Reconstructing American Literary History offers a wide-ranging revaluation of American literature, from the Revolutionary period to the present, by outstanding young scholars who represent a new generation of American critics. Although they differ in their approaches and methods, all express a distinctive experience of discontinuity and disruption, and all are concerned with the problems of literary history. These essays succeed in using literary techniques to illuminate the dynamics of culture and historical analysis to open up literary interpretation.
In this history of American literature, I have tried to be responsive to the immense changes that have occurred over the past thirty years in the study of American literature. In particular, I have tried to register the plurality of American culture and American writing: the continued inventing of communities, and the sustained imagining of nations, that constitute the literary history of the United States. My aim here has been to provide the reader with a reasonably concise but also coherent narrative that concentrates on significant and symptomatic writers while also registering the range and Reconstructing American literary history.