The Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations (for our purposes, rendered in proper MLA Style) for secondary sources – books, articles, and documents – wherein each citation is followed by a descriptive and evaluative paragraph of about 150 words. The purpose of this annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, quality, and accuracy of the sources to be employed in the research project; it also allows you to synthesize your research and present, to yourself, the essential nuggets of the texts you’re working with. As opposed to abstracts, which are the largely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly articles or in periodical indexes, annotations are both descriptive and critical; they describe the key points of an author's argument or point of view and judge its authority and appropriateness for the research project at hand. Your bibliography should have at least 5 references, only 1 of which may be an internet source (use the library!).

EXAMPLE

Nicolas Witschi

“Two Authors, Two Gold Rushes: Satire, Sentimentalism, and Regional Variation in Alonzo Delano’s California Journalism”


In a series of explorations into the status and depiction of reading in nineteenth-century American literature, Brodhead offers a redefinition of the way we think about regional literature. Especially useful to this project are his fourth chapter (“The Reading of Regions”) and the beginning of the fifth chapter (on Jewett), where he puts forward what is essentially a center/margin model for late-nineteenth-century publishing and “literary access.” By this Brodhead seeks to establish the extent to which any author presuming to write about a region already has a predetermined set of authorial conditions (personae, themes, subject matter, forms) which s/he must incorporate in order to meet a largely bourgeois audience’s expectations. Brodhead positions this argument directly in opposition to the gender-influenced model of regionalism advocated by Fetterley and Pryse. Remarkably, Brodhead hardly considers the impact of region itself, specifically the variety of publication and distribution contexts found outside the New York-Boston nexus and of which a writer such as Delano was very much a part.


Depressingly little biographical information is available about Alonzo Delano, other than what might be gleaned from primary sources such as Delano’s published letters and newspaper dispatches. Consequently, as brief as it may be, Dane’s introduction to this 1934 reprint of Delano’s first book provides the most comprehensive overview of Delano’s life and works to date. Dane briefly covers Delano’s journey across the Plains from Illinois to California; his establishing of a dry-goods shop first in the mines and then in San Francisco; and above all the various venues in which Delano published, under both his own name and his pseudonym, “Old Block.” Another collection of Delano writings, A Sojourn with Royalty (George Fields Press, 1936), also edited and published by Dane, provides a few more details.

Fender’s subject is the extent to which writing about the California Gold Rush affected subsequent ideas about and representations of the American West. An entire chapter on Gold Rush diarists and another on journalists provide extensive analysis of the narrative structures and assumptions that went into “plotting” the contemporaneous story of westward expansion as an already done deal. A valuable discussion of how Harte and Twain emerge out of Gold Rush-era humorous writing provides the perfect place into which to build Delano’s own contributions to the field. I am in the main, however, not fully convinced by Fender’s model of discursive inevitability – the Foucaultian idea that the discourse of empire already in place at the time determined not only the perception of western events but also their course – and a writer such as Delano, whose publications spoke to multiple discursive fields and, hence, to a multiplicity of regionalized assumptions, gives me the opportunity to test this model.


In the “Introduction” to this anthology, Fetterley and Pryse present a definition of regionalist literature in which a set of thematic and formal features are derived largely from gender. As Fetterley and Pryse imply, to be a woman regionalist is fundamentally and politically different (now, if not then) from being a male regionalist (which they associate with being a local-colorist). As an opening to a reading anthology, this piece does not yet fully lay out all the parameters of this theoretical position. However, given that this essay is frequently cited by other scholars invested in the reading of regionalist literature from the period (including Brodhead), it stands here as a significant statement on regional literature and identity. Pryse and Fetterley have co-authored a soon-to-be-published critical book entitled *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2002) – stay tuned.


This collection of essays basically takes up where Jordan and Fetterley & Pryse leave off, namely with the re-examination of the idea of a regional literature and its relations to the canon of American literature as a whole. It offers a variety of perspectives on regionalism, essentially expanding the critical category beyond the 1850-1910 time period but nevertheless focusing specifically on literature by women. Separate essays by both Fetterley and Pryse contribute further to their articulations of a gender-based model for critical interpretation. None of the pieces in this book, however, directly address the idea that contexts of production and publication might have played a more crucial role. Fetterley appropriately takes issue with Brodhead’s thinly-veiled elitist misogyny, and her essay does discuss to some extent matters of textual production. However, her doing so does not engage the center/margin model.


This book is a collection of essays by various scholars that attempt to re-center the discussion of literary regionalism in literary studies. That is, arguing that for too long the idea and articulation of regionalism has been perceived as a marginal part of cultural production, this book examines a variety of writers for ways in which regional writing has been attentive to political, social, and ecological issues. Jordan’s contributors do not limit themselves to the United States, nor to any specific time-period. This volume, while valuable for its broad scope, nevertheless suffers from the double-bind of claiming that regionalism really has been central to culture even as it’s marginal status has rendered it particularly
effective as a voice for dissent. This is useful largely as an example of how and where regionalism current stands as a category for academic inquiry.


Kowalewski examines the vernacular writing of two significant authors of nineteenth-century epistolary accounts of life in the “rugged” West, Louise Clappe (a.k.a. Dame Shirley) and Isabella Bird. In particular, by contextualizing Clappe’s use of humor in her subsequent influence on writers such as Harte and Twain, this essay provides one of the relatively few close discussions of Gold Rush humor. As such is nicely complements Fender’s brief foray into humor criticism. Focused largely on expanding “the range of cultural interaction and synopsis involved in recording western colloquial speech” (87), this essay does not discuss such things as the cultural work performed by satire and imitation. However, it does provide a useful model for how to approach colloquial and vernacular writing, a hallmark of regionalist literature in the late 1800s.


A standard work on the cultural and social impact of the California Gold Rush, this first volume of Starr’s still-emerging history of California provides a comprehensive (if sometimes overly optimistic and celebratory) body of information about who came when, where, and why. There’s not much discussion of Delano – indeed, most of the discussion of Gold Rush literature is focused on Harte, who was not a participant but rather a commemorator – but the contextual materials nevertheless help to locate the particular social settings with which a writer like Alonzo Delano would have been familiar. Starr thus provides a nice contextual complement to Fender and Walker.


To date the only literary and cultural history to examine in any detail the literary culture of San Francisco (and, more generally, Northern California) from 1849 to the 1870s. In many ways, by articulating the details and nuances of how dozens of writers and thinkers – among them Twain, Harte, Muir, Delano, King, Clappe, Bancroft, Phoenix, Stoddard, Coolbrith, and George – grew out of the S. F. environment, Walker offers an understanding of how publishing affects regional literary production. Walker offers relatively textual analysis, which means that the work of interpreting the cultural work performed by an artist such as Delano still remains to be done. But this too can be thought of as a good thing: as an instance of pre-New Critical historicism, Walker’s study is also useful as a comprehensive bibliographic resource for primary texts not yet fully forgotten by more recent critical trends.


A regionalist argument that does not cough itself in the terms of the regionalist debate, Wyatt’s book discusses the works of Dana, Leonard, Fremont, Muir, King, Austin, Steinbeck, and Chandler. Wyatt argues that each of these writers, when faced with a California landscape unfamiliar and perhaps a bit disorienting to them, followed a literary path to the exploration of interiority and consciousness. A compelling account of how a literary artist might be seen as reacting to a region (or an environment), this book nevertheless comes up short in articulating fully a sense of the history and cultural forces at work in each of these texts. The formalist close readings are valuable, but the methodology does not quite recommend itself for a study of Gold Rush satire. Nevertheless, as a major statement on California literature, it needs to be taken into consideration.