

ANN STRUTHERS

Harriet Beecher Stowe: Scribbler

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.