
Gregory Hansen

First published in 1921, *The Spanish Borderlands* is a critique of an “Anglophile” writing of American history as Herbert Bolton writes an intriguing narrative of Spanish exploration and colonization along the United States borderlands. In the book’s first section, Bolton presents the story of explorers such as Ponce De León, Cabeza De Vaca, and Hernando De Soto. He follows this section with six chapters on the early Spanish colonies in Florida, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, and California. Within this section, his discussion of the naval battle between Jean Ribault and Pedro Menéndez de Avilés provides a particularly compelling discussion of the Spanish expulsion of French Huguenots from northern Florida: the reader finds that the brutality of the conquest was not directed solely against America’s indigenous peoples.

Bolton’s treatment is not a study of Spanish-American folklore per se, but this republication provides good descriptions of folkloristic material that will be useful for further study. Bolton offers clear presentations and strong discussions of legends such as the “Seven Cities of Gold,” the “Land of Everlasting Summer,” and the “Fountain of Youth.” In these discussions he provides historical contexts for these stories and he develops a convincing narrative that explains how the stories were used by America’s indigenous peoples to resist Spanish conquest. Along with the discussion of folk history, myths, and legends that is scattered throughout the book, Bolton’s study also provides ethnographic information useful for folklife studies of Spanish military life and the social history of everyday life within Spanish and French colonies in North America. Although this description is somewhat thin, Bolton’s study provides means for gaining access to the rich descriptions of Native American and European folklife offered by early writers.

As a source for folkloric material and as a discussion of the historical context for early Spanish-American folklife, *The Spanish Borderlands* is an excellent resource for folklorists. But reading the book forces the folklorist to consider broader issues relevant to historiography and ethnography. It is too easy to think of revisionist history, especially critiques of an Anglo-centric American historiography, as a recent movement inspired by postmodernist cultural critics. Seventy-five years ago, Bolton was specifically challenging the received historical record by arguing that far too much emphasis had been placed on English exploration and colonization in North America. Whether or not he chose his heroes wisely would be a subject for lively
debate, but Bolton clearly understood how historiography reflects the biases and assumptions of the historian two decades before Ward Goodenough invented the term "ethnocentrism." Bolton demonstrates that critiques of the subjectivity of historiography are not novel criticisms.

Bolton’s history is also worth reading for its relation to the recent cultural critiques of ethnography. “Explorers first, then colonizers,” Bolton writes. This succinct statement has its multiple permutations within recent scholarship in literary criticism and cultural studies in which the enterprise of writing about culture is represented as a manifestation of colonialist ideology. Although these types of postcolonialist cultural critiques force the folklorist to reflect on the ethics of doing fieldwork and writing about fellow human beings, reading the actual descriptions of conquest and colonization demonstrates that the post-Marxist cultural critique of ethnography is little more than a series of specious arguments. When reading descriptions of how the French, Spanish, and English explorers slaughtered and enslaved American Indians, burned villages, and murdered children, the reader must seriously call into question the ethics of glibly comparing exploration, conquest, and colonization to ethnographic study. Bolton’s writing demonstrates that arguing that ethnography is colonialistic denigrates the terror of military conquest and the horror of slavery at the expense of a trendy trope that provides little more than therapy to assuage Euro-American guilt. In contrast to Bolton’s study, these types of postcolonialist cultural criticism are callous and ill-reasoned arguments. Although the contemporary reader will find The Spanish Borderlands dated, Bolton is well worth reading as commentary on current theories of cultural criticism.


Zoë-hateehc D. Scheffy

“From these blue tundras / I hear the story of life / winds rivers forests / yoik” (280). Nils-Aslak Valkeapää’s Trekways of the Wind combines original poetry and illustrations in an artistic celebration of the Sámi, a people indigenous to the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula of Russia. Nominated for the Nordic Council’s Award for Literature as Ruoktu Väimmus (1985), the original Sámi title, Trekways of the Wind offers English speaking audiences a chance to learn about and enjoy Sámi culture and artistic expression. Valkeapää, a leading Sámi artist, draws upon his own personal experience and the collective ethnic experience of the Sámi in order to present the Sámi within both social and political contexts.