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Literary Nevada: Writings from the Silver State (review)

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***Literary Nevada: Writings from the Silver State.*
Edited by Cheryll Glotfelty.**

Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008. 896 pages, \$60.00/\$29.95.

Reviewed by Lawrence I. Berkove
University of Michigan-Dearborn

Nevada is a state that in the popular mind has not been associated with anything more cultural than mining, gambling, divorce, and nuclear storage. With the publication of Cheryll Glotfelty's *Literary Nevada*, it is now apparent that this perception is seriously being challenged. This book is an eye-opening surprise in its revelation of the sheer volume of Nevada literature, its variety, and, best of all, its quality.

Its contents range from Native American myths and legends to accounts of the early explorers, immigrants, and miners; to cowboy poetry, contemporary poetry, fiction, travel writing, and nature writing; to impressions of rural life, nuclear Nevada, as well as Las Vegas and Reno. Each category is prefaced by a brief but pithy introduction as are individual author entries. These unusually informative introductions reveal editor Glotfelty's impressive familiarity with her subject and add significantly to the usefulness of the volume. The back matter contains helpful bibliographies for each chapter and also a chronological list of contents that "traces the origins and development of Nevada's literary tradition" (xxx).

The writings of native and "naturalized" Nevadans who have established reputations in literature or history are, of course, represented among the selections—for example, Dan De Quille, Sam Davis, Sarah Winnemucca, Will James, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, members of the Laxalt family, and Sally Zanjani—but so are pieces by non-resident authors with national reputations who had notable experiences in Nevada, such as Mark Twain, Jack London, John Muir, George Stewart, Wallace Stegner, Frank Waters, Arthur Miller, Gary Snyder, Joan Didion, Thomas Sanchez, Ann Zwinger, and John McPhee. In short, this collection has a solid core of proven writing from respected authors.

If there is a shortcoming in this book, it is but the reverse side of a strength—the sheer volume of material. The editor was faced with a problem that had no simple solution: how to represent the great breadth of a new discovery without succumbing to superficiality. While scholars familiar with the material in each of the thirteen sections of the book might want to see less variety and more examples of the fine literature that they know about from those categories, in the end I think that editor Glotfelty was right in remaining true to her main purpose of declaring and opening up the field of Nevada literature and laying out its main divisions.

She could not possibly have done full justice to each of the categories, so she made sure that she did no injustice to any of them by including filler material. In the final analysis, she put together a collection that indicates depth as well as breadth. It is for the scholars who follow her lead to these exciting new fields to demonstrate just how rich Nevada literature is.

In the best sense of the word, this hefty book is a sampler of what literary fare the state offers. It is obvious that this sampler is also an advertisement for a feast.

***Arab/American:
Landscape, Culture, and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts.*
By Gary Paul Nabhan.**

Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. 141 pages, \$40.00/\$17.95.

Reviewed by SueEllen Campbell
Colorado State University, Fort Collins

It is hard to imagine that anyone other than Gary Paul Nabhan could have written *Arab/American*, but then that is true of most of his books. Nabhan's individual and professional experiences as paleobotanist, agricultural scientist, southwestern desert ecologist, seed saver, locavore and food writer, community organizer, jokester, traveler, storyteller, and author, co-author, and editor of a score of books, plus the recognition bestowed upon him as a Lannan Literary Fellow, a MacArthur Fellow, and a Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient from the Society for Conservation Biology, combined with his family background in Syria/Lebanon, make him one of the few who would even think of writing a book like this one. That is part of its appeal: Nabhan is a writer to follow, and it is always interesting to see what he will come up with next.

Arab/American is a collection of nine essays (three of them previously published and likely familiar to WAL readers), split (unevenly) into three sections: (1) Cultural, Ecological, and Culinary Connections between Deserts; (2) Bridging Identities and Family Histories in Two Worlds; and (3) Conflict and *Convivencia*.

Two unifying strands hold these essays together. One is a set of intriguing—and entertaining—connections between the deserts of the American Southwest and those of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Middle East, connections that include words, recipes, the lives of individual people, and ways of adapting to similar arid and semi-arid landscapes. Words migrate from Arabic to Spanish to O'dham to borderland English. Dishes spread from Syria to Chihuahua and Merida. A