2003

Harriet Beecher Stowe: Scribbler

Ann Struthers

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Recommended Citation
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New Yorkers were amazed at this portrait which hung in the National Theater when the play, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, opened. This face is mild, compassionate, shy. Viewers expected an avenging harridan, a devil in petticoats with sword or butcher knife in hand, not white lace on black sleeves and at the high neck, a modest broach.

Hawthorne’s portrait hangs around the corner. He castigated “those scribbling women,” and she knows she’s one of them, trying to make frayed ends meet—seven children and a husband with frequent mental breakdowns. She knows Uncle Tom’s Cabin solidified Northern opinion against slavery as Hawthorne had solidified it against ancestral Puritans. Maybe that’s why the corners of her mouth turn up so slightly.