Contents

General editor's preface  ix
Acknowledgments xi

Introduction 1

1 The unused past: theorists of American literature and the problem of exclusivity 13
  An unusable past? 13
  What is an American author? 18
  American literature: out of space—out of time 31
  The consolation of criticism 37

2 The problem of Puritan origins in literary history and theory 49
  Puritanism as tragic vision: Perry Miller 53
  Puritanism as allegory: Yvor Winters, Richard Chase, and Leslie Fiedler 57
  Puritanism as rhetoric: Sacvan Bercovitch 74

3 'Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is': cultural theories of American literature 92
  Unreality in America: Lionel Trilling 93
  Parties of one: R. W. B. Lewis 107
viii  The Unusable Past

The romance of America: Richard Chase 123
The apolitical unconscious: Leslie Fiedler 129
An American fable: Leo Marx 140
The Phelps farm revisited: cultural theorists on Huckleberry Finn 151

4  American literature should not mean but be: self-reflexive theories of American literature 163
   D. H. Lawrence and American art-speech 164
   New Criticism and the American Renaissance: F. O. Matthiessen 167
   Making the world safe for symbolism: Charles Feidelson, Jr 173
   Worlds elsewhere: Richard Poirier 187
   Myths of American origins: post-structuralism 200
   'The world's body' 213

5  What is to be done? 218
   What is the American tradition? 219
   New directions 226
   The American scene 238

6  Conclusion: the significance of Frederick Douglass 256
   Notes 273
   Works Cited 278
   Index 287