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**BEYOND THE VALLEY OF *THE DOLLMAKER*:  
TWO UNPUBLISHED WORKS BY HARRIETTE SIMPSON ARNOW**

Matt Sutton  
University of Kentucky

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All too often, a collection of an author's papers kept by a library's Special Collections Department is merely that: a collection of papers. Ephemeral scraps, false starts and banal letters (often asking publishers, family and acquaintances for money) abound. Therefore, the University of Kentucky's Special Collections Department is lucky to have a collection as well-rounded and significant as the Harriette Simpson Arnow collection. While it would be important to preserve virtually any written memento by the author of *The Dollmaker*, still one of the most well-received and enduring novels to come out of Kentucky, the collection is especially notable for its depth. Over seventy feet of shelf space is given to complete manuscripts and typescripts of Arnow's published work, letters to and from literati like Robert Penn Warren and Alfred Knopf and letters to inquiring readers, all crucial to our understanding of this often overlooked author. But what is truly exciting about this collection is what has up to now been disregarded; three very different unpublished novels, over a dozen unpublished short stories and a wealth of autobiographical material spanning the length of Arnow's career, from the mid-1930s to the early 1980s.

Just the volume of work alone makes this collection unique; indeed, the number of unpublished works in advanced stages of completion rivals the number of published Arnow works. We can only speculate on the reasons why so many quality works went unpublished. One reason may be simple geography: living in Burnside, Kentucky, then Cincinnati and finally Ann Arbor, Michigan, placed her "out of the loop" of the New York-centered publishing establishment. A more intriguing reason, though, is the author's own dogged determination and fierce pride in her work. We can look at the years of Arnow's artistic maturity, from the publication of "The Washerwoman's Day" in the *Southern Review* in 1935 to her death in 1986, and not find one instance of work that caves in to the whims of the marketplace. Whether or not Appalachia was in the forefront of public consciousness at the time, Arnow spent over fifty years writing with commitment and conviction about her home region; long before the phrase became a critic's cliché, works like *Mountain Path* (1936) demonstrated true "sense of place" by balancing social critique with humane and multifaceted portrayals of rural Kentuckians. Her commitment and iconoclasm shine through in the two unpublished works that bookend her career: an apprentice short story called "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and a novel, titled [Belle](#), left uncompleted at her death. Though written almost half a century apart, these two seemingly disparate works share the same vision. The early short story observes Appalachia with a perspective and skill extraordinary for such a young writer. *Belle* not only keeps the focus of the earlier work (as well as her best-known novels) but filters her version of "place" through the conventions of several different genres. Collectively, the two works demonstrate that Arnow balanced high artistic ideals with sympathetic portrayals of rural people throughout her career.

Though it has never received publication or critical attention, the somewhat awkwardly titled "The Goat Who Was a Cow," dating from a time in the early 1930s when Arnow taught in rural Kentucky, displays an assurance and self-awareness of the region that some of the more visible, polemical Southern fiction of the time missed. In the

story, a southern Kentucky girl named Jezebel laconically tells her teacher a story in which she and her brother David knowingly lead a Northerner on a wild goose chase in search of moonshine. As if to punish the brusque interloper, Jezebel and David (who share a symbiotic relationship not unlike the one Harper Lee constructed for Jem and Scout twenty-five years later in *To Kill a Mockingbird*) ramble through hills, brush and marshes, with the Northerner barely in tow. The children's undisguised glee at making a mockery of the intruder's patronization is compounded by the man's petulant protests as the trip goes on. Expecting the world of Ma and Pa Kettle and coonskin caps, the Northerner (never identified by name and wryly nicknamed "the thirsty man") has instead found himself in a heart of darkness, with two very mischievous children leading the way. After finally leading the man to an old moonshiner, Jezebel must go so far as to negotiate the deal for the Northerner, making her a true bootlegger. After making his purchase and hurriedly paying the children, "the thirsty man" vanishes, scared but smarter. On their way home, the children intercept one of their family's wayward cows. Though her overnight trip is now justified (and well-reimbursed), Jezebel feels pangs of conscience as she returns home and again as she relates her wild tale to her teacher.

What Arnow does so effectively in this brief story is much like what she does in her later, published work: create a nuanced portrait of both a time and a place. Though set in Prohibition, "The Goat Who Was a Cow" never descends to an exaggerated moonshiner tale or a "local color" story told from a distance for the amusement of outsiders. The story's conflict refers to something more timeless: the tenuous relationship and mutual misunderstandings between neighboring but unequal societies. The Jezebel character has a narrative voice far more complicated than the standard "yarn spinner" or dialect voice. Jezebel tunes in to the Northerner's pretentiousness just as she detects the do-gooder attitude of her narratee, the schoolteacher, and twists her story to both fit and conflict with the teacher's anachronistic view of the "hill people." Tongue-in-cheek, she "thanks" her teacher for not seeing her and her region as "half civilized." Her wild tale, then, becomes a wry tale that "signifies" on the teacher's unspoken prejudices. Having lived and taught both in and out of the region, Arnow was especially capable of seeing both sides of the conflict and creating this type of convincing dialogue and characterization. In Jezebel, Arnow creates one of her more intriguing characters, one who illustrates both the narrowness and breadth of the culture gap. Jezebel is acquainted enough with the land to lead the Northerner through the brush expertly, canny enough to exaggerate her dialect in order to give both the Northern interloper and the schoolteacher a true "down-home" experience to take back with them, and articulate enough to tell the story to the captivated teacher. Given this character's depth and sophistication (especially notable when created by a still-developing author), one cannot help but wonder if Arnow's fictional analogue is less the patient schoolteacher and more the observant, savvy mountain girl who tells fascinating, deceptively simple stories.

While one might easily understand the existence of an unpublished early short story among Arnow's papers, the presence of *Belle*, a fully developed manuscript novel, requires some explanation. Almost five decades separated "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and *Belle*, years which brought much success for Arnow and established her painstaking method of work. Arnow published [\*The Dollmaker\*](#) in 1955 to critical and popular acclaim. She had spent nearly five years in constant, arduous rewriting of that manuscript, and even threatened to withhold the book when faced with undue editorial influence from Macmillan. Partly in reaction to this, Arnow published two dense volumes of social history, *Seedtime on the Cumberland* (1960) and *Flowering of the Cumberland* (1963), both the result of exhaustive research. After a hiatus, Arnow returned to fiction in 1970 with *The Weedkiller's Daughter*, followed by another work of history, [\*Old Burnside\*](#) (1976). *Old Burnside* was an uneasy compromise between Arnow and the University Press of Kentucky, in which Arnow rather reluctantly introduced autobiographical material alongside a general history of the town. The advantage of the *Old Burnside* project is that the short book refocused her energies from the encyclopedic detail of the *Cumberland* books to a more direct inquiry on the past, centered on the universal themes that drove her fiction and fleshed out with accurate portrayals.

This meticulous attention to detail and her solitary method of working, which had characterized all Arnow's major works since *The Dollmaker*, partly explain why *Belle* remained unfinished at Arnow's death in 1986, despite the fact she had been working on it for at least eight years. Considering, though, that these years coincided with the death of her husband, Harold, in 1985, two major illnesses and an unprecedented crush of publicity and interviews that surrounded the TV-movie adaptation of *The Dollmaker* in 1984, we are lucky to have the 876-page manuscript in any form. What emerges in these pages is a novel entering its final stages of development. There are minor points of confusion, however: some characters' names had not been settled on yet, key scenes had not been definitively put in order, an ending was not finalized, etc.<sup>1</sup> Despite these confusions, the novel offers much for consideration. Intriguingly, the work was left at the stage where characters start to interact rather than merely orbit one another, speak naturally rather than ornately and where scenes start to flow together. From all appearances, *Belle* appears to be a work designed as a culmination of a career, rather than an exercise or experiment. If this speculation is true, it is interesting to note the subject matter of *Belle*, since on the surface it is that staple of Southern fiction: the Civil War novel. Though her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace* (1974) was set in the era of the American Revolution, *Belle* has no link to that previous work of historical fiction. Therefore, *Belle* becomes especially notable; with the exception of her unpublished pseudo-science-fiction novella *To You No Place* (circa 1960), this is the only instance of Arnow choosing to write in an established genre or subgenre.

The novel itself is focalized through the character Belle Goodwood, who holds together her Kentucky home while her husband and son are off fighting for the Confederacy and her oldest daughter is away at school. Reading the manuscript, one cannot help but note the similarity between Belle and Gertie Nevels, the strong-willed, resilient heroine who anchors *The Dollmaker*. The theme of self-reliance in the face of adversity-natural, social and interpersonal-is everpresent in both works. The quietly independent Belle becomes a rock for her family and neighbors amid a series of crisis. Her strength is tested further by existing institutions, such as church and school, which hinder rather than help outsiders. Perhaps recalling Gertie's rejection of fire-and-brimstone fundamentalism in *The Dollmaker*, Arnow set the opening scene of *Belle* in a country church. There, Belle swallows her anger as the preacher curses the town's "harlots" and Eve's role in original sin while the men sit impassively on the opposite aisle of the congregation. As angered by the hellfire-and-brimstone sermon as the preacher's personal hypocrisy, Belle takes up and creates her own Sunday morning service at home to turn her children's attention back to Christian compassion. Likewise, when the war intensifies, she runs her own one-room schoolhouse, teaching alike her children, "white trash" and the children of her house slaves.<sup>2</sup> By novel's end, Belle has withdrawn almost fully into her own home, the one place where she is free of outside interference.

As these incidents suggest, Belle, whether by design or not, comes across less as an Everywoman, and more as an emblematic figure. There is no evidence in the notes or correspondence relating to *Belle* that the character was based on a real person; instead, the character seems to be a composite of figures gleaned from her years of researching women and families of the Cumberland region. Such concerns are minimal, though, in the novel's overall scheme. Using the limited omniscient voice, as she had in *The Dollmaker*, to get inside the main character's mind, Arnow quickly gets the reader to assume all that Belle assumes. Hence, Belle's seemingly unlimited resourcefulness - spent raising five children and running the makeshift church, a school, and a homestead of thousands of acres - rarely becomes an issue within the novel. Like many other Arnow heroines, Belle seems innately and unshakably capable.

Certainly Arnow was aware that a completely flawless character would be static, and it is interesting to note the imperfections Arnow was beginning to introduce into the character in these final drafts. A few chapters have Belle habitually drinking strong toddies at the end of the day, while each progressive draft significantly changes a subplot involving Belle and the married man whom she loves from afar, Jean Paul Gaudais. Perhaps Arnow was reacting to the criticism she had faced in her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace*, which featured a protagonist,

Leslie Collins, who fit the straitlaced, taciturn frontiersman role in the grand tradition of Daniel Boone and the work of James Fenimore Cooper. Arnow's championing of a seemingly flawless frontiersmen in the age of the antihero irritated many book reviewers, who overlooked the book's historical accuracy to attack the character's one-dimensionality. Arnow's task in this subsequent attempt at historical fiction, then, was a complex one. First, she had to recreate the Civil War era for a modern audience without specifically invoking the war's battles or key figures, in essence forgoing the fictional equivalent of her *Cumberland* social histories. Then she had to shed light on the relatively undocumented domestic facet of the war.<sup>3</sup> Finally, she had to recast characters for an audience increasingly receptive to - even expectant of - complex and strong women protagonists while heeding the established historical record. At the state it was left in, *Belle* seemed to promise all of these things. And while the book can get top-heavy with historical detail, it rarely stops to make didactic points. At its most lugubrious, *Belle* wears its accuracy on its sleeve, with its extensive descriptions of gun stocks and smokehouses loosely integrated with the story proper and signalling lulls in the plot. Arnow, then, was faced with the enviable problem of having to subordinate her proven skills as a historian to her fiction-writing prowess. The various drafts of the novel reflect Arnow's increasing weariness with minutiae and, as a result, the more historically bound passages of the book are pared down in the last working draft.

While a reader familiar with Arnow's published work would more than likely feel comfortable with the familiar Arnow themes of individualism and empowerment in *Belle*, the depiction of slavery in the manuscripts is much more ambiguous. Arnow probably shared in this ambiguity. Signalling, perhaps, the difficulty in getting a handle on a character, Arnow gave the house-cook character the rather clichéd name "Beulah" in the first typescript draft (this draft exists only in fragments in the UK collection), changing it in the final draft to "Victoria."<sup>4</sup> Though it is obvious that the relationship between Belle, Victoria, and Victoria's family is a master-slave relationship and that Victoria's children maintain Belle's ornate, half-empty house and grounds, both the characters and the omniscient narrator consistently refer to Victoria and her family as "help," not slaves. Why this insistence on euphemism? Within the work, the euphemism makes some sense. If the reader is to sympathize with Belle's plight (and a plight it is, since she deals with abandonment, dismemberment of a son in battle, supply shortages, and invasions from Northern soldiers), the reader must put aside the objection to the ownership of slaves and see it as a "curious institution" or "necessary evil." Running the house in tandem against seemingly impossible odds, Belle and Victoria must draw upon the same resources and each other, making Belle's relationship with Victoria more symbiotic than parasitic. But if Victoria is to be a double for Belle (as seems to be the case, given their inseparability throughout much of the work), the characterization of Victoria leaves much to be desired. Despite her more politically correct job description, Victoria's character is almost never focalized and never seen in a capacity outside her role to Belle. Unlike Belle, we never see Victoria fulfill her role as mother, outside of marshalling her children to perform tasks for Belle with machine-like efficiency. When Victoria's domestic duties are done, she promptly vanishes from the scene. This, coupled with her showy, finger-wagging fussiness towards outsiders, brings the depiction uncomfortably close at times to Margaret Mitchell's Mammy. Considering the round, dignified portrayals of women Arnow created throughout her career, Victoria's stasis is especially puzzling and a rare instance of Arnow employing a stock character.

Such shortcomings are the pitfalls of historical fiction, especially Civil War fiction written from the Southern point of view. Not only are we well aware of how the actual war turned out, we know how the war turned out in subsequent fiction. Scarlett, Rhett and the shadow of Tara loom large in our preconceptions, with Faulkner's misfit Southerners from *The Unvanquished* and *Flags in the Dust* nearby. So many shortcomings of *Belle* come about not because of any lapse of authorial skill, but the reader's own predisposition and conditioning, leaving perfectly "round" characters and otherwise believable situations predictable. Not all resemblances between *Belle* and *Gone With the Wind* are negative, however. Chapter X of *Belle* includes a delightful scene where Belle entertains her neighbors in a spirited "Christmas sing" that recalls the ebullient party on the eve of the war in *Gone With the*



*Wind*. Other similarities hurt the work, though, largely through a capitulation to melodrama. For example, we recognize right off that Belle has sent three men off to war - her gruff husband Barstow (who married Belle through an arrangement with Belle's father), her overeager son William and the man she really loves, a dashing colonel named Jean Paul Gaudais. Jean Paul plays the sensitive Ashley Wilkes role to the hilt, offering the supportive advice and sympathy that Barstow seems wholly incapable of, so it is quite foreseeable from the earliest stages of the work that Jean Paul will die in battle, his own love for Belle unrequited and undeclared, save for a letter Belle receives after his demise. Likewise, early scenes of the brash, gung-ho William are a studied contrast to his scenes upon return, where he returns bitter and maimed, another burden for Belle to bear. Finally, scenes where Belle protects her homeplace and heritage from a succession of intruders - Yankee deserters, scalawags and rapacious white trash alike - strike familiar chords among *Gone With the Wind* readers.

Yet, judging from the typescripts of *Belle*, these similarities to Mitchell's work were not lost on Arnow as she was writing: each of these aforementioned scenes underwent several major revisions, all of which marked significant changes in tone. (Most significant among these changes was the eventual omission of a scene that hinted at an extramarital affair between Belle and Jean Paul.) These heavily edited and re-edited scenes, none of which apparently satisfied Arnow enough to be considered finished, illustrate the diligence and order she put into this work and, above all, the elusive stamp of originality she was aiming for.

Taken as a whole, the work cannot be relegated, along with decades' worth of mindless bodice-rippers, as a cheap imitation of sentimental Civil War fiction. Instead, it stands more as a character-driven piece. Though Belle fully supports the Confederate cause, the book is far from an apology for the Old South. If we look for a sense of place in *Belle*, we find it in the depictions of the family home, not in fanciful descriptions of rolling fields and lush magnolias. In this way, then, Arnow succeeds in creating an image of domestic pastoral, a welcome sanctuary from war and division. Belle and Victoria quietly personify in their home the values - respect, honor and self-determination - that the war is supposedly fought over. As [Sandra L. Ballard](#) rightly pointed out in the only published study of *Belle* to date, Belle can neither be pigeonholed as a spoiled child of the South nor as Confederacy incarnate. In fact, the book's best stand-alone scene comes when Belle gives aid and comfort to some Union guerillas.<sup>5</sup> With a minimum of narrative sermonizing, Belle practices what she preaches in her home church and subordinates her allegiance to the Confederate cause to the Christian duty toward "strangers in our midst." Her other duty in this scene is that of surrogate mother to the soldiers, seeing much of her son William in the faces of these boys. Though her portrayal in this scene reminds readers of popular portrayals of Southern women during the war as feminine stalwarts of their family and their cause, in that order, Belle cannot be accurately described as a pioneer feminist character, since Arnow had no use for convenient labels, ideological or otherwise. As she is portrayed, Belle is simply a tireless force of nature, guiding her family through a time of extreme adversity led by her faith and inner courage.

Though by the time she was writing *Belle* Arnow may well have dismissed "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as an apprentice work, a certain harmony is struck when the two works are compared side by side. The foremost similarity is the attention to character nuance and Arnow's ability to situate characters in place. At both ends of her career, Arnow avowedly avoided the temptation to burden her work with excessive pathos or paint her characters with the broad brush of "local color." Portraying Jezebel in "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as a backwards, lazy hill girl would likely have raised a chuckle from big-city readers, but Arnow knew her region well enough to recognize its values (not the least of which was pride) and imbue the character with these same values. Likewise, Belle easily could have been a one-dimensional Southern belle or a long-suffering wife/mother had Arnow ignored both her research and her upbringing. "Place" in these two works refers less to superficial trappings like dialect and more to an ethos of self-reliance and forthrightness that Arnow shared with her best fictional creations. In this way, then, it seems preferable to read *Belle* outside of the canon of Civil War historical fiction and instead cast Belle in the

mold of *The Dollmaker's* Gertie Nevels. Both characters personify courage and resourcefulness, virtually define the phrase "strong woman," and typify the best qualities of their region.

While one admires Arnow's own persistence in undertaking such an ambitious project as *Belle* while in her seventies (at a time when she was hounded by professors, students and journalists, all claiming to have "rediscovered" *The Dollmaker*), one also wishes she had called a truce with the editorial process and found a sympathetic editor to polish this work into a fully realized novel. Given this intervention, the work may have attained more consistency and an adequate ending. Had this help been forthcoming, southern Kentucky may well have had its own great Civil War novel. But if this unfinished novel does not offer as bracing an artistic jolt as the best of her work or stand undisputed as The Great Lost Arnow Novel, it still deserves our attention. After fifty years of writing about the region she considered home, the best parts of *Belle* prove that Arnow still had many insights on the Kentucky/Tennessee region to share. Besides, after all Harriette Simpson Arnow did for this region's literature and people, her work is owed nothing less. Though it may be convenient or fashionable in this post-postmodern age to dismiss her work as anachronistic, such a judgment minimizes or overlooks the themes that keep her work beloved by many readers: family, faith, love and place. If works that reflect these themes are anachronistic, perhaps it is time we set the clock back.

Special thanks to Kate Black of the University of Kentucky Library for her guidance and assistance in this project.

### Notes

1. For example, Belle's husband is alternately called William Barstow and Barstow Goodwood, another character vacillates between Jean Paul Gaudais and Jean Paul Vauban. One character is amusingly called "young Dr. Name" in lieu of a permanent moniker (568).
2. An early draft of one of the schoolroom scenes was published in the Spring 1980 issue of the journal *Adena* as "Interruptions to School at Home" and remains the only fragment of *Belle* yet published.
3. One need only compare Arnow's copious historical notes with a recent history of domestic life in the South like Catherine Clinton's *Tara Revisited* (1995) to see that Arnow was well ahead of her time in terms of her historical interests and attentions.
4. There is every possibility, though, that this name-in-progress was meant to be ironic. Certainly the name "Belle" is tinged with irony, since her practicality and responsible nature clash with the stereotypical and one-dimensional coy mistresses of the South.
5. Harriette Arnow, *Belle* "final" ts. (Harriette Arnow Collection, University of Kentucky), 72-101.

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This web page is maintained by  
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College  
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075  
E-mail: [htallant@georgetowncollege.edu](mailto:htallant@georgetowncollege.edu)



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canny enough to exaggerate her dialect in order to give both the Northern interloper and the schoolteacher a true "down-home" experience to take back with them, and articulate enough to tell the story to the captivated teacher. Given this character's depth and sophistication (especially notable when created by a still-developing author), one cannot help but wonder if Arnow's fictional analogue is less the patient schoolteacher and more the observant, savvy mountain girl who tells fascinating, deceptively simple stories.

While one might easily understand the existence of an unpublished early short story among Arnow's papers, the presence of *Belle*, a fully developed manuscript novel, requires some explanation. Almost five decades separated "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and *Belle*, years which brought much success for Arnow and established her painstaking method of work. Arnow published [\*The Dollmaker\*](#) in 1955 to critical and popular acclaim. She had spent nearly five years in constant, arduous rewriting of that manuscript, and even threatened to withhold the book when faced with undue editorial influence from Macmillan. Partly in reaction to this, Arnow published two dense volumes of social history, *Seedtime on the Cumberland* (1960) and *Flowering of the Cumberland* (1963), both the result of exhaustive research. After a hiatus, Arnow returned to fiction in 1970 with *The Weedkiller's Daughter*, followed by another work of history, [\*Old Burnside\*](#) (1976). *Old Burnside* was an uneasy compromise between Arnow and the University Press of Kentucky, in which Arnow rather reluctantly introduced autobiographical material alongside a general history of the town. The advantage of the *Old Burnside* project is that the short book refocused her energies from the encyclopedic detail of the *Cumberland* books to a more direct inquiry on the past, centered on the universal themes that drove her fiction and fleshed out with accurate portrayals.

This meticulous attention to detail and her solitary method of working, which had characterized all Arnow's major works since *The Dollmaker*, partly explain why *Belle* remained unfinished at Arnow's death in 1986, despite the fact she had been working on it for at least eight years. Considering, though, that these years coincided with the death of her husband, Harold, in 1985, two major illnesses and an unprecedented crush of publicity and interviews that surrounded the TV-movie adaptation of *The Dollmaker* in 1984, we are lucky to have the 876-page manuscript in any form. What emerges in these pages is a novel entering its final stages of development. There are minor points of confusion, however: some characters' names had not been settled on yet, key scenes had not been definitively put in order, an ending was not finalized, etc.<sup>1</sup> Despite these confusions, the novel offers much for consideration. Intriguingly, the work was left at the stage where characters start to interact rather than merely orbit one another, speak naturally rather than ornately and where scenes start to flow together. From all appearances, *Belle* appears to be a work designed as a culmination of a career, rather than an exercise or experiment. If this speculation is true, it is interesting to note the subject matter of *Belle*, since on the surface it is that staple of Southern fiction: the Civil War novel. Though her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace* (1974) was set in the era of the American Revolution, *Belle* has no link to that previous work of historical fiction. Therefore, *Belle* becomes especially notable; with the exception of her unpublished pseudo-science-fiction novella *To You No Place* (circa 1960), this is the only instance of Arnow choosing to write in an established genre or subgenre.

The novel itself is focalized through the character Belle Goodwood, who holds together her Kentucky home while her husband and son are off fighting for the Confederacy and her oldest daughter is away at school. Reading the manuscript, one cannot help but note the similarity between Belle and Gertie Nevels, the strong-willed, resilient heroine who anchors *The Dollmaker*. The theme of self-reliance in the face of adversity-natural, social and interpersonal-is everpresent in both works. The quietly independent Belle becomes a rock for her family and neighbors amid a series of crisis. Her strength is tested further by existing institutions, such as church and school, which hinder rather than help outsiders. Perhaps recalling Gertie's rejection of fire-and-brimstone fundamentalism in *The Dollmaker*, Arnow set the opening scene of *Belle* in a country church. There, Belle swallows her anger as the preacher curses the town's "harlots" and Eve's role in original sin while the men sit impassively on the opposite aisle of the congregation. As angered by the hellfire-and-brimstone sermon as the preacher's personal hypocrisy,

Belle takes up and creates her own Sunday morning service at home to turn her children's attention back to Christian compassion. Likewise, when the war intensifies, she runs her own one-room schoolhouse, teaching alike her children, "white trash" and the children of her house slaves.<sup>2</sup> By novel's end, Belle has withdrawn almost fully into her own home, the one place where she is free of outside interference.

As these incidents suggest, Belle, whether by design or not, comes across less as an Everywoman, and more as an emblematic figure. There is no evidence in the notes or correspondence relating to *Belle* that the character was based on a real person; instead, the character seems to be a composite of figures gleaned from her years of researching women and families of the Cumberland region. Such concerns are minimal, though, in the novel's overall scheme. Using the limited omniscient voice, as she had in *The Dollmaker*, to get inside the main character's mind, Arnow quickly gets the reader to assume all that Belle assumes. Hence, Belle's seemingly unlimited resourcefulness - spent raising five children and running the makeshift church, a school, and a homestead of thousands of acres - rarely becomes an issue within the novel. Like many other Arnow heroines, Belle seems innately and unshakably capable.

Certainly Arnow was aware that a completely flawless character would be static, and it is interesting to note the imperfections Arnow was beginning to introduce into the character in these final drafts. A few chapters have Belle habitually drinking strong toddies at the end of the day, while each progressive draft significantly changes a subplot involving Belle and the married man whom she loves from afar, Jean Paul Gaudais. Perhaps Arnow was reacting to the criticism she had faced in her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace*, which featured a protagonist, Leslie Collins, who fit the straitlaced, taciturn frontiersman role in the grand tradition of Daniel Boone and the work of James Fenimore Cooper. Arnow's championing of a seemingly flawless frontiersmen in the age of the antihero irritated many book reviewers, who overlooked the book's historical accuracy to attack the character's one-dimensionality. Arnow's task in this subsequent attempt at historical fiction, then, was a complex one. First, she had to recreate the Civil War era for a modern audience without specifically invoking the war's battles or key figures, in essence forgoing the fictional equivalent of her *Cumberland* social histories. Then she had to shed light on the relatively undocumented domestic facet of the war.<sup>3</sup> Finally, she had to recast characters for an audience increasingly receptive to - even expectant of - complex and strong women protagonists while heeding the established historical record. At the state it was left in, *Belle* seemed to promise all of these things. And while the book can get top-heavy with historical detail, it rarely stops to make didactic points. At its most lugubrious, *Belle* wears its accuracy on its sleeve, with its extensive descriptions of gun stocks and smokehouses loosely integrated with the story proper and signalling lulls in the plot. Arnow, then, was faced with the enviable problem of having to subordinate her proven skills as a historian to her fiction-writing prowess. The various drafts of the novel reflect Arnow's increasing weariness with minutiae and, as a result, the more historically bound passages of the book are pared down in the last working draft.

While a reader familiar with Arnow's published work would more than likely feel comfortable with the familiar Arnow themes of individualism and empowerment in *Belle*, the depiction of slavery in the manuscripts is much more ambiguous. Arnow probably shared in this ambiguity. Signalling, perhaps, the difficulty in getting a handle on a character, Arnow gave the house-cook character the rather cliched name "Beulah" in the first typescript draft (this draft exists only in fragments in the UK collection), changing it in the final draft to "Victoria."<sup>4</sup> Though it is obvious that the relationship between Belle, Victoria, and Victoria's family is a master-slave relationship and that Victoria's children maintain Belle's ornate, half-empty house and grounds, both the characters and the omniscient narrator consistently refer to Victoria and her family as "help," not slaves. Why this insistence on euphemism? Within the work, the euphemism makes some sense. If the reader is to sympathize with Belle's plight (and a plight it is, since she deals with abandonment, dismemberment of a son in battle, supply shortages, and invasions from Northern soldiers), the reader must put aside the objection to the ownership of slaves and see it as a "curious

institution" or "necessary evil." Running the house in tandem against seemingly impossible odds, Belle and Victoria must draw upon the same resources and each other, making Belle's relationship with Victoria more symbiotic than parasitic. But if Victoria is to be a double for Belle (as seems to be the case, given their inseparability throughout much of the work), the characterization of Victoria leaves much to be desired. Despite her more politically correct job description, Victoria's character is almost never focalized and never seen in a capacity outside her role to Belle. Unlike Belle, we never see Victoria fulfill her role as mother, outside of marshalling her children to perform tasks for Belle with machine-like efficiency. When Victoria's domestic duties are done, she promptly vanishes from the scene. This, coupled with her showy, finger-wagging fussiness towards outsiders, brings the depiction uncomfortably close at times to Margaret Mitchell's Mammy. Considering the round, dignified portrayals of women Arnow created throughout her career, Victoria's stasis is especially puzzling and a rare instance of Arnow employing a stock character.

Such shortcomings are the pitfalls of historical fiction, especially Civil War fiction written from the Southern point of view. Not only are we well aware of how the actual war turned out, we know how the war turned out in subsequent fiction. Scarlett, Rhett and the shadow of Tara loom large in our preconceptions, with Faulkner's misfit Southerners from *The Unvanquished* and *Flags in the Dust* nearby. So many shortcomings of *Belle* come about not because of any lapse of authorial skill, but the reader's own predisposition and conditioning, leaving perfectly "round" characters and otherwise believable situations predictable. Not all resemblances between *Belle* and *Gone With the Wind* are negative, however. Chapter X of *Belle* includes a delightful scene where Belle entertains her neighbors in a spirited "Christmas sing" that recalls the ebullient party on the eve of the war in *Gone With the Wind*. Other similarities hurt the work, though, largely through a capitulation to melodrama. For example, we recognize right off that Belle has sent three men off to war - her gruff husband Barstow (who married Belle through an arrangement with Belle's father), her overeager son William and the man she really loves, a dashing colonel named Jean Paul Gaudais. Jean Paul plays the sensitive Ashley Wilkes role to the hilt, offering the supportive advice and sympathy that Barstow seems wholly incapable of, so it is quite foreseeable from the earliest stages of the work that Jean Paul will die in battle, his own love for Belle unrequited and undeclared, save for a letter Belle receives after his demise. Likewise, early scenes of the brash, gung-ho William are a studied contrast to his scenes upon return, where he returns bitter and maimed, another burden for Belle to bear. Finally, scenes where Belle protects her homeplace and heritage from a succession of intruders - Yankee deserters, scalawags and rapacious white trash alike - strike familiar chords among *Gone With the Wind* readers.

Yet, judging from the typescripts of *Belle*, these similarities to Mitchell's work were not lost on Arnow as she was writing: each of these aforementioned scenes underwent several major revisions, all of which marked significant changes in tone. (Most significant among these changes was the eventual omission of a scene that hinted at an extramarital affair between Belle and Jean Paul.) These heavily edited and re-edited scenes, none of which apparently satisfied Arnow enough to be considered finished, illustrate the diligence and order she put into this work and, above all, the elusive stamp of originality she was aiming for.

Taken as a whole, the work cannot be relegated, along with decades' worth of mindless bodice-rippers, as a cheap imitation of sentimental Civil War fiction. Instead, it stands more as a character-driven piece. Though Belle fully supports the Confederate cause, the book is far from an apology for the Old South. If we look for a sense of place in *Belle*, we find it in the depictions of the family home, not in fanciful descriptions of rolling fields and lush magnolias. In this way, then, Arnow succeeds in creating an image of domestic pastoral, a welcome sanctuary from war and division. Belle and Victoria quietly personify in their home the values - respect, honor and self-determination - that the war is supposedly fought over. As [Sandra L. Ballard](#) rightly pointed out in the only published study of *Belle* to date, Belle can neither be pigeonholed as a spoiled child of the South nor as Confederacy incarnate. In fact, the book's best stand-alone scene comes when Belle gives aid and comfort to some

Union guerillas.<sup>5</sup> With a minimum of narrative sermonizing, Belle practices what she preaches in her home church and subordinates her allegiance to the Confederate cause to the Christian duty toward "strangers in our midst." Her other duty in this scene is that of surrogate mother to the soldiers, seeing much of her son William in the faces of these boys. Though her portrayal in this scene reminds readers of popular portrayals of Southern women during the war as feminine stalwarts of their family and their cause, in that order, Belle cannot be accurately described as a pioneer feminist character, since Arnow had no use for convenient labels, ideological or otherwise. As she is portrayed, Belle is simply a tireless force of nature, guiding her family through a time of extreme adversity led by her faith and inner courage.

Though by the time she was writing *Belle* Arnow may well have dismissed "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as an apprentice work, a certain harmony is struck when the two works are compared side by side. The foremost similarity is the attention to character nuance and Arnow's ability to situate characters in place. At both ends of her career, Arnow avowedly avoided the temptation to burden her work with excessive pathos or paint her characters with the broad brush of "local color." Portraying Jezebel in "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as a backwards, lazy hill girl would likely have raised a chuckle from big-city readers, but Arnow knew her region well enough to recognize its values (not the least of which was pride) and imbue the character with these same values. Likewise, Belle easily could have been a one-dimensional Southern belle or a long-suffering wife/mother had Arnow ignored both her research and her upbringing. "Place" in these two works refers less to superficial trappings like dialect and more to an ethos of self-reliance and forthrightness that Arnow shared with her best fictional creations. In this way, then, it seems preferable to read *Belle* outside of the canon of Civil War historical fiction and instead cast Belle in the mold of *The Dollmaker's* Gertie Nevels. Both characters personify courage and resourcefulness, virtually define the phrase "strong woman," and typify the best qualities of their region.

While one admires Arnow's own persistence in undertaking such an ambitious project as *Belle* while in her seventies (at a time when she was hounded by professors, students and journalists, all claiming to have "rediscovered" *The Dollmaker*), one also wishes she had called a truce with the editorial process and found a sympathetic editor to polish this work into a fully realized novel. Given this intervention, the work may have attained more consistency and an adequate ending. Had this help been forthcoming, southern Kentucky may well have had its own great Civil War novel. But if this unfinished novel does not offer as bracing an artistic jolt as the best of her work or stand undisputed as The Great Lost Arnow Novel, it still deserves our attention. After fifty years of writing about the region she considered home, the best parts of *Belle* prove that Arnow still had many insights on the Kentucky/Tennessee region to share. Besides, after all Harriette Simpson Arnow did for this region's literature and people, her work is owed nothing less. Though it may be convenient or fashionable in this post-postmodern age to dismiss her work as anachronistic, such a judgment minimizes or overlooks the themes that keep her work beloved by many readers: family, faith, love and place. If works that reflect these themes are anachronistic, perhaps it is time we set the clock back.

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## Notes

1. For example, Belle's husband is alternately called William Barstow and Barstow Goodwood, another character vacillates between Jean Paul Gaudais and Jean Paul Vauban. One character is amusingly called "young Dr. Name" in lieu of a permanent moniker (568).

2. An early draft of one of the schoolroom scenes was published in the Spring 1980 issue of the journal *Adena* as



"Interruptions to School at Home" and remains the only fragment of *Belle* yet published.

3. One need only compare Arnow's copious historical notes with a recent history of domestic life in the South like Catherine Clinton's *Tara Revisited* (1995) to see that Arnow was well ahead of her time in terms of her historical interests and attentions.

4. There is every possibility, though, that this name-in-progress was meant to be ironic. Certainly the name "Belle" is tinged with irony, since her practicality and responsible nature clash with the stereotypical and one-dimensional coy mistresses of the South.

5. Harriette Arnow, *Belle* "final" ts. (Harriette Arnow Collection, University of Kentucky), 72-101.

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This web page is maintained by

Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College  
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075

E-mail: [htallant@georgetowncollege.edu](mailto:htallant@georgetowncollege.edu)