



AMERICAN LITERATURE A HISTORY

Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen

American Literature

A history

Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen

First published 2014
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2014 Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen

The right of Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bertens, Johannes Willem.

American literature : a history / Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. American literature--History and criticism. I. D'haen, Theo. II. Title.

PS121.B517 2014

810.9--dc23

2013018669

ISBN: 978-0-415-56997-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-56998-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-79843-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Garamond
by Taylor and Francis Books



Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

American Literature

This comprehensive history of American Literature traces its development from the earliest colonial writings of the late 1500s through to the present day. This lively, engaging and highly accessible guide:

- offers lucid discussions of all major influences and movements such as Puritanism, Transcendentalism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism and Postmodernism
- draws on the historical, cultural and political contexts of key literary texts and authors
- covers a range of American literature: prose, poetry, theater and experimental literature
- includes substantial sections on native and ethnic American literatures
- explains and contextualizes major events, terms and figures in American history.

This book is essential reading for anyone seeking to situate their reading of American Literature in the appropriate religious, cultural, and political contexts.

Hans Bertens is Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

Theo D'haen is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Leuven, Belgium.

Foreword

American Literature: A History is a thoroughly revised (and somewhat shortened) version of our Dutch-language *Amerikaanse literatuur: een geschiedenis*, published by ACCO in Leuven, Belgium, in 2008. We are grateful to ACCO for its gracious permission to recycle that book's material for the current volume. As in the ACCO book, Hans Bertens covered the periods 1585–1810 and 1810–61 (Chapters 1 and 2), and 1945–80 (Chapter 5), while Theo D'haen is responsible for the periods 1861–1945 (Chapters 3 and 4) and 1980–2010 (Chapter 6). Spelling and punctuation of the older quotations follow modern American usage, except in a few cases where it seemed more appropriate to remain faithful to the original text.

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vi
 PART I	
A superpower in the making: beginnings to World War I	1
1 Beginnings to 1810	3
2 Towards cultural independence: 1810 to the Civil War	47
3 Civil War to World War I: 1865–1918	93
 PART II	
The American century: World War I to the present	139
4 World War I to the Cold War: 1914–45	141
5 After the war: 1945–80	185
6 The end and return of history: 1980–2010	231
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 269
<i>Index</i>	285

Part I

A superpower in the making: beginnings to World War I

1 Beginnings to 1810

Introduction

The literature of the United States is more commonly called American literature, a term that seems self-explanatory and simple enough. But in literary histories – in all histories, for that matter – nothing is simple. What, after all, is ‘American’? When did the descendants of the mostly English citizens who had survived a dangerous Atlantic crossing become ‘Americans’? When did the later immigrants who joined them become Americans? ‘*He is an American*’, the Franco-American essayist St. John de Crèvecoeur claimed in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), ‘who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds’. For Crèvecoeur, still warmed by revolutionary fire, to be an ‘American’ is a matter of mentality, of a radical personal reorientation made possible by the new Republic’s freedom and democracy. But by Crèvecoeur’s time the question of who was an ‘American’ could also, and far more easily, be settled by way of citizenship: all the inhabitants of the thirteen English colonies who had decided to stay during the Revolution were now citizens of the United States of America, no longer subjects of the United Kingdom. But how American were the inhabitants of, say, Boston, around 1700, when the word ‘American’ makes its first appearances? Their writings tell us that they still see themselves as English subjects – even if they begin to feel increasingly unhappy with what far-off London decides for them – but also show that they were acutely conscious of the fact that they are both English and in a subtle way less English than their grandparents, who almost without exception had been born in England.

And what is ‘literature’ – another term that seems self-evident? For early historians of American literature like Charles Richardson, who published his *American Literature (1607–1885)* in 1886–88, and Barrett Wendell, whose *Literary History of America* appeared in 1900, the history of American literature did not really begin until the early nineteenth century. Practically nothing published in the first two hundred years after 1607 – the year the first permanent settlement was founded in Jamestown, Virginia – was worth discussion. For Richardson and Wendell the only literature really worth considering was that imaginative literature that met the aesthetic criteria of their own time, the late nineteenth century.

Things would change, but slowly. In 1955, in his *The Cycle of American Literature*, the influential literary historian Robert E. Spiller was still pretty negative about early American writing: ‘Except for a few sturdy volumes like William Bradford’s *Of Plimoth Plantation* [...] much of the writing left by these early explorers and settlers makes rather dreary reading today [...]. Writers sought mainly to justify their own enterprises, to take possession of the new lands, riches, and peoples for the monarchs who had sponsored their undertakings, and to describe geographic and economic conditions in order to help those who were to follow them. The

temptation to belittle the hardships and to overstate the possibilities of the future was great'. However, recognizing that the origins of American culture must be sought in the first two hundred years of settlement, Spiller singles out three eighteenth-century 'architects of culture' for special attention: the theologian and poet Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), the businessman, inventor, politician and all-purpose writer Benjamin Franklin (1706–90), and the plantation owner, politician and essayist Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), who all three of them still feature prominently in every American literary history.

Published twenty-four years after Spiller's *Cycle of American Literature*, the first edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (1979), one of the massive anthologies that are produced for the academic undergraduate market, has a completely different view of the early stages of the history of American literature. The section called 'Early American Literature 1620–1820' takes up no less than 572 pages. With as their starting point the radically expanded view of literature that had by then been widely accepted, its editors include personal and collective histories, theological discussions, private journals, essays, autobiography, political writings, and other texts that for Richardson and Wendell would not have qualified as literature. Obviously, the aesthetic criteria applied by Richardson and Wendell, or, for that matter, other aesthetic criteria, no longer are decisive. 'Literature' may not quite equate with 'texts', but clearly all texts that throw a light on the development of what one might call Early American – or Colonial – Culture come in for literary scrutiny.

In the 1979 edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, American literature begins with the writings of the Puritans, the English Calvinists who in the early seventeenth century left England to seek religious freedom and whose small vanguard in 1620 more or less by accident founded Plymouth, Massachusetts. In fact, for the editors, seventeenth-century American literature is the exclusive domain of Puritan writing. Their first non-Puritan text – Ebenezer Cook(e)'s long satirical poem 'The Sot-Weed Factor' – dates from 1708. But literature, and more particularly any national literature, is a moving target. The seventh edition of the *Norton Anthology* of 2007 no longer features 'Early American Literature 1620–1820'. Instead we have 'Beginnings to 1700' and 'American Literature 1700–1820', together taking up over 900 pages (and with a layout that accommodates considerably more words per page than the 1979 edition). There seems no end to the expansion of early American literature. In some ways, this expansion is not only understandable, but quite welcome. In the past decades, due to the efforts of scholars of early American literature, more and more texts that had completely disappeared have again come to light and have enriched its history. Moreover, the whole idea of 'American literature' has once again become more inclusive. Like its competitors on the anthologies market, the *Norton Anthology* now pays a good deal of attention to Native American literature. We read Native Creation stories, trickster tales, and speeches by great Native leaders like Pontiac, Logan and Red Jacket. In other words, American literature has come to include the oral literature of the original inhabitants of the territory that is now the United States of America. But it has come to include a lot more. In 1979, the Puritan writers included in the *Norton's* first edition, although mostly born in England, had all lived and died in the New World. But in the last three or four decades American literature has incorporated texts of those English writers who spent some time in the New World, or played a significant role in one of the English settlements, but never made the New World their permanent home. The most famous of these is the adventurer Captain John Smith, who wrote extensively about his exploits in the New World, but there were many others who left a record of their transatlantic experience after their return to Europe.

Potentially more controversial than this redefinition of American literature, which seems reasonable enough, is another expansion in a different direction. The seventh edition of the

Norton Anthology prints sections of letters by the Genoese sailor Christoforo Colombo – Christopher Columbus, in the English-speaking world – and extracts of historical narratives written by the Spanish friar Bartolomé de las Casas and the Spanish explorer Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. The inclusion of the latter, who in 1542 published an account of his harrowing adventures in what is now Florida, Texas and Northern Mexico – an epic trek that even brought him to the Gulf of California – is, again, not unreasonable. Cabeza de Vaca writes with an anthropologist's interest and with growing sympathy about the various Native peoples he encounters and is an important source of information about their first contact with the European invaders. Although Cabeza writes in Spanish, and firmly belongs to Spanish literature – he died in Seville in 1558 – the inclusion of his personal narrative in an anthology of American literature is understandable if we accept that writings pertaining to what is now U.S. territory have a rightful place in a history of American literature. This does raise the question why the Dutch-language texts that came out of the Dutch colony that centered on New Amsterdam (later New York) – such as Adriaen van der Donck's *Vertoogh van Nieu-Nederland* (1650) – and the writings of, for instance, the great French explorer Samuel de Champlain – *Voyages* (1613), *Les Voyages de la Nouvelle France* (1632) – who had been one of the first to sail down the coast of New England, anticipating even Captain John Smith, should not be considered American literature, but maybe we should not expect rigid consistency in literary histories or anthologies.

But with Columbus and de las Casas the connection with American literature becomes extremely tenuous and strains our credulity. Do the editors seriously believe that Columbus and de las Casas stand at the very beginning of what would eventually become American literature? Not very likely. Still, their decision to go back to Columbus is not at all unique in recent anthologies of American literature. In *The English Literatures of America, 1500–1800*, an anthology that also covers the English presence in the Caribbean and was published in 1997, the editors, Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner, go even farther back. They begin with a brief extract from a book published around 1298 by the Venetian merchant Marco Polo, who had traveled to China and had lived there for a number of years, and then present an excerpt from Sir John Mandeville's rather fantastic *Travels* (1356). The point here is that Columbus (who also is anthologized), Amerigo Vespucci (who follows him), and other early witnesses of the momentous meeting of the Old and New World, were part of a European culture in which descriptions of, and fantasies about, unknown territories and strange peoples who spoke incomprehensible languages already had a long history (Columbus actually took a copy of Marco Polo's *Travels* with him on his first voyage and knew Mandeville's book). We may assume that their expectations of and reactions to the New World were to some extent influenced by such earlier texts and we can sometimes actually point to descriptive elements that seem to have been borrowed directly from them.

The same must have been true for the Englishmen who began to explore and settle North America a hundred years after the Spanish had shown the way. By that time, the European 'discovery' of the Caribbean, Central America and much of South America had already generated an extensive literature that circulated widely in the Old World and no Englishman who was interested in the New World was wholly unaware of it. Those writings, with on the one hand their emphasis on hardship and mysterious dangers, but on the other their suggestion of future riches and easy, if not utopian living, shaped the expectations with which the English approached the New World. Soon after Columbus had returned to Spain in the spring of 1493, one of his letters describing what he had seen already appeared in print. After singing the praise of the natural harbors of that part of the Caribbean that he had explored – an important feature for a sailor, especially in a region often visited by severe storms – he goes on to describe the

eternal spring he has found: 'All [mountains] are most beautiful, of a thousand shapes, and all are accessible and filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, and they seem to touch the sky. And I am told they never lose their foliage, as I can understand, for I saw them as green and lovely as they are in Spain in May'. De las Casas, who traveled with Columbus on that first voyage, in describing the very first encounter between the Spanish and Native Americans, attributes to the latter an almost Edenic quality. The Indians, he tells us, 'walked among them and drew close, with such nonchalance and ease, with all their shameful parts uncovered, as though the state of innocence was restored or had never been lost'. Later, he and his compatriots are impressed by 'their natural kindness, their innocence, humility, tameness, peacefulness, and virtuous inclinations' – these inclinations even including a willingness to be converted to de las Casas' Catholicism. In spite of imprisonment and even enslavement at the hands of Native Americans, Cabeza de Vaca offers a similar sense of wonderment at their humaneness in his *Relación*. The Malhado, who live on the Gulf Coast, near present-day Galveston, 'love their offspring more than any in the world and treat them very mildly', he tells us, and the Avavares, who live further inland, 'always treated us well'. Such descriptions picture the New World as paradisiacal and the Native American as a noble child of nature. Other descriptions, equally in debt to earlier narratives of encounters with unknown worlds, offer a completely different picture, calling attention to cannibalism, human sacrifice, and violent warfare.

Marco Polo, Sir John Mandeville, Christopher Columbus and Bartolomé de las Casas can of course not be called American writers, and the fact that the word 'America' makes its first appearance in an English text in the 1509 translation of Sebastian Brant's satire *Das Narrenschiff* (*The Ship of Fools*, 1494) likewise has nothing to do with the beginnings of American literature. However, all literatures and all myths and fantasies are indebted to other literatures, myths, and fantasies and the earlier European narratives describing wondrous travels to the Far East made themselves felt in the way the Spanish saw and described the New World, and it is not surprising that the English, in their turn, were tempted to see the New World in terms suggested by the narratives of those Europeans who had preceded them, a world of great danger and enormous promise.

But to return to the question that was posed at the beginning of this introduction: what is 'American' – or 'United States' – literature? For the purposes of this book it is the oral and the written literature created in that part of the North American continent that is now the United States of America, with the proviso that those literatures – like the Dutch-language writings of New Netherland and the French travel literature of Champlain and others – that played no role in the development of American culture and America's self-image will not be considered. For the colonial period and the period right after the American Revolution, literature will be defined very broadly in order to grasp as fully as possible the development of the diverse cultural threads that come together in the making of American culture. From the 1820s onwards literature will be defined more narrowly as imaginative literature – with some major exceptions – so that the focus of this book will gradually shift towards the aesthetically more successful fiction, poetry, and drama that American writers have produced. There are American literary historians who would rather not speak of 'American' literature and are generally reluctant to use the word 'American'. That demonstrates a praiseworthy sensitivity to the fact that, in a sense, all inhabitants of the Americas are Americans and that to call the literature of the United States of America and the earlier colonies 'American literature' may raise eyebrows outside the United States. However, to call the United States 'America' or to refer to its literature as 'American' is not necessarily an act of arrogation. Practically the whole world uses 'America' and 'American' and, more importantly, the citizens of the U.S.A.'s closest neighbors

would hotly dispute being 'American'. This book, then, uses 'America' and 'American' for purely practical reasons and without a hidden imperialist agenda.

Beginnings

The enormous excitement generated in Europe by the discovery of the New World, soon led to an English expedition, headed by the Venetian citizen Giovanni Caboto (anglicized as John Cabot), that explored and named Newfoundland in 1497. Although Cabot's voyage was officially backed by the English crown (even if financed by Bristol merchants), it did not lead to serious exploration, let alone colonization, of the North American coast. It took the English almost a hundred years to follow the Spanish and Portuguese example and to establish colonies on the American mainland and then the first two attempts, financed by the dashing courtier Sir Walter Raleigh, ended in failure. Roanoke Colony, in what is now North Carolina, was founded in 1585, but abandoned the next year, when all its inhabitants, threatened by starvation and by a Native population that had been provoked into enmity, returned to England, and a second attempt, in 1587, to establish a settlement at the same place, ended mysteriously. When after three years the colony's leader, who had sailed back to England for supplies, finally returned, he found that all 120 colonists, including his young granddaughter, the first English child to have been born in America, had vanished without a trace.

We have a fascinating account of the first Roanoke settlement by Thomas Hariot (1560–1621), who was in Raleigh's employment and accompanied Raleigh's colonists to the New World in 1585. Two years after his return, in 1588, he published his *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* – a bit of an exaggeration, even though he had traveled as far as the Chesapeake Bay, given the fact that at the time 'Virginia' covered everything from the mouth of the Hudson to Spanish Florida. Hariot's *Report* gives us detailed descriptions of the local flora and fauna and is quite informative about the Native Americans in this particular area since he had managed to learn their language – a circumstance that also substantially contributed to his knowledge of the region. Much of the *Report* clearly aims at prospective settlers. Hariot pays a good deal of attention to what he calls 'merchantable commodities' – in sections entitled 'Of Roots', 'Of Fruits', 'Of Fowle', 'Of Fish', and so on – and emphasizes Virginia's natural advantages: 'For English corne nevertheless, whether to use or not to use it [...]. Of the growth you need not doubt: for Barley, Oats, and Peaze, we have seene prooffe of, not being purposely sowed, but fallen casually in the worst sort of ground, and yet to be as faire as any we have ever seen here in England'. More generally, 'the aire here is so temperate and holsume, the soyle so fertile, and yielding such commodities', that settling such a wonderful world becomes the natural thing to do. In a section devoted to the Native population Hariot's Indians, as far as their religious beliefs are concerned, turn out to be remarkably like the English: 'They believe also the immortalitie of the soule, that after this life as soone as the soule is departed from the body, according to the workes that it hath done, it is either carried to heaven the habitacle of gods, there to enjoy perpetuall blisse and happinesse, or else to a great pitte or hole, which they thinke to be in the furthest part of the world toward the Sunne set, there to burne continually'. Perhaps this is a faithful account of what Roanoke's Indians believed, perhaps Hariot shaped what he heard to fit his Christian framework. We have no way of knowing. What we certainly do know is that his account of the terrible toll the English presence takes on the Indians must be true. In every Native village the English visit, they bring diseases against which the Indians have no immunity and which everywhere begin to carry off large numbers. This terrible mortality rate among Native Americans as a result of contact with the European invaders is a recurrent element in all early accounts. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, a Spanish soldier who took part

in the conquest of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán in 1519, and who recounted his experiences (and those of others) in his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (*The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*), first published in 1632, tells us about Tenochtitlán: 'We could not walk without treading on the bodies and heads of dead Indians [...] the dry land the lagoon and the stockades were piled high with the bodies of the dead'. Many of these dead had become the victim of the incredible ferocity of the superiorly armed Spanish, but many more had died from the smallpox that the Spanish soldiers had brought with them. In the decades following first contact perhaps up to ninety percent of the Native population succumbed to smallpox, measles, and other diseases that in Europe were rarely fatal, but that in the Americas were absolutely disastrous. Neither party knew what caused these epidemics, but for Hariot's Indians the fact that the English were hardly affected by whatever killed the Indians themselves in such terrible numbers made them even more awe-inspiring.

Although Roanoke was a failure, its model proved very influential. Obviously the sparsely populated coast of North America, with a Native population that in comparison with the Aztecs and other Central American peoples lived in very primitive circumstances, could not yield the sort of riches in silver and gold that the conquest of New Spain had brought to the Spanish. If there were profits to be made, they would not be made by robbing a Native population of their natural resources or by plundering the treasure-chests of their rulers. Profit would require long-term investment by financial backers and a population equally willing to invest in its own future. But first of all that population had to be convinced to try its luck in the New World. Prospective colonists had to be offered a good and substantial reason for undertaking a risky and arduous voyage to a wholly unknown place at the absolute edge of the world. And so, in order to recruit interested parties, each Roanoke settler was promised a substantial tract of land, larger by far than anything they might ever hope to acquire in England. This settlement model, called 'planting', would in the course of the seventeenth century lead to a large English presence along the coast of North America and in the Caribbean.

On the North American mainland that presence becomes permanent with the founding of Jamestown, near what is now Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1607. Jamestown, too, staggered on the verge of failure, but was saved by renewed support from its backers, the Virginia Company, and the efforts of Captain John Smith, who provided the necessary effective leadership. Whereas Roanoke had in fact been the initiative of one single investor, the Jamestown enterprise had a more promising corporate base, a joint stock company, but even so the colony's future would in the decades of its existence regularly hang in the balance. In any case, five years after its founding, the newly arrived John Rolfe cultivated Jamestown's first tobacco crop and shipped it to England, the beginning of a trade that in the long run would prove to be enormously profitable. Thanks to Hariot and others, tobacco had already acquired a reputation as a medicinal miracle – a cure for various diseases and an aphrodisiac to boot – so that demand had soared in spite of such prominent early tobacco-haters as the English king James I, who in his 'Counter-Blaste to Tobacco' of 1604 presciently calls smoking 'A custome lothsome to the eye, hatefull to the Nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the Lungs', and compares 'the blacke stinking fume thereof' to the smoke that presumably is produced in hell. The European demand for tobacco and other agricultural products suggested that 'planting' was a viable and even quite profitable form of colonialization and drew new 'planters' to Virginia, so that before long the colony was faced with a shortage of labor, leading to the importation of indentured servants from England and, in 1619, the arrival of a first shipload of some twenty African slaves, who were set to work on the Jamestown plantations. Eventually, with the growth and spread of settlements, slavery would largely replace the indenture system, because many indentured servants disappeared before they had fulfilled their contract to seek a better and free life

elsewhere in the colonies. Since tobacco is a crop that after seven years has exhausted the soil, its cultivation also led to a permanent shortage of land and necessitated continuous expansion, a process that was bound to lead to ever new and serious conflicts with the Native population.

What Thomas Hariot did for Roanoke, Captain John Smith (1580–1631) did for Jamestown, with a report called *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note, as Hath Hapned in Virginia*, that was published without his knowledge in London in 1608, and in the much more detailed, and co-authored – because Smith never visited Virginia after 1609 – *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* of 1624. Smith is one of the most colorful characters of the period of first exploration and settlement. A farmer's son both gifted with and hampered by a fiery temper, a hankering for adventure, a propensity for violence, and a well-developed self-confidence, he left England at age sixteen to fight with the Dutch in their war with Spain, was involved in privateering in the Mediterranean, served in the Austrian army – hence his captaincy – and was taken prisoner in one of their battles with the Turks and sold into slavery. Murdering his master, Smith managed to escape and made his way back to England via Russia and Poland. At twenty-four Smith had seen much of Europe, had proved his mettle in the most desperate circumstances and shown a very useful instinct for survival. Even if we take his exploits with a grain of salt – Smith himself is after all our only source for most of them – he must have had an impressive record when he sailed with the first contingent of settlers to Jamestown. Not surprisingly, given his temperament, he found himself in serious trouble with the expedition's leadership – and under arrest – before they were halfway, but when after their arrival in Virginia the Company's sealed directions were opened, Smith turned out to have a seat on the settlement's ruling council and was later that year elected as president of the council, Jamestown's highest position of authority.

Smith's writings must be approached with caution. His 'I thank God I never undertook anything yet [for which] any could tax me of carelessness or dishonesty' (*The Generall Historie*) does not really inspire the confidence that he may have had in mind. He also tends to give different versions of one and the same event in different publications. But he is a lively and observant writer with a strong interest in the more adventurous side of things. His most famous adventure, his 'rescue' by the Native girl Pocahontas, has even become an American myth, retold again and again, fairly recently in the 1995 Disney movie *Pocahontas*.

In the *Generall Historie*, fifteen years after the event – which he strangely enough does not mention in his report of 1608 – Smith tells us how he and two other Englishmen are ambushed by a party of Indians while exploring Jamestown's environment. His two companions are killed and Smith – he very effectively writes about himself in the third person – is made a prisoner and taken to a local Chief, Powhatan. Although Smith, whose knowledge of Algonquin, his captors' language, is absolutely elementary, has no clear idea what is going on, he does at a certain point realize that things must be taking a turn for the worse. But then Pocahontas intervenes: 'two great stones were brought before *Powhatan*: then as many as could layd hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs, to beate out his braines. *Pocahontas* the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon him to save him from death'. Was Smith really in deadly danger? Did he misinterpret what in reality was some sort of Native initiation ceremony? We have no way of knowing. What we do know is that Pocahontas, who in her turn was captured by the English in 1613, converted to Christianity and stayed with them, marrying the already mentioned John Rolfe. Accompanying him to London where he sought new investors in the Virginia enterprise, she tragically died far from her native shore in 1617.

Smith, who as leader of his small group was held responsible for the death of his two companions, left Jamestown under a cloud in 1609. In 1614 he returned to North America, again

in the service of the Virginia Company, to explore the coast of Maine and Massachusetts. Naming the area New England, and giving English names to salient geographical features, he published an influential account of his journey in his *A Description of New England* (1616). Smith informs us about New England's coasts, its forests, climate, vegetation, crops, and does not hesitate to display its abundance of natural resources. 'He is a very bad fisher', he tells us, 'who cannot kill in one day with his hook and line, one, two, or three hundred Cods: which dressed and dried, if they be sold there for ten shillings the hundred, though in England they will give more than twenty'. In short, 'Here nature and liberty afford us that freely, which in England we want, or it costs us dearly'. And there is a simple way to relieve English parishes of burdensome duties towards the poor and to simultaneously settle this wonderful land: 'But that each parish, or village, in Citie, or Countrey, that will apparel their fatherless children, of thirteen or fourteen years of age, or young married people, that have small wealth to live on; here by their labour may live exceeding well'. But we should not put too cynical an interpretation on this last suggestion, even if the promotion of settlement is never far from Smith's mind. For Smith the exploration and settling of North America has a genuinely heroic dimension. New England – and, by implication, Virginia – presents a unique occasion for great deeds, for acquiring new knowledge, for spreading Christianity and civilization, and, not least, for contributing to the glory of England: 'What so truly suits with honour and honesty as the discovering things unknown: erecting towns, peopling countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things unjust, teaching virtue; and gain to our mother country a kingdom to attend her'. For Smith and for many of his compatriots who would follow him to North America settling the New World was much more than a way to escape the limitations, financial and otherwise, of life in England. It was a great and unprecedented challenge, an opportunity to show character and courage, to create one's own destiny in the face of adversity and danger. For even if Hariot, Smith, and others like Richard Hakluyt (c. 1552–1616) who had never even set foot in America and had drawn on others in his *Voyages and Discoveries* (1589–1600), had highlighted the New World's paradisiacal aspects and played down its darker side, their accounts do not altogether hide that colonization was a highly uncertain and very risky enterprise that did not come with any guarantees.

Native Americans

With Hariot and Smith, Native Americans enter English colonial literature. We do not know how many Native Americans lived in what is now the U.S. when the first English colonists arrived in Roanoke. Estimates range from not more than a couple of million to eighteen million and more and are invariably contested. What we do know is that North America was home to an extraordinary diversity of languages, cultures, and religious beliefs. Compared with North America, Europe, overwhelmingly Christian and with languages that with only a few exceptions belonged to the Western branches of the Indo-European language family, was a miracle of homogeneity. All these Native American peoples had their own creation stories – narratives that explained the origins of the Earth, the Sun and other celestial bodies, and of mankind itself (as often as not equating mankind with the people in question, putting them and their culture at the center of creation). These stories explicitly or implicitly provide a moral framework, condemning certain acts and praising others, and so offer guidelines for acceptable and responsible living. All these peoples entertained religious beliefs – we get a glimpse of one culture's beliefs in Hariot's *Briefe and true report* – and all of them knew tales that were handed down from generation to generation.

Since the Native peoples of North America did not use writing, we do not know these stories, beliefs, and tales in their authentic form – or, rather, authentic forms, since these forms were not generically fixed in genres or subgenres, as in European literature of the time, but endlessly flexible. When in the second half of the nineteenth century anthropologists started recording them, often in very literal translations which could not possibly do justice to the oral, interactive, and dynamic nature of especially the tales and ceremonial chants, all Native peoples had been exposed to Western culture. We cannot know to what extent these nineteenth-century tales and stories were influenced by the European presence. Still, when in so-called trickster tales greedy and treacherous whites get their just deserts through a smart trick that Coyote or another trickster hero plays on them, we may well be dealing with an authentic, pre-conquest tale in which only the original victim of the trickster's manipulations has made place for a new enemy. But perhaps we should simply shelve the question of authenticity. The world that we encounter in Native American stories and tales is so radically different from the Judeo-Christian world of western culture that it is not very relevant that it may have differed even more.

Creation stories are of all times and all places, and have since time immemorial served to explain the world and our existence, if not the special status that the Creator has accorded us (and not our enemies across the mountains). And so in the Navajo story the Navajo are guided to their promised land by 'Changing Woman', with the help of 'Spider Woman' and a heroic pair of twins. But there is an endless variety in the way the Creators of these stories actually go about creating us. In the highly elaborate story of the Pima people – also from the Southwest – creation goes through a number of false starts, with a dissatisfied creator destroying his first efforts by allowing the sky to fall on his handiworks. The often entertaining inventiveness of many of these stories and the more than occasional presence among their cast of characters of the trickster discussed below suggest that their audience is not quite expected to view them as Christian fundamentalists see the Biblical creation story. Some stories show signs of having been adapted or even created in response to historical events. In an Iroquois story that is admittedly more about foundation than about creation – and that is mentioned here because the nineteenth-century poet Longfellow used it for a famous narrative poem and because Walt Disney borrowed its hero's name – the godlike Hiawatha, a historical Iroquois chief, returns to Earth to unite the various Iroquois nations before returning to the sky in a white canoe.

Trickster tales, too, are an important element in many cultures. Their heroes revel in insubordination and in defying and undermining authority. Self-important and pompous authority is the preferred target, but any authority will do. In medieval Europe the fox Reynard and Til Eulenspiegel delighted audiences with the impudent tricks they played on their so-called superiors (and on unsuspecting rivals), and in Afro-American culture Brer Rabbit did the same. But Native American trickster tales tend to be both more ferocious and, paradoxically, to be more in tune with natural forces. The Native American trickster, quite often Coyote, but also appearing as Rabbit, Spider or in other guises, is a creature of amazing contradictions. He is courageous but not above fleeing like a coward, is smart but may act foolishly, is ruthless and selfish but on occasion noble and humane. Gifted with magical powers, the trickster can disguise himself, assume practically any form, at times even change sex at will – whatever serves his devious purposes. The trickster is invariably ready for not always innocent mischief or to gratify his not particularly modest sexual appetite. But he may also feature in tales that are less earthy and that are most of all brilliantly inventive and entertaining. Whatever he is, he is a masterful survivor, able to keep one step ahead of chaos with a resourcefulness that delights the audience, even if that chaos has been unleashed by his own less prudent actions.

Trickster tales obviously entertain an audience, but they also have a social function. They may explain taboos – or, since taboos are not always explicable, at least clarify them – and they