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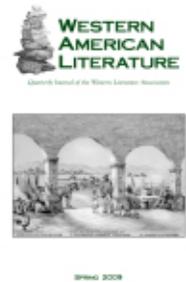
Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, Space (review)

Alex Hunt

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(Review)

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standing of her literary heritage and led to a new complexity in her later novels that, ironically, diminished her popularity. In support of this thesis, Pearson presents a far-reaching examination of modernism and discusses Walker's themes of economic needs, of warfare, of women's changing roles, of evolving technology, and of movement and displacement, along with her adaptations of modernist aesthetics in her literary style, concluding that "today, her novels remain relevant and infused with the energy of compromise and the language of movement: her modernism" (177).

A counter-argument might be that, rather than infusing her novels with energy through her reading in modernism, Walker larded her later novels with a ponderous weight of literary borrowings that robbed them of the freshness and spontaneity of her earlier work (some sections in *If a Lion Could Talk*, for example, come perilously near a parody of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [1902], with the upper Missouri River in Montana standing in for the Congo River and missionary wife Harriet Ryegate as an unlikely Marlow). Also, as Pearson notes, the public's taste in literature changed during Walker's career. Today it is necessary to read beyond Walker's gentility, her ladylike avoidances, her insistence on the nobility of her characters, in order to appreciate her finest work: *Winter Wheat* and *The Curlew's Cry* (1955). In this respect, Pearson, in her close reading and analysis of style, has done Walker a great service and also a service to those in search of a far-reaching study of modernism and its adaptations in the literature of the American West.

Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, Space.
Edited by Susan Kollin.

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. 268 pages, \$19.95.

Reviewed by Alex Hunt
West Texas A&M University, Canyon

Some of the finest work in western American literary and cultural studies is coming to us through the University of Nebraska Press's Postwestern Horizons series, and Susan Kollin's *Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, Space* is a collection of superior scholarship. Kollin's introduction to the volume, drawing on examples including W.'s rhetorical western blunders and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), does an excellent job of explaining the "postal" state of western American studies, and her collection features a number of essays that not only illustrate but no doubt will continue to shape the field.

The strength of the book is its theoretical sophistication, as contributors build from such positions as critical regionalism, thirdspace, hybridity, and deterritorialization. While, as Kollin notes, postwestern criticism is not clearly defined, it is clear from the various essays that it does work against common paleowestern-critical problems, reaching for a sense of region, as Krista Comer puts it, "not inevitably productive of conservative nationalisms, masculine or white authority or essentialistic/authentic definitions of place" (32). Many essays share what Neil Campbell defines as a "desire to bring the Outside into the frame" as well as explore the West outside that frame, beyond geographical referents in a postregional West. Further, the contributors' choice of subject demonstrates a cultural studies model, focused as much on material culture and critical theory as on literature.

Kollin organizes the book into three parts, "Newer New Wests," "Nature and Culture," and "Contested Wests." The first includes Stephen Tatum's theorizing of the West as simultaneously actual/virtual and local/global and Krista Comer's cultural mapping of the Pacific surfer-girl new-world order. "Nature and Culture" presents Lee Clark Mitchell's critique of the cult of authenticity in western American literature and Kollin's own essay on the commodification of wild nature in Alaska. "Contested Wests" contains Beth Loffreda's follow-up on her Laramie work on Matthew Shepard and Melody Graulich's essay on an adopted Korean cowgirl. One finds in this collection essays in which contributors build upon previous work important to the field.

While many essays have some degree of engagement with ethnic studies both within and without the West as a region, I found curiously absent any essay focused on the Indian reservation or the US border, two kinds of real and imagined western space that seem crucial to defining a postwestern criticism. Shouldn't a postwestern project begin with a strong acknowledgment of borderlands influence? How do ongoing indigenous claims to sovereignty complicate this bold new postfrontier West? Where is Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Guillermo Gómez-Peña's "Gringostroika" (1993)? Surely the matter of the US West as (post?)colonial space has not been resolved. Audrey Goodman's wonderful description of Pueblo country in her essay on Otowi Bridge and the atomic West is the most direct discussion of a West that is contested along ethnic lines.

Overall, I enjoyed the diversity of topics and writing styles, the blending of critical and narrative modes in these essays. My initial response to "postwestern" criticism was one of some concern: after all, as western American scholars, do we not run the risk of negating our subject, of "posting" ourselves out of our disciplinary boundaries? After admiring the work

included in Kollin's excellent collection, however, I was put at ease. From Tatum's description of the fecal plumes of Wilderado, Texas, to Nancy Cook's essay on ranching in Montana, these essays are strongly redolent of a continuing fascination with a place that continues to make claims upon us.

Jazz and Twelve O'Clock Tales.

By Wanda Coleman.

Jaffrey, NH: Black Sparrow Books, 2008. 147 pages, \$22.95.

Reviewed by Robert Headley

Southern State Community College, Wilmington, Ohio

Folks interested in reading Wanda Coleman's fine short story collection *Jazz and Twelve O'Clock Tales* should do themselves a big favor and first listen to "Lush Life," Billy Strayhorn's mellow, melancholy, soulful song of lost love, a jazz classic if ever there was one and the source of Coleman's title. For best results, they should try the John Coltrane/Johnny Hartman version. Like Strayhorn's ballad, Coleman's stories are filled with heartache, heartbreak, loss, regret, loneliness. These are burnt-out cases, to be sure, but these are also tales of struggling souls clinging to hope and searching for love.

Jazz plays a central role in the collection, but it would be a mistake to think Coleman's stories just concern music and musicians. The stories are more clearly vignettes, slice-of-life glimpses into the often sad, sometimes violent lives of the down-and-out of Los Angeles. They are tales of single moms, junkies, ghetto kids, struggling artists. Often, Coleman explores the vast, stark differences in the lives of blacks and whites; at times, and just as powerfully, she focuses on fragile relationships of men and women, especially the poor, the hated, the ignored, those mainstream society chooses not to see.

Coleman is often called the unofficial poet laureate of South Central Los Angeles, a title used mainly by book reviewers, I suspect, but it's an apt one all the same. Coleman is a prolific, award-winning poet, and her prose style reflects that. There is poetry present in each story. In "Joy Ride," for example, the story of two young couples whose afternoon drive leads to an encounter with an abandoned baby in a burlap bag, the narrative can be highly lyrical: "The mental sanctuary of their shock is violated as the brass section pours it on and the trumpet player's shrill wail is nearly drowned in the slam of brakes and the shriek of tires. The sedan swerves and stops on a diagonal, coughing out the two men" (3).

One of the collection's strongest pieces is "Jazz at Twelve." Babe, the narrator, is at a jazz club with her husband, Kevin, to hear a quintet featur-