florida Indians while they underwent rapid transformation from a traditional hunting, trapping, and subsistence farming lifestyle in the Everglades, to modern tribal enterprises at the end of