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.

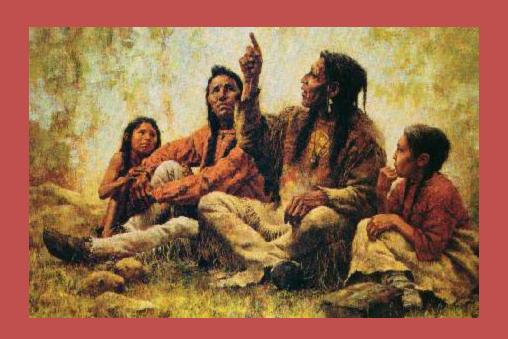
Also, as with the early Europeans, Native American Literature holds a vast body of work including epic narratives, stories, poems, songs, oratory and chants.

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.