

# Contents

Abbreviations xi

Introduction 1

*The Plan of the Book* 5  
*Just How "American" Is the GAN Idea?* 10  
*Why Now?* 14

## PART ONE. THE UNKILLABLE DREAM

1. Birth, Heyday, and Seeming Decline 23
  - The Birth of the Dream* 24
  - Defining the Terms, Somewhat* 28
  - Monumentalism and Mockery: Dos Passos, Stein, and Others* 36
2. Reborn from the Critical Ashes 46
  - Critical Professionalism and Paradigm Change* 47
  - The Dream of the Great American Novel Miraculously Survives Its Discreditation* 52
  - Chaos Configured? Morrison and Updike as Great American Novelists* 60

## PART TWO. SCRIPT ONE: MADE CLASSIC BY RETELLING

3. The Reluctant Master Text: The Making and Remakings of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* 71
  - Hawthorne as a Nonnational Writer* 74
  - Provincial Discontent: Hawthorne's Arts of Entrapment* 76
  - Imagining Euro-Atlantic Diaspora: New England Derealized* 84
  - Great American Novel Despite Itself: The Retellings* 91

## PART THREE. SCRIPT TWO: ASPIRATION IN AMERICA

- Introduction. American Dreamers in Context 105
4. "Success" Stories from Franklin to the Dawn  
of Modernism 109
- American Dilemma: Uneven Development of Early Fictions  
of Development* 112
- (Mis)Making Men: The Franklin Legend as Model and as Target* 120
- Women's Up-From Stories: Antebellum to Wharton* 129
5. Belated Ascendancy: Fitzgerald to Faulkner, Dreiser  
to Wright and Bellow 139
- Double Helix: An American Tragedy and The Great Gatsby* 141
- Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Beyond: Americanization of  
Observer-Hero Narrative* 151
- Dreiser, Wright, Bellow, and the Ethnic Turn in  
Up-From Narrative* 162
6. Up-From Narrative in Hyphenated America:  
Ellison, Roth, and Beyond 175
- Ellison's Invisible Man as Literary Event* 176
- Surpassing a Classic Benchmark: Invisible Man versus  
Huckleberry Finn* 182
- Ellison to Neo-slave Narrative and Beyond* 192
- Roth's American Trilogy: American Pastoral as Success  
Story "Undone"* 198
- The Way We Live Now?* 208

## PART FOUR. SCRIPT THREE: ROMANCING THE DIVIDES

- Introduction. Shifting Ratios, Dangerous Proximities 217
7. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Its Aftermaths 226
- "The Greatest Book of Its Kind"* 228
- Self-Revision: Stowe's Dred* 240
- North-South Divide Romances before and against Stowe* 244
- What Can Reform Fiction Do as Encore? Nineteenth-Century Novels  
after Stowe* 248
8. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Its Others 258
- Comedy as a Substitute for Politics* 259
- Unperceived Rivals: Cable's The Grandissimes, Chesnut's The Marrow  
of Tradition* 275

9. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*,  
and Literary Interracialism North and South 286
- Burning the House Down: Absalom, Absalom!* 288
- Recouping Tara: Gone with the Wind* 300
- Mirrors of Miscegenation for the Civil Rights Era and Beyond* 308
10. Morrison's *Beloved* as Culmination and Augury 317
- Reinventing Tales White and Black* 320
- Refiguring the Divides* 326
- Afro-Atlantic Diasporic Imagination* 330
- Other Divides, Other Diasporas* 339
- PART FIVE. SCRIPT FOUR: IMPROBABLE COMMUNITIES
- Introduction. Fatalisms of the Multitude 349
11. *Moby-Dick*: From Oblivion to Great American Novel 358
- First Lowering: Some Basic Terms of Engagement* 360
- Ahab, Ishmael, Melville* 365
- The Crew as Global Village and/or "Democratic" Microcosm* 375
- Moby-Dick as Cultural Icon* 383
12. The Great American Novel of Twentieth-Century  
Breakdown: Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*—or Steinbeck's *Grapes  
of Wrath?* 389
- Novelistic Architecture: Collective Fiction in the Machine  
Age* 392
- Democracy Derailed: The Fate of the Working Classes* 399
- Opinion Management* 403
- The Steinbeck Alternative* 415
13. Late Twentieth-Century Maximalism: Pynchon's *Gravity's  
Rainbow*—and Its Rainbow 423
- Melville, Dos Passos, Pynchon* 428
- Plotlines* 431
- American Genesis of the Modern Rocket State* 436
- Mad Captains and Whale Rockets* 439
- Apocalypse When?* 446
- After Pynchon: DeLillo, Wallace, Vollmann* 452
- Epilogue 461

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| Notes           | 467 |
| Acknowledgments | 539 |
| Index           | 541 |