Examining the literature of slavery and race before the Civil War, Maurice Lee demonstrates for the first time exactly how the slavery crisis became a crisis of philosophy that exposed the breakdown of national consensus and the limits of rational authority. Poe, Stowe, Douglass, Melville, and Emerson were among the antebellum authors who tried—and failed—to find rational solutions to the slavery conflict. Unable to mediate the slavery controversy as the nation moved toward war, their writings form an uneasy transition between the confident rationalism of the American Enlightenment and the more skeptical thought of the pragmatists. Lee draws on antebellum moral philosophy, political theory, and metaphysics, bringing a fresh perspective to the literature of slavery—one that synthesizes cultural studies and intellectual history to argue that romantic, sentimental, and black Atlantic writers all struggled with modernity when facing the slavery crisis.

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MAURICE S. LEE
To Marisa and Nico
Contents

Acknowledgments v

Introduction 1

1 Absolute Poe 14

2 “Lord, it’s so hard to be good”: affect and agency in Stowe 52

3 Taking care of the philosophy: Douglass’s commonsense 93

4 Melville and the state of war 133

5 Toward a transcendental politics: Emerson’s second thoughts 165

Epilogue: An unfinished and not unhappy ending 210

Index 217
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