

ans of American communism, and Haynes and Klehr find less cause for complaint here, though they rightly upbraid David Oshinsky of the University of Texas for complaining that revisionist historians such as themselves are, in his words, “too zealous in setting the record straight.”

Yet Haynes and Klehr fail to acknowledge the full impact of their work on some of the most accomplished left-liberal scholars. In *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (1998), Ellen Schrecker wrote that American Communists merely “did not subscribe to traditional forms of patriotism,” and she questioned whether their espionage activity represented “such a serious threat to the nation’s security that it required the development of a politically repressive internal security system.” In a new preface to a 1999 edition of her book, however, Schrecker wrote, “I would acknowledge more conclusively than I did [in the original] that American Communists spied for the former Soviet Union.” A year later she went even further, volunteering that “there is now just too much evidence from too many different sources to make it possible for anyone but the most die-hard loyalists to argue convincingly for the innocence of Hiss, Rosenberg, and the others.”

Similarly, Maurice Isserman, one of the most widely respected historians of American communism, acknowledged in the *Foreign Service Journal* in 2000 that the CPUSA’s “few dozen American spies of the 1930s grew to scores, perhaps hundreds,” during World War II. Haynes and Klehr commend Isserman, but their resolute search for every academic who

remains in denial may partially blind them to just how much the scholarly conversation about American communism has changed.

Of course, real differences, both interpretive and political, still exist between Haynes and Klehr on the one hand and left-liberal historians such as Schrecker and Isserman on the other. Haynes and Klehr deem postwar anticommunism “a rational and understandable response to a real danger to American democracy,” hardly a sentiment the Left would endorse. Yet Haynes and Klehr are no apologists for Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose impact on American public life they characterize as “overwhelmingly negative.”

The authors conclude that “despite all the new archival evidence . . . distortions and lies about Soviet espionage go unchallenged” in scholarly volumes such as *American National Biography*, an indictment that is both indisputably correct and undeniably overstated. Thanks in large part to their own work, the historical consensus on the relationship between the CPUSA and Moscow has undergone a dramatic change since the Soviet Union’s collapse. As *In Denial* details, some loyalists still refuse to see that the documentary record has been revolutionized. But Haynes and Klehr’s valid complaints about these unyielding historians ought to be coupled with an acknowledgment of victory in behalf of those whose pursuit of historical truth has been conclusively vindicated.

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Haunted Hawthorne

HAWTHORNE:
A Life.

By Brenda Wineapple. Knopf. 509 pp. \$30

Reviewed by Judith Farr

In Hester Prynne, the passionately honest woman whose scarlet letter “A” marks her as both adulteress and angel, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) created one of the

most admirable heroines of American fiction. Forced to exhibit herself for hours on a scaffold with both emblems of her sin at her breast—the infant Pearl and the letter “A”

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she herself gorgeously embroidered—Hester serves as the light that ultimately rescues her lover’s soul from damnation. This elegant allegory presents its heroine with a grave empathy bordering on tenderness. It may therefore startle some readers of Brenda Wineapple’s revelatory biography to learn that Hawthorne’s vision of strong women, and indeed of women in general, was severely marred by what she calls “a deadly ambivalence.”

The bookish youth who wished he had been “born a girl so that I might have been pinned all my life to my mother’s apron,” the sensuous husband who played Adam to Sophia Peabody’s Eve on their idyllic honeymoon in Concord’s Old Manse, and the creator of such vital heroines as Hester of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Zenobia of *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), was the same man who fulminated that “I wish [women authors] were forbidden to write, on [pain of] having their faces deeply scarified with an oyster-shell.” Envious of Harriet Beecher Stowe because some 300,000 copies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were in circulation the year it was printed, while *The Scarlet Letter* sold fewer than 7,000; afraid that sentimental fiction by female writers would weaken the infant American literature; and certain that too much intellectual engagement robbed women of their natural tranquility and grace, Hawthorne was a devoted father, but he chose not to teach his children to read until they reached the age of seven; and later he forbade his daughter Rose to write stories. He thought that her moral nature, finer than a man’s, might be defiled by such activity. Rose’s brilliant older sister Una was taught reading, horseback riding, French, and geography “in small doses,” but came to “despair of her own ignorance.” This well-meaning deprivation must have contributed to the

girl’s anxiety and neurosis: To Hawthorne’s anguish, Una received primitive shock therapy at 14.

Like his other failures of human sympathy—his confessed “repugnance” toward Jews; his indifference to the misery of slaves and lack of compassion for youths who died to preserve the Union, a cause in which he did not believe—Hawthorne’s apparent misogyny is already well known. (Indeed, it would be hard not to perceive evidence of it in the tortured sexuality and twisted attitudes of such characters as Miles Coverdale, covering up his lust in various hiding places from which he peers at forbidden girls, and Hester’s dim-spirited lover, Arthur Dimmesdale.) Yet

one of the strengths of Wineapple’s vivid biography is that she encourages us to understand the complexity of Hawthorne’s misogyny. None of his emotions—or prejudices—were simple. He objected to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* out of primitive envy, yes, but also because he believed that politics (Stowe’s abolitionism)



Emanuel Leutze’s 1862 portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne

should be kept out of art. He was averse to women’s higher education, true, but treated a female Shakespeare scholar most graciously when she asked “literary counsel” of him. When he lost a position that might have bettered the family’s desperate fortunes, he observed that his wife, Sophia, would bear the great disappointment “like a woman—that is to say, better than a man.”

Wineapple, the author of *Genêt: A Biography of Janet Flanner* (1989) and *Sister Brother: Gertrude and Leo Stein* (1996), paints a rounded portrait of Hawthorne that invites both respect and pity. The reader comes to understand the inner demons of anxiety and self-doubt that made the development and exercise of his artistic

genius not merely difficult but heroic. Melancholy tortured him all his life. His pessimistic yet often luminous fiction was the work of one who feared and was ashamed of both his own genetic inheritance (he was the grandchild of a Puritan “hanging judge”) and his writing gift. The latter seemed to him frivolous, and indulging it, a wicked waste. “In the depths of every heart,” he once declared, “there is a tomb and a dungeon.” He often felt he inhabited both. His fame arrived at last, not at first. He destroyed copies of *Fanshawe* (1828) in despair, and although *The Scarlet Letter* was a success, it did not bring sufficient remuneration to enable his family to live in any kind of comfort.

One cannot help but admire Hawthorne’s energetic if emotionally vexed efforts to alleviate his family’s dismal poverty. The transcendentalist writer Ellery Channing recalled that a handyman’s cottage the Hawthornes rented (though they failed to pay the rent) was one of the poorest shanties in Lenox, Massachusetts, “with uneven floors, and so ill-built that the wind could not be kept out.”

When, for the sake of a steady salary, Hawthorne became a U.S. consul in Liverpool, his writing suffered. He hated the job and loathed yet was attracted to England. Realizing finally that Sophia and the children were miserable in that “rancid” city—Wineapple’s adjectives can be venture-some—he left England for Italy, where he and Una caught “Roman fever” (malaria) and nearly died. Dejected, discouraged, half-sick, they all returned to the United States and the bone-piercing cold of Concord.

It was 1860, and John Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry had occurred the year before. Unmoved by the nationalist fervor that warmed the New England heart, the aristocratic Hawthorne of excellent ancestry was reviled as a “Copperhead,” a Northern sympathizer with the South in the war. He maintained that slavery would (and should) die out if left alone, whereas emancipation would provoke years of tumult.

Though famous for habitually avoiding company, Hawthorne reached out to a few friends and represented himself honestly to them. Herman Melville loved him, perhaps was slightly *in love* with him. Franklin

Pierce, for whose presidential campaign Hawthorne worked, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a classmate at Bowdoin College, perceived the essential nobility and even sweetness of his nature.

To the end, in whatever unfertile circumstance, Hawthorne wrote. For “writing,” as Wineapple tells us, “meant everything to Hawthorne and yet cost everything. It was his heart of darkness . . . a source of shame as well as pleasure and a necessity he could neither forgo nor entirely approve.”

Especially praiseworthy in this biography are the literary-critical passages. We live in a time when sociopolitically minded critics attack Emily Dickinson for writing no poems about the execution of 38 Santee Sioux in Minnesota in 1862 or the problems of Irish miners in Pennsylvania, so we should rejoice that Wineapple never denigrates Hawthorne’s artistry on the grounds of his personal predilections or politics. Instead, she follows Henry James’s advice and grants the writer his *donnée*: his personal vision and characteristic genius. A sensitive reader of the various fictions, she is especially perceptive about the decidedly autobiographical *Blithedale Romance*, which draws upon Hawthorne’s recollection of the utopian community of Brook Farm in Roxbury, Massachusetts; with its quirks of insight and characterization, that novel can be difficult to treat.

Wineapple occasionally resorts to awkward, quasi-poetical stylistic shortcuts: Zenobia is described as having “indignant hair”; the month of May is “nonchalant.” But she draws us into her narrative with élan. Her first chapter discloses the sad history of Hawthorne’s son Julian, imprisoned at 60 for selling worthless mine shares and exploiting his father’s name. Sorrow and imprisonment, the terrible influence of family history and names, the past with its mysterious power over the present: These are Hawthorne’s major themes, and in Wineapple’s biography, even the shape of the text gives them their proper authority.

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