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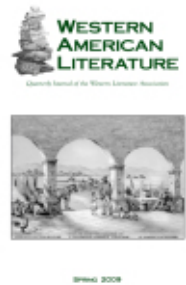
*Jazz and Twelve O'Clock Tales* (review)

Robert Headley

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(Review)

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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-

ing Kevin's friend Frank Lattimore, a great jazz drummer who has seen better days and who is fighting a host of demons. Early in the story, Babe recalls when she first met the musician: "The man was already a legend where I grew up. Then one day here he is marching into my living room, trailing Kevin. Stumbling yet. High as in cosmic, his blue-ringed brown irises juiced out at me from under savvy lids. I took one look at him, got instantly evil, and hissed at Kevin" (12). Through leaps in time and logic, and with self-scrutiny that is often painful, Coleman's protagonist reveals lives tangled and untangling. It is a fine, fine work.

Coleman's other characters include a doomed gospel singer, organized crime figures, cabbies, professional people, the working poor, beaten wives, boozy husbands. She gives us Los Angeles stripped bare, exposed and vulnerable, painting a portrait of racism, fear, poverty, dashed dreams, and sudden death. She sings us a throaty, smoky, aching tune about people fighting to find their way home.

***Red Land, Red Power:***  
***Grounding Knowledge in the American Novel.***  
**By Sean Kicummah Teuton.**

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. 294 pages, \$22.95.

Reviewed by Michael Terry  
Utah State University, Logan

Proponents of trickster discourse, led by Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens, have dominated American Indian cultural and literary studies in recent years. In *Mixedblood Messages* (1998), Owens describes the "zone of the trickster" as a "shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question" (27). The theoretical "zone of the trickster" allows Native critics engaged in the political project of decolonizing Native lands and lives to deconstruct harmful stereotypes of Indians. While such deconstruction certainly has its uses, Sean Kicummah Teuton argues in his new book that trickster discourse ultimately fails because it only deconstructs: it can never help Native Americans build politically viable identities.

Building such identities, Teuton writes, requires "a reasonable means of evaluating different kinds of tribal and self-knowledge" (7). This entails seeing tribal knowledge as socially constructed *and* stable. Teuton argues that scholars need a new theoretical framework to define and evaluate it. Trickster theory is not adequate because it relies on postmodernist theories of knowledge that see production of understanding one's self as sub-