

American Literature from 1400's - Present

Native American Literatures and the Puritans



Native American Literature

Beginnings in Oral Tradition

- ▶ Just as early Europeans carried myth and legend from one generation to the next through oral tradition, so too did the early Americans.
- ▶ Also, as with the early Europeans, Native American Literature holds a vast body of work including epic narratives, stories, poems, songs, oratory and chants.

Native American Literature

Beginnings in Oral Tradition

- ▶ Unlike early European oral literature, such as *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey*, Native American Literature was not recognized by Western scholars until the late 1800's. A long held assumption was that Native Americans had no literature.
- ▶ One of the issues in recognizing Native American literature lies in the fact that there were literally hundreds of languages to translate.

Native American Literature

Beginnings in Oral Tradition

► Eventually Native American writers began to translate the stories of their tribes.



Creation and other Myths

- ▶ Native American Cultures, like their Greek counter-parts, used stories to convey moral lessons and pass down tradition.
- ▶ The natural world remained an integral part of any story, regardless of tribe.
- ▶ The Native American universe is not dominated by human beings, and human beings and animals are often interchangeable.

Creation and other Myths

- ▶ American Indian cultures possess a sharp understanding of the power of the metaphor.
- ▶ Songs and chants can make things happen, such as bringing rain or curing the sick.
- ▶ The American Indian world view is not linear, but cyclical.
- ▶ Creation myths, as other stories and myths, explained a purpose or a reason for being.