

Haunting Stories of Abuse:
Revealing Ghosts Through Critical Performance Ethnography

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts in the Department of Communication Studies.

Chapel Hill
2008

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ABSTRACT

Ariel Gratch: Haunting Stories of Abuse: Revealing Ghosts through Critical
Performance Ethnography
(Under the direction of Renee Alexander Craft)

This project explores what it means to be haunted by a history of abuse. Through critical performance ethnography I explore the incommunicability of intimate abuse. In an effort to make meaning out of these acts, we work to label past experiences and place them into an easily explainable context. In so doing, many mundane acts of abuse might not be viewed as legitimate by the people who experienced these acts of abuse. This project employed a performance centered research method. A staged performance was created that juxtaposed ethnographic research, theories of victimization, memory, and haunting, and a traditional ghost story. This opened up conversations of how histories of abuse continue to effect people long after the physical abuse stops. This analysis suggests that focusing on the relationship aspect of intimate abuse offers methods of praxis that are absent when our focus rests on labels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I find myself constantly surprised by the relativity of time. Looking back on this project, I recollect the moments of panic where it seemed as though nothing would reach completion. As I look back through my memories, and as I watch myself work, I am keenly aware of the countless number of people waiting in the wings, as it were, who were watching out for me and making sure that I remained true to myself and true to this project. I look back and watch my panicked self thinking that time was against him, and I can't help but laugh. I realize now that, through all the support I was given by friends, family, and mentors, I had all the time in the world.

I must begin by thanking my partners in this project, Tanya, Chava, Turner, and Ann, who so generously shared with me some of the most beautiful and painful moments of their lives. I would also like to thank my thesis committee for countless words of wisdom, bits of advice, and nudges in the right direction. This project would also never have come close to completion without the talent and commitment of Amanda Clark, Timothy Daly, Sally Gold, Elizabeth Peacock, Lydia Rogers, and Katherine Wilkinson, the ensemble that created and performed the staged production of *The Bell Witch*. Finally I must thank my entire family who are also my friends, and all of my friends who are, in turn, also my family. I love you all very much.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I don't remember this; my brother tells me it happened. But, I don't remember. We were at the dinner table. She held a knife to my throat and laughed. I couldn't move and she said she'd kill me. But I don't remember it. – Turner

I took out the screen to the window. I was trying to run away, and he bursts in and says, "did you think I was an idiot!?! Did you think I wouldn't hear!?!". And the last thing I remember thinking before I blacked out was, what does you being an idiot have anything to do with your ability to hear me? - Ariel

You never knew when it might change. So, even when we were playing, and having a really good time, I was always conscious. I was always looking around, saying, Ok, where's my weapon? What can I use if he turns? (laughs). And, that carries over. I'm still very conscious, if I walk into a parking lot at night, ok, what can be a weapon? Where are the exits? So, it has made me more aware...of my surroundings. - Chava

We all knew we had fucked up childhoods, we just never talked about it. It'll be nice to talk about it. - Tanya

Statement of Problem

"I would just go limp. Like, he would pull my hair and he would drag me from my hair and I would just go limp. And it hurt, and I wanted to cry, but I would just go limp and I would laugh. I would laugh like a maniac. And that would really piss him off. But I wasn't going to let him have power over me. I was just going to defy him" (July 5 2007). My friend Ann told me this story during the summer of 2007. I remember the power and the confidence in her voice when she told this story and I remember the tears welling in my own eyes as I listened to her words. It reminded me of what my friend Tanya had said earlier that summer: "We all knew we had fucked up childhoods, we just

never talked about it. It'll be nice to talk about it" (May 15 2007). Sharing these stories with my friends, whom I will refer to as my partners in this project, helped me to examine some of the suspicions I had about the term "victim," and in turn, has opened up other questions about being in an abusive intimate relationship. Through the stories we shared, some common threads emerged:

- Memory and Forgetting: We were often unable to recall certain events and either told the event as it was told to us by someone else or simply told the frame of the event, unable to tell the whole event, as in the above excerpt from Turner's story.
- What it Means to be a Victim: The events that we remember and did relate were more often than not stories in which we stood up to the abuser, defied the abuser's wishes, or prevented others from being abused, at times, by offering ourselves up in place of another.
- What it Means to be Haunted: Each of us discusses our present relationships in contrast to and in part, as constituted by the abusive relationship of our childhood.

Guided by the stories we told, this paper explores: 1. How people recollect their abusive past, 2. what it means to be victimized by abuse and to be labeled a victim, and finally, 3. how the events of the past continue to have material consequences. In short, I examine the ways in which people are haunted by acts of abuse.

Personal Rationale

I began this project because I was haunted...by a story. A friend of mine was putting together a production that would combine a group of southern ghost stories and invited me to tell the story of the Bell Witch. I agreed and began researching the story. Slowly but surely, I became enthralled with the story. I couldn't stop telling it and I was

convinced, to some extent, I was simply not telling it “right”. Over the next few years I told the story numerous times, in different ways and through multiple media. After a while, I didn’t really want to tell the story anymore, but for some reason, I just couldn’t stop. I was beyond believing that there was a “right” way to tell the story. Instead, I began looking at what it was about the story that I was holding onto, and conversely, what in the story was holding on to me. In the story, the Bell Witch haunted the Bell family of northern Tennessee for four years. One night, the Witch possessed the Bell’s youngest daughter, Betsy. Guided by the witch, Betsy made her way to the riverbed in the middle of the night. Once there she squeezed nightshade into a bottle and headed back home. Upon returning home, Betsy crept into her father’s room, still possessed by the witch, and poured the poison into his mouth as he lay sleeping. The haunting occurred between 1817 and 1821, and it is often believed that the witch came about because John Bell, the father of the family, had abused his daughter Betsy¹. Thinking of my own history of abuse, I realized that the story of the Bell Witch allowed me to examine an explicit story of haunting in order to better understand the ways in which my own story is implicitly haunted. In the story of the Bell Witch, a spirit needs to be conjured to tell the story. The spirit manifests for multiple reasons and for multiple people, which I will discuss in chapter 3. Most importantly, however, the spirit exists to allow Betsy’s story to be told. Stories of intimate abuse are difficult to understand, particularly because of the incredibly complex relationship between the perpetrator of abuse and the person who is abused. In this paper, I argue that certain ghosts are conjured which both allow and inhibit stories of abuse to be told and heard. In this paper I use the words “witch,” “spirit,” and “ghost” interchangeably. They all serve a similar

¹ For a more complete account of the Bell Witch story, see Appendix A.

purpose as a trope of “haunting,” as a trace of the past, as a tool for explaining and making sense out of the incommunicable and nonsensical. I argue that it is easier to believe and to understand a supernatural agent causing harm, than it is to believe a family member or loved one, causing harm.

Social Rationale

I tell my personal narratives to friends and family and they often remark that it is a wonder that I can function. Some have told me that it is a wonder that I can love. Friends have told me that, were they hurt multiple times by people that they loved, they would have a much tougher time opening themselves up to others for the fear that they would be hurt again. I began to question if most people who have experienced acts of abuse forget how to love and how to function as “normal” people. I began to question the assumptions that are made about people who have been in situations of abuse and then the ways in which people that have experienced abuse become interpolated into the role of “victim” through popular discourses of abuse. Relating this back to the Bell Witch, I began to wonder how the witch functions in the story. What does the witch’s existence make “visible” and/or possible? I needed to speak with other people who had experienced situations of intimate abuse. In what ways would these people situate themselves within the discourse of victimization? Would they accept the role of victim, and if so, under what conditions? How does the experience of growing up in an intimate abusive relationship affect the way a person who experienced abuse thinks about and maneuvers within their current intimate relationships?

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

I believe that the term “victim” is inherently problematic. It frames a person who has experienced an abusive relationship as an inactive agent. During the abuse, the victim label suggests that the person who experienced the abuse was deprived of *any* power. Being labeled “victim” locks the abused in the constellation of moments where they lacked power to act for themselves. The label, “victim,” suggests passivity. My assumption is that the term “victim” renders silent moments during the act of abuse where the seemingly inactive agent, through non-violent resistance², through selective, repressed, or forgotten memory, and through a myriad of other devices prevents the perpetrator of abuse from holding power over them, if only for a moment, and how they can, in some instances, hold power over the perpetrator. I am not, however, totally eschewing the term “victim,” as there may be places where it can and should be employed. I am, instead, arguing for a strategic use of the label, one in which a person, when suitable, might be “victim, and/or...” Labels work to constitute who someone is and cast them as such at all points. We might benefit from focusing on how someone was victimized, rather than locking them into a term that might not be appropriate.

Limitations

As I began this project, I realized that my partners, who so generously allowed me to engage their stories, were people with whom I already had an established connection and rapport. This means that, to some extent, I knew them and had a relationship with them because of our similarities. While this closeness does allow me

² I use non-violent resistance here only insofar as I am focusing on moments where the person who was being abused was able to gain a modicum of agency and power without committing a physical act of violence.

to ask questions I might normally shy away from, I have to be aware that in interviewing and working with people who have similar personal experiences, I am not getting information from far outside of my comfort zone and my research may be narrow in this respect. Because of my familiarity with my partners in this project, I had to commit myself to a higher level of active listening that allowed me to hear these stories and voices as if for the first time in order to make sure that I didn't gloss over any nuances that I might otherwise have missed. In chapter 3 I discuss how critical ethnography and co-performative witnessing allow me to remain more fully engaged in acts of what I call "intimate ethnography."

In addition to a higher level of active listening, I also had to be careful about my position as researcher. Although I was given permission to use the interviews in the context of a performance as well as this thesis, I could do so only in certain ways. I could not make any assumptions about the feelings or motivations of my partners in this project without consulting them first. Further, my partners and I agreed that if, for whatever reason, they wanted to disassociate themselves from the conclusions I drew and the project itself, I would concede to their request, despite the repercussions that doing so may have had for the rest of the project. Fortunately, this problem never arose.

De-Limitations

This project focused on a single link in the chain of abuse. That is, I approached abuse from the point of view of people who have experienced physical acts of abuse but have not themselves been abusive. The interview with Tanya was illustrative of this point. During the interview she suggested that she thought that her father had been

abused when he was young. Though she believes this, she doesn't assume that he is abusive because of the abuse he received. In this way she can continue to distance herself from him on multiple levels, which I discuss in chapters 2 and 3. As a researcher, I had to heed Tanya's words and be careful to stay true to her story without vilifying her father. I couldn't assume what it was that made him do what he did or become the person that she knows him to be.

Inspired by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Marc Augé, I also questioned why people say they forget or remember certain events, but not whether or not it is a conscious or unconscious choice to forget or remember. I was not concerned with what causes one to remember or forget. Rather, I was concerned with how the actions of memory are mobilized.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 – Revealing Ghosts

In this chapter I look at some of the major claims in the literature on victimization and abuse, memory, and haunting. I begin by examining some of the labels that tend to float around discourses of abuse. I then put these labels in conversation with the narratives of my partners in this project in order to ask how/if any of these labels are applicable and/or appropriate. I look at the act of labeling as an act of power and as a constitutive act. As such, the act of labeling has implications for the person labeling as well as the person labeled. That people will sometimes try to label themselves before others get a chance to label them leads me to explore the ways in which people remember acts of abuse. Popular discourses of abuse, I argue, often work to prevent certain stories from being heard. By looking at the active ways in which we

construct our memories, we can see how the past continues to affect us in the present. I argue that confronting the ghosts of one's past begins by looking at the ways in which people are haunted in the present.

Chapter 3 – Haunting Abuse

I begin this chapter by taking a close look at the ethnographic process. Following Dwight Conquergood and D. Soyini Madison, I explore what it means to engage dialogically and performatively, and I delve into what is critical about critical ethnography. In so doing, I present the groundwork I used during the ethnographic process which made possible the staged performance and the subsequent analysis. I look at how performance works as a mode of analysis and how through the ethnographic encounter and a staged performance of the narratives I collected from my partners in this project, I was able to explicate the pools of theory I drew from in chapter 2. Finally, by showing how stories of abuse may be relative to each other but need not be constituted by that relativism, I discuss how understanding someone as haunted might be a productive way to think about a person's history of abuse.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, I take a moment to explore the aspects of the research that were left untouched and that continue to haunt discourses of abuse. In the conclusion, I take a glance at some issues that, although related and highly relevant to this study, did not fit within the scope of this paper. Questions arose through the interviews that lead me to wonder how the stories of people who perpetrate abuse fit into discourses of

intimate abuse and what further research needs to be done in this area. There are also questions about gender and sexuality that arise throughout, as well as questions of body memory and how people with similar pasts might be drawn together that need to be examined. Finally, I consider possible modes of praxis and how praxis is an integral part of any theoretical project.

CHAPTER 2

REVEALING GHOSTS

In this chapter, I look at some of the literature on victimization, memory, and haunting and begin to examine how the stories told to me by my partners in this project begin to disrupt discourses of victimization and challenge some of the ways that people are interpolated into the role of victim. I argue that certain stories don't fit within the discourses of victimization and may not be heard as stories of abuse, or at all. For someone who has experienced an act of abuse, what does it mean for something to exist outside of the discourse of victimization?

Victimization

Traditionally, we call someone a victim when they have gone through some traumatic experience. When we look at children who have experienced abuse, it is easy to label them as [powerless] victims. Nicola Gavey, following Martha Burt and Rhoda Estep, suggests that there are certain "obligations" as well as a "negative social value" placed upon the victim role (58). By discussing these obligations and negative social values, we can begin to problematize the label of victim. We can further problematize it once we begin to speak to people who have experienced abuse and listen to how they position their stories in relation to this term. I argue that by labeling a person "victim," we invite a subjectivity that denies any claims they may have to agency. Because the term "victim" is so heavily loaded, rather than focusing on the various iterations of the term solely in the literature on intimate abuse, I find it useful to look across the spectrum

of victimization, as the different points along the spectrum speak to and with each other. For this reason, I draw on texts that address the term on personal, communal, and national levels. I argue that a nuanced treatment of “victim” may also be applicable to broader “victimization” studies.

The rhetoric of “victim” is traditionally attached to people who have gone through traumatic events, from large scale acts of violence such as the Holocaust or the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to individual struggles, such as people with illnesses that could be terminal, such as cancer. There has also been, especially in the last twenty years, a tendency to label people who experienced sexual and intimate abuse as victims. Though the term is problematic within the traditional realms of the discourse (illness and war), it is equally, if not more problematic when attached to interpersonal acts of abuse (rape and intimate abuse).

When we attach the label “victim” to someone, we fail to acknowledge the moments where that person had agency. As Sharon Lamb points out, “If we see the victim as a ‘victim,’ then it is fine to acknowledge that there might be times when she is just reacting” (126). In the introduction to this paper, I related a story that Ann, one of my partners in this project told me. Instead of crying when her father pulled her by her hair, Ann chose to laugh. Lamb suggests that were we to label Ann a “victim,” rather than see her laugh as a mode of resistance, we might simply call it a “reaction.” To simply react to an event is not necessarily extraordinary. Her laughter, as a mode of resistance, however, is extraordinary. It is neither normal nor expected. We can see this when her father begins to pull harder. Having not elicited the expected reaction from his daughter, he redoubles his efforts to make her cry. The one simply reacting in this

scenario is her father. Ann, on the other hand, is actively defying him. I am not, however, totally eschewing the term “victim,” or any of the terms within the discourse of victimization. As Gavey points out, “it can be troubling to know how to proceed” since the stories we hear, and for that matter the stories we tell, as well as the terms we use may not always be consistent with “either dominant traditional or dominant feminist constructions” (68-9). By illuminating these differences, though, Gavey suggests that we may open up new analyses that are sympathetic to people across a wide spectrum of abuse, “no matter how they experience it” (69-70). The act of labeling, then, does not just affect the person who experienced abuse, but also has significant implications for researchers and feminist theorists who often choose the label.

The act of labeling is an act of power. If the label sticks, the person labeled is assumed to have the trademarks of that label. Since the label of victim does not afford agency to the person who experienced abuse, the term “survivor” is often used instead. To say a person “survived” is to say that they faced an event where the possibility of them not surviving was a substantial one. As Lamb points out, “for victims of sexual abuse, rarely was a life at stake” (119). Using the term then, suggests Lamb, brings out the worst aspects of the abuse and further vilifies the act. It also suggests that the person who experienced the abuse was “an active resister in her abuse” (119), suggesting that whatever actions the person experiencing the act of abuse took could be viewed as resisting acts. The survivor label suggests a sense of purpose and a choice to survive, a sense of power or ability to survive, and a sense of having lived through and past an event or a series of events. Lamb says that “the call ‘I am a survivor,’ comes from a belief that people *can* label themselves and that this is an empowering strategy in a

world where others seek to label you” (121). It is important for many people who have experienced acts of abuse to not be labeled a “victim.” By claiming the role of “survivor,” the person who experienced the abuse can take on the powerful act of labeling for themselves and at the same time highlight the moments within the abusive relationship in which they actively resisted the abuse.

However, the label “survivor” is oftentimes just as problematic as the label “victim”. For example, while Ann’s story above is a great illustration of the difference between what it means to be a victim of abuse versus what it means to survive abuse, the rest of her narrative also points to one of the major problems with the survivor label, namely that long after the physical abuse stops, the person continues to be affected. Ann likes the term survivor because, as she says, “it is more positive. I don’t like to think of myself as a victim. I mean, it happened, but you’re past it...but, you’re not past it. You’re still stuck there. I don’t know...” (Jan. 12 2008). Ann never actually says that she considers herself a survivor but simply that she likes the term better than “victim,” because it is more positive. She links the term victim to someone who is still experiencing abuse and notes that while she is no longer experiencing the abuse, she suggests that just because the physical act of abuse is past, it does not mean that she is done dealing with it. For Ann, as well as my other partners in this project, the act of abuse continues to affect them and plays a part in their everyday lives. In that way, then, we never pass the act of abuse. In Holocaust Testimonies, Lawrence Langer recalls the response of one Holocaust survivor who, when “asked if she lives with Auschwitz after her return,” replied, “No – I live beside it” (5). Living beside an event is a good way to think of Ann’s statement above. By being both past the event as well as acknowledging

that the event is still with her, she is aware of how the event does not constitute her actions but nevertheless, continues to affect them.

When asking my partners in this project what term made sense to them, no one was able to give me a definitive answer. Turner simply said that he was ambivalent. He went on to say that “It *was* abuse. I survived it. I don’t perpetrate it, and I don’t seek revenge. There’s no negative connotation on the word survivor, but maybe it’s a little too optimistic” (Jan. 12 2008). Tanya suggested that the term “‘survivor’ is a bit extreme. Plus you haven’t survived, because you’re still dealing with it. Maybe a recovering victim? It’s always a learning process. Unless you don’t try to move on. If you’re still playing the victim card” (Jan. 12 2008). We all have different views on our past and continue to confront our past in different ways. To label someone as a victim, a survivor, or any other term for that matter, casts them at all points as such. Tanya’s term “recovering victim” helps us not to forget about the moments where the person who was abused lacked agency, as we might were we to refer to them as a survivor³. By labeling someone a survivor, we might view their ability to act and the methods they use to defend/retaliate against the abuser as either canceling out the abuse (if you successfully defend yourself it’s not abuse), or as an act of abuse in its own right (Renzetti 47).

If it is necessary to examine the labels applied to people who were abused, it is also necessary to examine the labels attached to abusers as well as to the situation of abuse. Jeanne Marecek, following bell hooks, suggests that “the ubiquitous term *abuser* shrinks a man’s identity to a single dimension, just as the term *victim* shrinks a woman’s identity” (174). In “Monsters and Victims” (2004), Julia T. Wood asks if the men she

³ Recovering also medicalizes the term and places the person who experienced abuse as someone who needs medical treatment, a problem the scope of this paper is not able to address.

interviewed, all of whom abused their partners, are “monsters, or victims, or both” (556). Wood and others (Johnson, 2006; Sokoloff with Pratt, 2006) argue that one of the many factors that play into intimate abusive relationships is the way in which normative masculine codes exist in our society. To place the question of “monsters or victims” together is to present us with two heavily loaded terms. Wood is suggesting that if we are going to consider men who commit acts of intimate abuse as monsters, we must also consider the possibility of those same men as victims. In “Lethal Theater” Dwight Conquergood notes how “with each exemplary monster executed, capital punishment is legitimized and revitalized” (342), through the ritual of state execution. By casting the person to be executed as a monster, argues Conquergood, we take away the subjectivity of the person executed and in so doing, the prospect and the possibility of rehabilitation and rehumanization. In the same way, if we cast a person who abuses a loved one as a monster, we deny that person their subjectivity. That these labels are simple and help us make sense of otherwise very complex relationships is also problematic. If we were to say, for example, that in a particular moment a person acted like a monster, but they can be a very nice person, we are forced to confront the terms “acted like,” “very nice,” and “person.” The statement, “this person is a monster,” is much easier to understand. What’s at play here is really this wonderful sense of humanity. Conquergood brings up the notion of effigy to describe the way we tend to focus on a singular aspect of a person.

For Conquergood, effigies

produce magical power from parts, pieces, effluvia, operating on principles of contiguity and synecdoche—the piece, the part that stands for the whole—more than likeness or resemblance... An effigy is the fusion of image and body, symbol and source, the figurative and the physical. Because a jury will never vote to kill a human being, the fundamental task of the prosecutor is to turn the accused into an effigy composed of his or her worst parts and deeds. (353)

By creating effigies we condemn someone to a less than human stature, but we also show that were we to view someone as human, we would have a much harder time convincing ourselves to take a life. The effigy then works to maintain the person as less than human but also suggests the possibility of praxis in the knowing that we will not execute a person we can relate to.

The act of labeling, then, is revealing on multiple levels. Labeling leaves out any possibilities that are not within the label. To be labeled a victim, a survivor, or a monster, is to be cast at all points as such. The label also says something about the particular relationship and constitutes that relationship in particular ways. We can see how labeling someone as an abuser or a monster also has implications for the person they abused as that person is now someone who willingly let a monster, someone with no redeeming qualities, into their lives. We can see how, even when a person labels themselves as a survivor, the label works to conflate who they are with the violence of their past. If we want to broaden the discourse of victimization and we want to find more productive ways to talk about what it means to be labeled within this discourse (as survivor, victim, recovering victim, former victim, etc...), we must also continue to expand our understanding and interpretation of the person who perpetrates the abuse. To address the question of intimate abuse, we must see it first as a relationship. To do so requires that we acknowledge that no member of the relationship can ever fit neatly into a single label, but may use any combination of them strategically.

Memory and Haunting

I would just go limp.

I don't remember this

*Like, he would pull my hair
and he would drag me from my hair
and I would just go limp.
And it hurt, but I would just go limp
and I would laugh.
I would laugh like a maniac!*

-Ann

*My brother tells me it happened.
But, I don't remember.
We were at the dinner table
She held a knife to my throat and laughed
I couldn't move and she said she'd kill me.
I don't remember it.*

-Turner

After working with my partners in this project, I believe that there are certain ways in which abuse is remembered and forgotten that need to be examined. Drawing on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Marc Augé, I argue that there is an element of choice within memory. The acts of remembering and forgetting are employed in strategic ways in an effort to make meaning out of complex realities. During these acts, memories are manipulated, highlighted, and, at times, created. Despite all this work, however, there are still events that never seem to make sense. These events continue to affect people long after the actual event has ended. Drawing on the work of Avery Gordon, I find it useful to talk about the haunting aspects of abuse. To do so allows us to spend less time concerned with how our memories are constructed and focus on how past events continue to have material effects. That certain events don't make sense, that they continue to haunt, and that they continue to affect long after the event is over, speaks to the power of memory and the incommunicability of stories of intimate abuse.

In *Unfashionable Observations*, Nietzsche suggests that “existence itself is nothing but an uninterrupted having-been, something that lives by negating, consuming, and contradicting itself” (88). This living through negating suggests that in order to live, we must be able to forget, ignore, and go against some of the things that we may believe or remember. He offers up three views of history, the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical. Each of these views works in a very specific way to connect to the past, and

each one holds different implications for my partners in this project. Within the monumental view of history, we know that the future is possible because we have seen the accomplishments of the past. Essentially, the accomplishments of the past speak to very real possibilities that the future holds. However, large parts are left out so the past from which we are drawing is left with gaping holes. Within an antiquarian view, we acknowledge that the past brought us to where we are and our view of the past remains solid. In this way, we feel the past rather than see it. We do not get a broad idea of the past, but rather a feeling, or a very specific image that prevents us from seeing the past in new ways. Finally, the critical view of history suggests that by dissolving the past we are able to create a future out of the rubble of the present. However, this can lead us to believe that “every past is worthy of being condemned” (106), and towards a justification that *any* future can be just and right.

Each of the three views of history, then, asks us in a specific way to forget and remember certain things, but also to forget and remember in specific ways. In *Oblivion*, Augé discusses the presence of mnemonic traces “that for no obvious reason haunt the individual’s present but cannot always be assigned a specific time and place, enshrined inside the anecdote of an authenticated remembrance” (19). For Augé, that which we forget shapes the present that we remember. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we create our memories of the present. In the same way that an etching is created by scratching into the surface of the metal and is therefore constituted by what is not revealed, so too are our memories shaped by that which we don’t reveal, be it through forgetting, screening, or repressing memories. Both Nietzsche and Augé suggest that our memories, individual and collective alike, are shaped by that which we forget.

Drawing on the information given to me by my partners in this project, I began to see why certain memories might stand out while others get pushed aside, behind, or away. This then leads me to question the ways in which the act of forgetting certain memories can be empowering.

Forgetting does not have to be a totally unconscious choice. For Augé, “not to succeed in forgetting one’s recent past is to prohibit oneself from catching up with the anterior past” (61). In this concept of the return, we are relating the moments of the present to our memories of the past and allowing those memories to constitute the way we confront the present. For example, Ann labels her father as the abuser and has said that because of him, she’s afraid to be alone with older men: “I still don’t feel comfortable around older men. I have this great teacher, and I dread going to his office because I expect things could happen if I’m alone” (July 5 2007). The memories, it seems, will continue to exist as mnemonic traces, and may always be there. However, the possibility may exist where their presence might be forgotten. Forgetting then might allow other memories to stand out and have a stronger affect on the present.

We can take this analysis further by looking at what Avery Gordon discusses as the “complex personhood”. For Gordon, “complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning” (5). We see the actions of a person and realize that those actions are always already constituted by that which we cannot see: traces of the past. Through the story she tells, Ann suggests that upon entering the office of her professor, she realizes that she is a different person than should be there: a person haunted by her past. Her professor doesn’t know this, but is

nevertheless effected by the presence of this trace. Ann shows her difficulty in abandoning what might not be the real reality. She might not have to be constantly on guard from older men, but her past has shaped her so that other states of mind don't feel as comfortable for her. As Ann puts it, her past has made it so that much of her present is "damage control. I try to manage any random variable that I can. Cover all possible bases. Try to plan way ahead."

Ann knows that her life is filled with enormously subtle meaning, and her narrative suggests that she believes in the possibility that at the same time her life and the lives of others are straightforward. For Ann, however, the subtle meaning tends to dominate her relationships in a way that obscures that which is straightforward. As such, Ann's memories help make her more aware of her actions and her surroundings. By juxtaposing part of her narrative with a part of Turner's narrative, I think we can begin to see how acts of remembering and forgetting help to reveal our complex personhoods. In particular, I'm interested in looking at how the act of forgetting can be considered an act of agency as well as a demonstration of the agency already present. In the excerpt at the beginning of this section Ann clearly remembers her event, whereas Turner clearly forgets his. Be they conscious or unconscious, I would like to look at these moments as *choices* of memory. For Ann, her father was trying to hold power over her as he dragged her by her hair, but because of Ann's "maniacal laughter," was unable to do so. Her father's inability to control her reaction caused him to pull Ann's hair harder in an effort to stop her laughing, but her laughing continued. It was a moment of triumph for Ann in which she held power over her father, despite the fact that he physically controlled her. For Turner, what we don't see in this snippet is the

preceding moment. Were we simply to analyze what was present, we may say that he is repressing something and it needs to be brought out and “dealt” with. In the moment before, however, Turner recalls in detail how he picked his brothers up from school, helped them get their homework done, and cooked dinner for them before his mother came in and held the knife to his throat. What I am suggesting here is that there were moments where Turner and Ann were both active agents which they remember explicitly. When Turner doesn’t remember a moment in which he was unable to act, and unable to protect his brothers, it might be an unconscious choice made in order to focus on the moments where he was an active agent. This raises an interesting question. Is it possible for conscious agency to come out of an unconscious choice? It is because those memories exist that they can recollect a past that is marked by traces of abuse, but constituted by acts of power. It seems, at times, to be productive for both Turner and Ann to remember and forget certain things. I think that one possible way they might make meaning out of what they remember and forget is to look at the acts of remembering and forgetting as acts of agency. In this way, a conscious sense of agency can emerge from an unconscious act.

What we forget shapes what we remember. Memories are shaped by Oblivion, Augé says, as “the outlines of the shore are created by the sea” (20). It seems that, to some extent, my partners in this project are actively seeking to retrieve agency through the crafting of memory. In “Convolut K” Walter Benjamin discusses how “there is a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of awakening” (389). For Benjamin, awakening is what pulls the past into the present; the other to the same. The present, then, is the only place where the past is solid. This is not

however, the solid past suggested by Nietzsche's antiquarian view of history. Nietzsche presents us with the three views of history in an attempt to demonstrate how any of the single views can cause almost irreparable damage. Benjamin's conception of awakening is an attempt at dancing among Nietzsche's three views. Creating a solid past in the present suggests that the memories that do find their way to the present exist because they enable us to see our history in a way that allows us to understand, and exist in the present. The past is solid, but it is also always in a state of re-solidifying itself. As new memories are produced, our solid past is constantly reshaped to incorporate the new memories. Though Ann laments at the fact that her past continues to haunt her, she also realizes that her conceptions of the world are changing. "I know now what I'm at least allowed to expect from someone without getting upset. I feel more comfortable having needs. We educate ourselves as a safety mechanism. You know, I don't want to be a closet example...Education is a way out; constructive instead of destructive...You either destroy yourself, or rally against" (Jan. 12 2008). To an extent, each one of my partners in this project, me included, feels similar to Ann, but like Ann, we are all still troubled by the ways in which our past continues to come up in frustrating and all too familiar ways. Looking at our stories through a lens of haunting enables me to discuss how the past continues to affect us and what it means that it does so.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (1997) suggests that haunting "is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it" (7). The ghost exists to represent an absence. In the case of intimate abuse, the ghost represents the act of abuse that is simply unexplainable. As Gordon suggests, "the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice

not only to itself, but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss...” (63-4). It is hard to make sense out of being hurt by a loved one. As Ian Hacking notes, people will often create “bizarre memories [that] are not strictly true, but are ways in which a patient can shield herself from the grim reality that it was her immediate family that abused her” (120). Echoing Hacking, Janice Haaken suggests, “In the project of remembering it may be easier to struggle against a demonic presence than a perniciously absent one” (38). The ghost, then, exists to be that which cannot be, or that which simply doesn’t make sense. The ghost is the abuse within an intimate relationship. In this light, I look at a haunting as the way in which the ghost continues to have effects long after the relationship. In other words, the haunting is the traces of the past existing in the present. When we look at traces as having material consequences, i.e. the ghost and that which it effects, we can discuss haunting within a social context where the existence of ghosts and spirits can be bracketed and the actual haunting affects can be discussed. For instance, the act of abuse changes the way in which the person who was abused confronts the world. Lines in the narratives I collected such as Chava’s “I became more aware of my environment” (Sept. 1 2007), or Ann’s “I wasn’t like the other kids. I had a sense of being tough” (July 5 2007), speak to what the story of the Bell Witch cannot. In the story of the Bell Witch, the family was excommunicated from the church and was unable to turn to the community for help. Because of the Witch, the Bell family was marked as different. To say that John Bell was loving and abusive at the same time is hard to understand. The Witch allowed the town to say that something was wrong in the Bell household, but not to address the actual problem. In the next chapter I give a more detailed analysis of the Bell Witch Story. There, I look at exactly what the ghost made

possible, from the prevention of John Bell abusing his daughter, to his death. I will also examine how because of the ghost, the family was unable to live a normal life and how Betsy wasn't allowed to act for herself. When we attribute actions to a supernatural presence we can lose sight of the other possible iterations of a story. To bracket the ghost and talk about the haunting is to bypass preconceived notions and begin to see the world in different ways.

In The Use of Pleasure, Michel Foucault writes that the object of post-modern thought “was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently” (cited in Cooper and Blair 513). A framework of haunting, a framework that accepts that there may be things we don’t know how to explain, is one of the ways in which we can begin to think differently about abuse, about victimization, and about how we remember our personal and collective histories. To understand oneself as haunted, I argue, allows a person to bracket the discourse around the ghost. To do so, is one way in which we can expand the discourse and allow more disparate stories to be heard. Being constrained by a discourse forces someone who wants to tell their story into a particular framework that may prevent them from telling the story the way they need to tell it. One of the clearest moments where the discourse worked to constrain what stories could be heard happened during the recovered memory movement of the late 1980’s and early 1990’s.

The recovered memory movement points to how certain stories, because they don’t fit into specific discourses of abuse, simply can’t be heard. To be brief, many daytime talk shows aired specials about how, through therapy, many people were “recovering” lost memories. These memories revealed that their family members

belonged to a satanic cult and that, as a part of the cult's rituals, they were abused. When investigated, the claims of satanic ritual abuse could never be verified and led to various groups claiming that the recovered memories were "false" memories. One way of understanding recovered memories of ritual abuse is as an effort to make meaning out of an otherwise incommunicable experience. In this way, we can see the satanic ritual as just one way to imbue meaning into abuse. That these memories emerged, even though they were proved "false," speaks to the need of the person who claimed them to make meaning out of something. In Memory, History, Forgetting, Paul Ricoeur writes that, "inasmuch as the collective memory is the target of this harsh schooling by which a society constructs its own solidarity, the work also offers the occasion for a reflection on memory itself" (323). One of the things that Tanya discussed during our interview was that she knows that a lot of people had it a lot worse than she did, but that she also had it worse than others. Over the past year, I have been trying to find ways to talk about my own history of abuse. As I moved forward in my project, and as I began to see my stories in the context of a larger discourse of intimate abuse, I continued to have questions about the ways in which I feel comfortable talking about my history of abuse. It had taken years to talk to my friends about our experiences for a variety of reasons, one of which is that to an extent, we didn't feel like our stories were valid stories of abuse.

When stories of satanic abuse were popular, they were the extreme cases of child abuse, and hence, those stories made it so that all other stories of abuse became relative to this particular type of abuse. Other stories of abuse became constituted by that relativism and tended to essentially count less than the more serious act of satanic abuse.

In other words, if satanic abuse was the extreme, then unless that was the abuse a person experienced, it could always have been worse. Though none of my partners in this project claimed to experience abuse to this extent, we still saw the abuse we suffered as relative to other acts of abuse. In her interview, Tanya said, “we all knew that we had fucked up childhoods, but we never talked about it” (May 15 2007). We all questioned whether or not our stories were valid stories of abuse. Though our stories were all very different and we all suffered in different ways, we all continue to be affected by the abuse in similar ways. In other words, we weren’t sure to what extent our experiences counted as abuse, but we were all sure that our experiences continue to affect us.

One of the things that Ricoeur suggests is that the voice of dissent is one that needs to be taken into consideration. Stories of satanic abuse point to two things, namely that for the person who was abused, the abuse they suffered didn’t feel significant and that what they suffered might not “count” as abuse when compared with what others suffered. The recovered memory movement shows that certain memories that need to be heard and understood remain silent. By finding new ways to listen to stories of abuse, by engaging dialogically and performatively with others, we might be able to enable people who want to talk about the ways in which the mundane acts of abuse they experienced continue to affect them, no matter what form the abuse took. In other words, by bracketing the act of abuse, the ghost, we can see that past events continue to haunt us. While the actual acts of abuse we suffered may never really make sense, the ways in which people are affected by abuse can be made clearer.

CHAPTER 3

HAUNTING ABUSE

After spending the summer of 2007 interviewing my partners in this project, I spent the fall of 2007 working with a committed ensemble of six students to weave my partners' stories together with the story of the Bell Witch. My hope in doing this was to create a staged performance that would open up a discussion around the questions I had about abuse. It was important to me to make this performance accessible to a wide audience, so the ensemble worked to make sure that the production was aesthetically pleasing as well as critically engaging. Each of the performers took on the role of one of my partners in this project as well as one of the members of the Bell family, except for the performer who played Tanya. Her secondary role was as the heart of the ensemble. She worked to make sure that when the performers were telling the story of the Bell family, their story was in line with what the ensemble had agreed on as far as how these stories should be told.

Inspired by the work of the performance group "Split Britches," we allowed the arguments that the ensemble had during rehearsal about the nature of the narratives and the meanings behind them, to not only inform our performance choices, but to actually become a part of the performance. The arguments demonstrated our own apprehensions of telling and interpreting these stories, as well as the apprehensions some of my partners in this project had in giving us permission to interpret them. In this chapter, I begin by looking at the way I approached my partners in this project and how my choices in the

field were influenced by current literature on critical performance ethnography. I then juxtapose parts of the narratives of each of my partners in this project with the member of the Bell Witch story that their stories were linked to in performance. In so doing, I continue the discussion that these narratives and the production began and continue to look at the ways in which a framework of haunting can be used to talk about moments of abuse.

Critical Performance Ethnography

In “Rethinking Ethnography,” Dwight Conquergood, drawing on Michael Jackson’s project of “radical empiricism,” discusses how the project of ethnography moves from the traditional approach of “Other-as theme to Other-as-interlocutor . . . [it] represents a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication” (354). Ethnography, then, is a move from observing the subject to engaging with and connecting to the subject. Conquergood goes on to explain how in the ethnographic relationship, “listening is an interiorizing experience, a gathering together, a drawing in, whereas observation sizes up exteriors” (355). In a sense, within the ethnographic relationship, the research depends on the relationship. It is one thing to get a story from someone and to use that story for the purpose of research. It is another thing entirely for the person who told their story to believe that the story was heard and understood. Lawrence Langer explains how for the former victims, the Holocaust was a totally unpredictable world, and how that world is incommunicable, primarily in that “The urge to tell meets resistance from the certainty that one’s audience will not understand” (xiii). To simply record another’s story is not the same as listening to the story. There may be experiences that don’t make sense. A mother holding a knife to the throat of her son

because he cooked dinner for his brothers and sister as in Turner's story, for instance, is a situation that just doesn't make sense. There is a difference, however, between making sense out of an event and understanding the experience another went through. It is not necessary for me, for example, to understand the exact feeling of the experience that Turner went through. It is, however, necessary for me to understand how what he went through is something that I could not easily understand. It is a sincere act of listening that is a vital bridge to understanding. In this way, even the act of sincerely admitting that I do not understand the experience is, in a sense, an understanding of the experience. It is an understanding of the experience as something so extraordinary that it truly is incomprehensible. For a story to be greeted by that sort of understanding is what ethnographic research attempts and it is through a relationship with the "Other-as-interlocutor" rather than "Other-as-theme," that this might be possible.

The question that remains then is this: how do we listen to these stories? To simply tell Turner that I understand what he went through when his mother held the knife to his throat would be a lie. I have no words to greet an experience like that. I had to ask him to repeat the story, twice, to make sure that I was not imagining what he had told me. In order to begin to understand what Turner went through, listening to his story was not enough. Listening to his story three times was not enough. In order to understand the story, I needed to understand more about Turner himself, and to do so required knowing more than what Turner told me. I had to understand Turner as well as my other partners in this project, beyond the acts of abuse. As an ethnographer, I draw on the work of Michel Foucault, who suggests that the role of theory is to "analyze the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build

little by little a strategic knowledge (savoir)” (Power/Knowledge 145). Foucault uses the verb “savoir” instead of “connaître,” which suggests a knowing of/how/with, rather than a knowing who/what/where, and it is the attempt at gaining this type of knowledge that is what is critical in the ethnographic project and what enables a more engaged listening.

In one meaning of the word, ethnography is critical in that it critiques the discourse and reveals that which can't be heard. Critical ethnography seeks to find new ways of knowing and understanding that observation alone could not hope to reveal. Ethnography also becomes critical insofar as it is urgently needed. Langer suggests that for the former victims of the Holocaust, “the Holocaust is a communal wound that cannot heal. This is the wailing subtext of their testimonies, wailing beneath the convalescent murmur of their surface lives” (204-5). Without others being able to understand their stories, the totally unpredictable world of intimate abuse remains incommunicable and continues to haunt the person who experienced abuse. The “wailing subtext” of the narratives requires a more intimate form of knowing. It is this type of knowledge that Foucault calls for and which critical ethnography attempts. In “Interventions and Radical Research,” Conquergood, following Michel de Certeau, discusses “two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract – ‘the map’; the other one practical, embodied, popular – ‘the story’” (369). In this language, each person possesses a map – a complex amalgam of interpersonal and social choices that are present on their body and through their interactions – and a story – that which makes the amalgam complex, namely the fact that each one of the often disparate choices we make, from what we wear to how we talk and to what we say or don't,

connect, even if we don't know or ever can know how they connect. Every location on the map exists because something complex happened. Everything from the clothes we wear, to the things we say point to who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. We can look at the map then as our everyday performances and the story as the subtext that constitutes those performances. The map and the story are not mutually exclusive ways of knowing. They are, instead, intrinsically linked and constitutive of each other. For ethnography to be truly critical, the ethnographic approach must take into account multiple ways of knowing the other. In "The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography," Soyini Madison suggests that through performance ethnography, the dialogic performative "becomes the antithesis of what it means to be alone" (320). Following Madison, I argue that the ethnographic encounter must be dialogic and is in its nature, performative. A dialogic encounter between the ethnographer and the person they are working with suggests that both parties want to know *with* the other, rather than simply about. A performative approach, in that we understand ourselves to be performing various aspects of our identities (Butler, 2007), suggests that we can never truly understand the other, but through an encounter with them, we can understand more about them and at the same time, more about ourselves. The dialogic performative in critical ethnography is how we engage and interact with the other so that new stories can be told and heard in ways in which they otherwise would remain silent.

When I initially spoke with Tanya about coming to visit and to interview her, she responded saying "it's funny, cause we all knew that we had fucked up childhoods, and we were all there for each other, but we never really talked about it" (May 15 2007). My engagement with my partners in this project over the course of the summer, and as I

continue to work with them, sending them drafts of the script and bits of my thesis, has allowed us to better understand some of the things we went through in relation to each other. During the interview with Tanya, she would say that she knew she had it a lot worse than some, but a lot better than others. The abuse was all relative. Ann remembers knowing she was different, but wasn't able to relate it to her family until she was older. Chava discussed how living in an abusive household made her a stronger more aware woman. Turner talked about how he continues to struggle to express himself and how when communication breaks down for him, at work, at home, or with friends, he ends up spending countless hours apologizing for his outbursts and loss of temper, because he can't explain what triggered them. What strikes me in these moments is that "we never talked about it." What Tanya said next was, "it'll be nice to talk about it." Through the interviews and the performance that emerged from them, new ideas and insights into our friendships, our pasts, and theorization about abuse were opened up, that under different circumstances, might not have.

Performance

In creating a performance by weaving the story of the Bell Witch together with the narratives from my partners in this project, the ensemble was hoping to create a dialogue with the audience and continue one with my partners in this project. By putting the narratives in conversation with the story of the Bell Witch, we were suggesting that the explicit haunting of the Bell Witch story would shed light on how the stories of my partners in this project are implicitly haunted. In the same way that the recovered memory movement worked to make sense out of the incommunicable world of intimate

abuse, the story of the Bell Witch also works to make sense out of abuse. To begin my analysis, I will briefly relate the story of the Bell Witch⁴. I will then discuss the significance of the individual characters and the ways in which they relate to my partners in this project.

The haunting began in 1817 when, one evening, the Bell family was awakened by the sound of rocks being thrown against their windows. John Bell was the first up and rushed outside but could find no one there, yet the sound of rocks continued. After a few nights, the sound of rocks was accompanied by the sound of animals fighting in the yard, and footsteps on the roof. Eventually, the spirit came inside. One night the family woke up to the sound of screams coming from young Betsy Bell's room. Again, John Bell was the first up and opened the door to his daughter's room just in time to see Betsy lifted from her bed by an invisible force. He watched as her face was smacked back and forth until he yelled out, "demon, leave this house." With that, Betsy Bell fell to the floor and there was silence. After a short time, out of the silence, John Bell's words came back to him in a low ghostly whisper.

After that night, the spirit grew stronger, both in voice and action. It began to carry on intelligent conversations about anything from its purpose (to kill John Bell), to local politics. It continued to attack Betsy and eventually began attacking John Bell as well. A typical attack would have either Betsy or John fall to their back chocking, and unable to stand. Attacks typically lasted a few minutes, but would occasionally last the

⁴ This version of the story is an amalgamation of stories found from the following sources: Fitzhugh, Pat. The Bell Witch: The Full Account. Nashville: Armand Press, 2000. Monahan, Brent. The Bell Witch: An American Haunting. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000. Price, Charles Edwin. The Infamous Bell Witch of Tennessee. Johnson City: The Overmountain Press, 1994. The Bell Witch Website. Ed. Pat Fitzhugh. 2008.

better part of an hour. In most recordings, the spirit seemed to gain power from these attacks. Finally, the attacks became so severe for John Bell that he was confined to his bed. One night, the spirit possessed Betsy and took her to the river bed where she squeezed nightshade, a deadly poison, into a small vial. Upon returning home she snuck into her father's room and poured the poison into his mouth. Once John Bell died, the spirit began to disappear. About a year after her father's death, Betsy married Richard Powell, the local school teacher, and they left the town of Adams Tennessee, never to return.

The story of the Bell Witch raises some questions. Reading it as an abuse story and looking at the spirit as emerging because of the act of abuse, what purpose does the spirit serve other than to torment and kill John Bell? The Witch took four years to kill John Bell and then used Betsy to poison him. Did Betsy want her father dead, and if so, why did it take four years to kill him? If Betsy did kill her father, why does the story need the Witch? For that matter, why does the Witch also torture Betsy if her purpose is to avail her? In this way, the Witch seems to represent the ways in which people continue to be affected by the abuse. What would it mean, then, if Betsy had killed her father without the assistance of the Witch? Would she still be seen as "helpless" and "innocent" as she is often described? It is, of course, speculation that it was Betsy's hand that poured the poison. What if it had been Lucy Bell, the mother of the Bell family? In the stories there is very little written of her and I wonder what part she played during the four years of the haunting. For that matter, what if it had been John Bell that had taken the poison himself? Having been ostracized from the community because of his excommunication from the church, might we consider that the years of

guilt racking up from what his family suffered because of his actions led to John Bell taking his own life? These were the questions I had before I went to visit my partners in this project and I allowed them, along with the questions I had about victimization, abuse, and memory, to inform the questions I asked.

Tanya

As I sat on the plane to go visit Tanya, another question came to my mind and it fueled my terror. It was this: how do you talk with someone you love about their most horrifying experiences? There was a time when Tanya came to visit me while I was in college. At one point during that weekend, as we were sitting on the floor in my living room, Tanya began talking about her current relationship and began to cry, saying “it’s so fucked up!” I went to hug her, and in our embrace she thanked me, and told me that she loved me. We were both crying as we held each other, but we never really talked about it. Our childhoods were quickly fading. We had both talked about the abuse we went through as children, but only to some sort of a professional; never to someone else who had gone through similar experiences, and never to someone we loved. I think, to an extent, because we both knew that we had been through some awful stuff growing up, we didn’t know how to breach the subject with each other. We watched as the other stumbled and danced through their relationships, and we knew that our particular maneuverings through these relationships was constituted in part by our pasts, but neither of us knew how to open the conversation with the other.

On the plane to visit Tanya, I poured over my copy of Madison’s Critical Ethnography. I was worried, among other things, about breaching the subject of abuse

with my partners in this project without compromising my ethical responsibility to them and was hoping for some sage advice. As I read Madison, my mind went back to the introduction of Remembering: Oral History Performance, where Della Pollock, drawing on the work of Kelly Oliver, discusses the “response-ability in subjectivity.” Pollock says that “the ability to respond (response-ability) that inheres in the obligation (responsibility) to do so defines what it means to be a human self” (4). I was reminded of this as I read Madison’s words: “By traveling to someone’s world, we open a greater possibility for identification; moreover, we gain the opportunity to glimpse ourselves through *their* eyes” (106). My response-ability, which is a responsibility to my partners in this project, is also always already a responsibility to listen to and to tell our stories. Asking my friends to tell me their stories required that my own past and my own understanding of the world be challenged. “We never really talked about it.” Why is that? When Tanya tells me the origin of her ghosts, in what ways would I confront the origins of my own ghosts as well, and how would our stories together affect our friendship and inform my project? As Rivka Eisner so deftly put it when she wrote about listening to and performing the story of her friend Chi Tôi, “the performative moment of speaking opened a space in which meanings and memory were being constantly made and remade” (105). In what ways would listening to Tanya’s stories make and remake our memories, our friendship, and our understanding of our pasts?

As I said earlier, the performer who portrayed Tanya during the performance also played a character that I describe as the heart of the ensemble, the one making sure that certain questions remained open and others closed. When I began this project, I was terrified. It was my first ethnographic research project, but more importantly I was

about to learn things about people that I love and cared about. I interviewed Tanya first because she is one of my oldest and one of my most critical friends. I knew that if the questions I asked made her uncomfortable, she would not hesitate to tell me so and to tell me why. I knew she would be the hardest to interview, but I knew that she would also help guide me through the process and make me more aware of what to look for and what not to look for in these interviews.

What stood out from Tanya's interview were the points she made about how it would be nice to talk about her past with me, and about how all of our stories of abuse were relative. Tanya experienced acts of violence from her father and her brother but remarks how her feelings are different for both of them:

I think at this point I can feel sorry for my brother, or at least feel sad for my brother. Um... (pause). I think with my dad I could just not care about him anymore. Um, cuz, I mean yeah, it probably started somewhere before for him, but from everything I've seen, you know, at least the situation with my brother was caused by him. It's kind of a trickle down effect. It's where my brother learned to hit me! (June 15 2007).

By watching her brother turn into an abusive person, Tanya was able to still care about him in a way in which she wasn't able to care about her father, who, she suspects was abused by her grandfather. Because she only knew her father as an abusive person, whatever she might suspect about her father's history of abuse is only a suspicion. It can not hold the same weight or consequence that her feelings towards her brother can, who she did see grow from a "normal" boy, into an abusive one, and eventually into an abusive adult. To cast the same performer in the role of Tanya as the role of the heart of the ensemble is to create an advocate for the narratives of abuse. Tanya understands that she has chosen to view her father in specific ways that serve to leave out certain aspects of who he is, or who he might be. By being linked to Tanya, the heart of the ensemble

works to make sure that the stories being told are the stories of the people who experienced acts of abuse, and not the stories of the people who abused. She makes it clear that we have silenced certain stories in order to more clearly hear others.

Ann

When I returned to Chapel Hill, I called up Ann and told her about the project and asked her if I could interview her. There was a moment of silence coming from the other side of the line. She hesitated and said, “um...yeah, I mean...yeah. I think that’s ok” (June 25, 2007). I asked her if she was sure and said that I would understand if she wanted to say no. There was another moment of silence before she said, “can I think about it?” I said “of course, that’s fine, just let me know what you decide.” We hadn’t talked in a while, so we stayed on the line for another hour before I told her I had to run. She told me that she’d let me know in the next couple of days. When I got home, I sent her the IRB approved outline I had written to give her a better idea of the rationale for this project and what I hoped to accomplish through the interview process. After a couple of days, I got a call from Ann saying that she would let me interview her. I asked her if she was sure and if she had read over everything. There was another moment of silence before she said yes. She said that the IRB forms made her uncomfortable, and that the consent form made her feel more uncomfortable.

The hesitance Ann expressed before agreeing to be interviewed is interesting in light of the stories she told during the interview. Before interviewing Ann, I hadn’t given a lot of thought to the modes of resistance employed by people who had been in intimate abusive relationships, especially children. During the interview, Ann told me

the story I related earlier, about her father pulling her by her hair and dragging her through her house. Though she wanted to cry, she resisted, and instead laughed. As her father began to pull harder in a concerted effort to make her cry, she just continued to laugh. As Ann said, “I wasn’t going to let him have power over me. I was just going to defy him.” Before interviewing Ann I had been questioning if the term “victim” was always appropriate, but I hadn’t formed any concrete thoughts as to how the term might be problematic. After listening to Ann, and then going back over all the interviews, I found various moments where my partners and I did resist becoming victims. While there were moments in which we might all say that we were victimized, after looking over the interviews, I don’t think any of us would have considered ourselves to be “victims.” Ann helped me realize this, but because of her apprehension to the IRB forms, she almost did not let me record her story⁵.

Throughout the interview with Ann I noticed how time and again she refused the victim role. The only times she spoke about actual acts of abuse was when the story she told was one about how in the moment of abuse, she was able to defy the abuser. Ann also knew from a very early age that she was different than other children her age. She said, “I had a sense of being tough...but didn’t relate it to my family ‘til I was older” (July 5 2007). More than any of my other partners in this project, Ann’s narrative focuses on moments where she felt powerful and defiant. In the story of the Bell Witch, Lucy Bell, the mother of the family, unlike Ann, sits quietly as the abuse happens. In the

⁵ The “Statement of the American Folklore Society on Research with Human subjects,” suggests that “Introducing written legal document into the folklorist-consultant relationship would generally prove an insult to the consultant and bring folklore research to a halt. Institutional review boards should alter or waive the requirements for written informed consent in the case of folklore and other forms of ethnographically based research (*Critical Ethnography* 116). Ann agreed to be interviewed because we were friends. The IRB forms proposed to protect her from any harm I or the institution I come from may incur, which was in many ways antithetical to the basis of our friendship and caused her to hesitate before agreeing.

only scene where she tries to confront her husband, she does not know how to adequately challenge him about the abuse and chooses to say nothing. For this reason, the performer playing Ann also played Lucy Bell. For the ensemble, Ann and Lucy represent two very different narratives of abuse. On the one hand, Ann seems to ascribe more to the “survivor” label, focusing on the moments where she has agency, whereas Lucy fits closer to the role of the “victim” label, who, for fear of a number of factors (abuse from her husband, social stigmas, the well-being of her children, etc...), remains silent. By seeing both characters being portrayed by the same body, we are able to understand the possibility of a person who experienced acts of abuse as existing at multiple points along the continuum of abuse. Where the character of Lucy Bell reminds us how the world of intimate abuse is all encompassing and oftentimes inescapable, Ann reminds us that, by focusing primarily on the aspects of her story where she did have a modicum of power, within that world, power relations *can* shift and moments of resistance are possible.

Chava

Chava has one of the most contagious laughs I have ever heard. It comes out often and unexpectedly, but always welcome. After interviewing Chava and really listening to her, I began to see a life that is terrifying in its beauty and its complexity emerging from her laugh. At one point in her story, she told me about her and her mother’s midnight escape from her father. In the dark, Chava led her mother to a neighbor’s house a little ways away. When Chava was safe with the neighbors, her mother returned to their home alone to confront Chava’s father. As Chava told me this

story, tears streamed down her face, but it did not prevent her from laughing. Her laugh is complicated. Joni Jones says, “performance ethnography rests on the idea that bodies harbor knowledge about culture, and that performance allows the exchange of that knowledge across bodies” (339). In sitting in Chava’s living room and listening to her laugh and cry, in watching these conflicted emotions performed at the same time, knowledge about the complexities of intimate abusive relationships is demonstrated on her body in ways that a text alone can not do.

Chava’s laugh and her story beg for performance. At this point in my research, I was already preparing for rehearsals. We had the first ensemble meeting right before I went to visit Chava, and rehearsals were starting as soon as I returned. I knew we were going to be creating a performance, but I wasn’t exactly sure why it needed to be performed. Chava’s laugh made me realize, not only that there are moments where a text is not enough, but it also forced me to reevaluate the way I had listened to the other narratives. In Critical Ethnography, Madison, citing Victor Turner, wrote that “expressions are ‘the crystallized secretions of once living human *experience*’” (17). “Once an experience presses forward from the field of the mundane, it moves to expression; it is no longer a personal reality, but a shared one” (151). The complexity of Chava’s laugh serves to connect all our narratives together and prevents us from forgetting the story of the abuser.

Chava referred to her father as “the good doctor,” saying that “everyone loved him, so when something happened, we couldn’t tell anyone, because he was the good doctor, and no one would see what was really happening. No one would see this side of him” (Sept. 1 2007). When Chava’s father methodically broke her mother’s neck,

Chava's mother had to go to the hospital where her husband worked. As Chava pointed out, her mother "couldn't say what had happened, because everyone knew [my father], and he was the good doctor, so they'd just think that she was crazy." As she told me this story and as she laughed at various points throughout it, Chava also had to intermittently wipe the tears from her eyes. Towards the end of her interview, Chava told me that she needed to forgive her father "so I could move on, because it was taking all my energy to be mad at him. And he wasn't all bad. No person is all bad, or all good. And I want to figure him as all evil, but you can't do that. Because there were good times. And there were times where he was really sweet. And, you know, he loved me as much as he could" (Sept. 1 2007). Chava sought to reconcile with her father in a way in which the rest of my partners in this project had not. We have all tried to find ways to make meaning of the abusive relationships, but only Chava actively forgave her father. For this reason, the performer who played the role of Chava also played the role of John Bell. In our presentation of the story of the Bell Witch⁶, John Bell was never portrayed as a loving and caring father, and Betsy Bell was never portrayed as anything but a passive recipient of the abuse. As Wood argues in "Monsters and Victims," we tend to think of someone as a "monster" or a "victim," but not somewhere in between (2004). Just as I cast the same performer in the roles of Ann and Lucy Bell in order to demonstrate how one person might exist at multiple locations along the spectrum of abuse, I cast Chava and John Bell as the same performer to demonstrate that every level of an intimate abusive relationship is extraordinarily complex. We watch the performer as she portrays John Bell in the way that makes most sense to us, as a violent, temperamental husband and father who hurts the members of his family. We then watch

⁶ For the performance script, please see Appendix B.

as the same performer takes on the role of Chava and challenges the portrayal she just gave. Chava reminds us that the abuser is not only an abuser. Chava's tears never let us forget that her father was abusive, but her laughter reminds us that just as her character is not constituted by the moments where her father victimized her, his character cannot be constituted by those moments either. Without justifying what he did to her, Chava is able to show us how what he did, and who he is, is not one in the same.

Turner

It wasn't until the third week of rehearsal that we began to piece together the script. All the narratives we had been working with were flowing together except those of Turner. When I interviewed him, what stood out most to Turner was that his story was relative. He was very eager to "help out" as he put it, but was concerned that his stories weren't the kind of stories I was looking for. I told him that if I knew what I was looking for, I would probably be working on a different project. Throughout our interviews, Turner would toss away, as though meaningless, events that were more horrific than many others I had heard, saying things like, "I was raped, but it was just by a friend, so I'm not sure if that matters" (Aug. 18 2007). At another point, he told the story his brother told him, about his mom circling the dinner table and yelling at him and his brothers before coming up behind him and holding a knife to his throat. What came out of my time with Turner that made it difficult to situate him within the context of the other narratives was this extreme sort of relativism as well as his inability to tell his own story.

What I looked at first was Turner's inability to tell his story. I looked back at the other interviews and tried to find places where my other partners in this project and I had trouble telling/remembering our stories. When I went back over my own transcripts, I saw that scattered throughout was the phrase "I don't remember." However, whereas Turner was placing his "I don't remember's" before the stories he would tell, I was placing them after, as in "I don't remember what happened after that." Before Turner tells the story of his mother drawing the knife on him, he quickly glosses over the fact that he was the one who had prepared dinner, but only after making sure that his brothers had done their homework and that the house was clean and that his mother's supply of beer was stocked. Looking back at the story where Ann laughs as her father drags her by her hair, we begin to see a stark contrast in the stories they both choose to tell. While they both had a certain type of power, Ann in her ability to laugh and Turner in his ability to take care of his family, Turner avoids acknowledging this power and focuses instead on the moment where he was totally without power. For Ann, the moments where she is unable to act are thrown away as easily as Turner throws away the moments where he did act. For Turner, his own ability to act was delegitimized because it was being constituted by its relativism to other stories of abuse. The ten year old child taking care of his family was nothing out of the ordinary, and therefore, not worthy of note.

For the purpose of the production, the same performer who played the role of Turner also played the role of John Jr. in an effort to reveal modes of agency that were available, if not power. A ten year old taking care of his brothers and sister is extraordinary, and each one of my partners in this project did something similar that was just as extraordinary. Tanya, for instance, remembers a time that her brother was

abusive to her mother and her mother just began screaming and would not stop and it fell to Tanya to help her. She said, “I just remember holding her and she was just crying uncontrollably” (June 15 2007). Chava recalls a time where her father tried to leave her with a complete stranger and she remembers thinking, “now is the time when you’re not making the right decision for your child...who is me...who is 8. And having to have the consciousness of, ‘this is how a parent should act, and they’re not acting that way’” (Sept. 1 2007). In our staging of the Bell Witch, John Jr. attempts to stand up to his father but, like Lucy Bell, can’t find the words. The character of John Jr., however, is also the narrator for the story of the Bell Witch. Instead of showing the audience the story of the abuse, he shows them the moments just after the abuse. In these moments, unable to confront his father, he rushes to and cares for his sister. On the one hand, we see what John Jr. was able to do during the acts of abuse. He cared for his sister in the same way that Turner cared for his siblings. Though Turner couldn’t prevent his siblings from being abused, at least not all the time, he worked to find ways to make sure that they were still taken care of. In the same way John Jr. worked to make sure that Betsy had what comfort there was to be had within their situation.

On the other hand, however, John Jr. never acknowledges that the abuse actually happened. While Turner doesn’t necessarily remember the abuse, he knows that it happened and tells what he can of it. John Jr. is unwilling to talk about the abuse in any terms, and this is where the conflict in the performance arises. As John Jr. begins to tell the story of the death of John Bell, he is confronted by Tanya who lambastes him for not letting Betsy Bell tell her story. John Jr. defends himself by saying that it is not his story to tell. Mirroring an argument that the ensemble had had during rehearsals about how to

tell Turner's story, Tanya and John Jr. argue about how to tell a story in which not all characters are accounted for, and some characters can't speak for themselves. Turner's story during the course of performance was told by the ensemble while the performer playing Turner sat and listened. The argument between Tanya and John Jr. brought to light the ethical implications of this. When John Jr. finally does tell the story from Betsy's point of view, we are reminded that whenever a story is told, it is told from a particular perspective that raises some voices and silences others. What we argue in performance is that while John Jr. infers what happened to his sister, even though he never actually saw the abuse take place, it would be unethical for him not to make these inferences. Likewise, it would be unethical for him not to acknowledge that these were his inferences. As I argued in chapter 2, it would be unethical to have received these stories and to have done nothing more than transcribe them. The argument between Tanya and John Jr. brings out what is implicit in Turner's story, namely that a desire to tell does not always constitute an ability to do so. Likewise, the ability to tell a story does not necessarily mean that it should be told.

Andrew

Andrew is the pseudonym I used in performance for myself. As the ensemble worked together to shape the script, I wanted to make sure that my narrative was treated just as the others and that the ensemble felt comfortable challenging it in the same way that they challenged the others. Strategically, the performer who played Andrew also played the role of Betsy Bell. The major conflict the performance raised was about how to tell a story of abuse, and what it means to be haunted. Betsy plays the role of the

exemplary victim: she is passive and silent. Read as an abuse story, the presence of the Witch allows for Betsy's inaction. John Bell dies at the hand of his daughter, but because of the presence of the Witch, Betsy's actions can be read as involuntary and we see that she is not culpable for the murder. We do, however, see that she is capable of the murder. Without seeing Betsy actually kill her father, the story has no weight as an abuse story and fails to challenge traditional notions of abuse. That the Witch uses Betsy to kill her father, that Betsy is capable if not culpable, leads us to question two things. First, we have to question the amount of agency a person in an abusive situation has. For the Witch to kill John Bell is the only way that the community can understand the story. In that way, Betsy remains a passive victim. For Betsy to kill her father affords Betsy the agency that is not traditionally afforded to a "victim" (Lamb, 1999). The second question is how people are haunted by the abuse. The presence of the Witch does not allow for Betsy's story to be heard. In all that she does in the various iterations of the story, everything is affected by the Witch, from her marriage proposals being disturbed by the Witch, to the Witch helping Betsy find her way when she is lost in the woods, the Witch is present for all of her actions.

The impetus to begin this research was that I felt haunted by my past experiences but had trouble expressing the ways I was haunted. I had mixed emotions about my first stepfather and I had mixed emotions about why my mother stayed with him for so long, especially when she also suffered at his hands. I also had issues that would arise in romantic relationships that I could not explain. I would fall into what my friend Tanya would describe as "patterns." Each relationship I would enter would fall into a similar pattern where I would do whatever it took to avoid conflict, even if it meant sacrificing

what I cared about. The Witch's intrusion on Betsy's engagement causing her to turn down a marriage offer when she otherwise might have accepted reminds me of my own relationship history. When Betsy does eventually marry, it is only after her father dies and the Witch disappears. When she does marry, she leaves the community and never returns.

I linked our stories for two reasons. First of all, it was practical. I had the most liberty with my own narrative and was able to paraphrase my own story in order to bring the Bell Witch story into the narratives of my partners in this project, and to bring those narratives into the story of the Bell Witch. There were points where I wanted to merge the narratives together with the characters in the Bell Witch so both voices would speak at the same time. This would allow us to link key points together and clarify the idea of haunting within the abuse narratives. An example of this can be seen at the end of the John Bell death scene in which Betsy and Andrew share a monologue. I was able to keep the integrity of my own words intact in a way in which I would not have been able to with another of the narratives.

In addition to having more leeway to rephrase my story, this also enabled me to make room for the narratives of Ann and Tanya that end the show. What I found in the interviews was that, to some extent, each one of my partners in this project also experienced issues related to the abuse they experienced as children in their adult romantic relationships. Tanya and Ann both spoke about their relationships in which they were not physically abused, but suffered emotional abuse from their partners. Chava talked about "red flags" that would pop up for her whenever she began to get close to someone. She would avoid a relationship if one of these flags, something that

reminded her of her father, would appear. “It’s helped me to find my husband,” she said, “but I also missed out on meeting a bunch of people who might have been really great” (Sept. 1 2007). Through our histories of abuse, many of our actions are informed by what we learned to expect from the abusive relationship, and this in turn affects the people we come in contact with every day, from a college professor whose office we won’t go into, to a romantic partner who we cannot tell our true feelings. When Tanya said, “It’ll be nice to talk about it,” this is what she meant. It would be nice to talk about and try to understand how our histories of abuse continue to affect us. Like my partners in this project, I had trouble voicing the ways in which I was haunted by the abuse I experienced.

Performance Analysis

As I stated earlier, my hope in staging the performance was an attempt to open up a discussion about abuse and to relate the incommunicability of these stories. To simply read the words of my partners in this project was not enough. Just as Chava’s laugh begged for performance, so too did Ann’s defiance, Tanya’s frankness, and Turner’s silence. To simply write down our shared experiences would have gone against what our bodies demanded in the telling of our stories. Eisner remarks that after working with her friend Chi Tôi, “I increasingly realize just how much there is that I do not know—that the expanse of her life-story and storied life exists ‘beyond’ anyone’s ability to contain” (“Remembering Toward Loss,” 124). It is the knowledge within a story that cannot be contained, in a text, or in a body, that performance ethnography works to impart to an audience, but never truly can. As we cut scene after scene, and story after

story in preparing for our “final” performance, we began to realize that our initial intentions to use the performance to start a discussion about the incommunicability of abuse was simply not realistic. To know that someone’s actions and words beg for performance is to know that until performed, you cannot begin to understand what happens through their performance. The conversation that arose after the performances was centered primarily on the way in which the piece was structured, and how ambiguous the performance was as to what it actually means for someone to be haunted by their history of abuse. As I began to think about the performance and the responses to it, I began to realize that what was coming up for most of the audience, myself included, was how the stories worked in relation to each other. Tanya had said that she knew she had it a lot worse than some and a lot better than others. Turner questioned whether his stories were what I was looking for in that he wasn’t sure if they were real abuse stories. Langer’s assumption that “The urge to tell meets resistance from the certainty that one’s audience will not understand” (xiii), needed to be reexamined. In addition to thinking of an audience as an outside group, I began to challenge what it meant for my partners in this project to be their own audience. Seeing our stories as relative to other stories of abuse, our telling meets resistance in that we fear that the abuse we suffered might not be legitimate because it wasn’t as bad as others. In Ghostly Matters, Avery Gordon suggests that haunting “is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import” (7). Tanya, Chava, Ann, Turner and I all know that the abuse of our past has effected our relationships in the present. By looking at haunting as a “generalizable social phenomenon,” we can successfully bracket the acts of abuse, and focus on the fact that whatever those acts were, they continue to have material consequences many years

after the acts were perpetrated. Understanding ourselves as haunted enables us to tell a story that is relative to other stories of abuse, but not constituted by that relativism. In the next chapter I take a close look at what it means to be haunted and how understanding a person as haunted is one way in which we might confront and understand out histories of abuse.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this thesis I set out to explore some of the complexities of intimate abusive relationships. Beginning with the notions that the label “victim” is inherently problematic and that the material effects of abuse continue to affect people long after the physical acts of abuse stop, I explored the literature on abuse, memory, and haunting. My goal was to explain how a framework of haunting allows us to understand how each person will be affected differently by different events. I searched for what it was that a supernatural agent makes possible. In the story of the Bell Witch, we notice how the Witch could be seen as responsible for any action. On the one hand her presence can work to mask the abuse. Instead of intimate abuse, we see the witch as the problem. We also see how the Witch takes agency away from people. Betsy’s hand is guided by the Witch so that Betsy is never actually the one who kills her father. In chapter 2 I discussed how the recovered memory movement in the late 1980’s worked in similar ways. That the abuse I discussed in that chapter was conducted within the context of a satanic ritual made the abuse something that was out of the hands of anyone in the abusive relationship. In this way, the supernatural presence makes more sense as no one in the relationship had the agency to begin or end the abuse. The ghost represents that which cannot be explained, namely, the incommunicability and the complexity of the intimate abusive relationship. In other words, the ghost points to a gap in the discourse. The ghost represents the moment, as Lawrence Langer says, where

“the urge to tell meets resistance from the certainty that one’s audience will not understand” (xiii). To understand someone as haunted is to know that their story is complex and does not fit easily into any one discourse.

I have also argued that intrinsic to critical performance ethnography is the need for praxis. To engage a site critically and performatively is to seek to know *with* members of a site. This engagement is critical in that it seeks out new and subjugated knowledges which would benefit communities beyond the ethnographic site. This engagement is performative in that to know *with*, as Eisner points out, is to make and remake meaning. It is to actively search for new ways of hearing and telling stories. In these ways we see how critical performance ethnography works to engage haunted people and haunted sites. There are stories that are incommunicable. Critical performance ethnography, I argued, works to bridge the gaps of communication.

I would now like to address some of the areas in which future research is needed. Throughout this paper I have referred to the people I interviewed as “my partners in this project,” and as “my friends.” Our friendships existed long before this project began and leads me to wonder if, in some way we can’t fully understand, we were drawn to each other because of our histories of abuse. I wonder to what extent our bodies perform that history. As I discussed in chapter 3, our everyday performances can be looked at as a map that is made complex by the story from which it is constituted. That my partners in this project and I were drawn to each other leads me to wonder if this is so because our pasts continue to affect us in similar ways. I wonder to what extent the abused body continues to perform so that it is recognizable by other abused bodies. If the abused body continues to perform in specific ways, and other abused bodies are able to see that

body in ways in which a non-abused body can not, what ways might creating a dialogue between people who had been part of intimate abusive relationships enable us to expand the ways in which abuse is talked about? We all questioned whether or not our stories were valid stories of abuse. Though our stories were all very different and we all suffered in different ways, we all continue to be effected by the abuse in similar ways. We were not sure to what extent our experiences counted as abuse, but we were all sure that our experiences continue to effect us.

I have found performance to be a wonderful analytic tool. It enabled us to focus on the haunting acts of abuse in a way in which a text alone simply cannot. When I began the performance aspect of my research, the first thing the ensemble worked on was to gain a theoretical understanding of abuse, memory, and haunting. We spent a month emerged in these theoretical pools before we began working with the narratives. I think that such work could be intensely useful with a group of people who had been in an intimate abusive relationship. The performance that would emerge from their research and their own narratives could be beneficial to them as well as to their audience.

Further, I argue that a better understanding of perpetrators of abuse is necessary. One of the questions I asked my partners in this project was if they remember any good times with the person who abused them. Each one of my partners remarked how there were times when, as Chava put it, “he could be really sweet” (Sept. 1 2007). I remember one morning after yet another night of screaming and crashing coming from my parent’s room. I went into the room to find my mom standing over my stepfather. Her face looked hurt, but she stood strong. Meanwhile, my stepfather sat on the bed, his face red

and wet with the tears he seemed to be crying for quite some time. As I think back to that moment, I am again reminded of Chava's words: "He loved me as much as he could." There is very little that is simple about any life. We search for meaning and reach conclusions based on the meanings we find. Tanya expressly said that she refrained from looking for meaning in her father's actions. It is a choice that Tanya made in an effort to make things simpler. However, Tanya expressed that she would still like to have a relationship with her father, she just didn't think that it was likely.

Remembering the tears my stepfather cried and hearing Chava's words above make me wonder about the ways in which a person who abuses a loved one might themselves be haunted by the abuse they cause. If we were to try to gain a better understanding of a person who abuses, we might begin to make meaning of their actions. To do so might place them in a light that would be uncomfortable for a person who was abused to see. I spent a long time hating my stepfather but that memory of him crying along with other memories of remorse he expressed and good times he created have stuck with me. The more complex a figure he becomes, the harder it is for me to hate him. It challenges the way I understand the world when I look at not just who he was and the remorse he felt during the relationship, but also how, in the same way I am haunted by the abuse, he might also be haunted by the same abuse. Though some of us who were abused when we were younger may shy away from a better understanding of the ways in which the people who abused us continue to be affected by that abuse, as a researcher I think a better understanding of those effects is warranted and might help people who have abused to gain a deeper insight into the negative ways in which they were affected by their own actions. It is also important to remember that, while gender plays a role in

intimate abusive relationships, abuse is invariably about one person trying to hold power over another⁷. In this study, two of us are men and three of us experienced abuse from women. More research still needs to be done on women who abuse (Renzetti), as well as men who were abused when they were younger but did not grow up to be abusive. While some of the problems that exist in intimate abusive relationships might be caused by gender differences, these relationships, I would argue, have more to do with power.

In this light, I also think that haunting as a lens might also be beneficial in looking at abuse on a larger scale. Particularly, I am thinking of communities and nations that have lived through harsh regimes or continue in a warlike state for years and years with power shifting from faction to faction. Many nations have turned to or considered the use of truth and reconciliation commissions (TRC's). The TRC in post-apartheid South Africa sent an image to the world that South Africa was healing itself; all the while revenge killings were taking place away from the eye of the international media (Wilson, 2000). While TRC's may aim at healing, the simple act of telling the "truth" might not be enough. The people in South Africa who lived through apartheid will continue to be affected by the abuse they suffered and the lives that were lost. To truly understand someone as haunted is to see the effects of the past as a constant presence in the present. As one Holocaust survivor in Holocaust Testimonies said when "asked if she lives with Auschwitz after her return," she replied, "No – I live beside it" (5). A person may accept an apology, but they also may still be haunted by the event that warranted the apology. I think that new modes of understanding how not just

⁷ One reason why I chose to write about intimate abuse of children is that it makes it easier to remain more gender neutral and place the focus primarily on the effects of the abuse on "people" who had been abused, and not specifically "men" or "women" that have been abused.

individuals are haunted by acts of abuse, but entire communities and nations are haunted by acts of abuse is warranted.

Finally, I think we need to resist the notion that the actions we take will not have a visible effect until we are gone, that the discursive formation can't change within a single lifetime. I think part of the reason that this notion is hard to accept is because I don't think it is true. In Gendered Lives, Julia Wood suggests that "one rhetorical strategy used by profeminist men is performing a traitorous identity, in which a member of a group criticizes particular attitudes and actions that are common and accepted among members of that group" (84). In chapter 2, I stressed the need to listen to what Ricoeur calls "the voice of dissention." As a mode of praxis, we can become that voice of dissention, particularly within our own social group, and work to affect change before the abuse starts. By taking on a traitorous identity, we challenge other members of our group to question whatever preconceived notions they may hold. If our group takes something for granted, the dissenting voice, the traitorous identity, asks them to challenge that notion and question what it does.

The traitorous identity is needed particularly outside of academia. By this I mean that I think that it could be beneficial for some academic works to be "translated" for a larger audience. While it is encouraging to read the literature on intimate abuse and see the myriad of ways these authors engage the communities they research, from working in battered women shelters, to conducting interviews in maximum security prisons, we also need to continue working to translate our research to a non-academic audience. In this line of thought, I have found performance to be particularly useful. In my production of *The Bell Witch*, I asked the audience, a fair mix of career academics and

others, to challenge some traditional notions of abuse. We presented stories that paint all members of abusive relationships in lights that are both traditional (monster/victim) and more complicated. The discussions held afterwards presented the opportunity for members of the ensemble to work in dialogue with audience members to better understand these complex relationships. The performance struck at multiple levels and each night I had people coming to talk about anything from their own histories of abuse, to people who wanted to comment on how the performance itself worked as an analytical tool. The performance piqued peoples interest in haunting as a method of analyzing abuse, and in the discussions that followed the performances, people wanted to engage us about our choices in performance and our understanding of these topics.

In addition to staged performance, there are other popular outlets for theoretical work and moments of praxis for works on abuse, as well as many other subjects, which should continue to be explored. It is important, I think, to look at the places in popular culture where praxis is possible, but not yet popular. How can we, for instance, utilize music videos and concerts, graphic novels and comics, and internet sites like facebook and myspace to create conversations that seem far too absent. I believe that we *can* push the boundaries of a discourse. It is not, however, an individual effort. To do so requires a critical engagement with the world. It requires that we stay aware of how we affect and are affected by others and to stay aware of our ability to become the voice of dissention and to maintain a strategic traitorous identity.

Appendix A:

The Bell Witch Story

It all started in 1817, on the Bell farm in northern Tennessee with three, seemingly random, occurrences. First, John Bell, a farmer, was out tending to his land when he came across a giant black beast, unlike anything he had ever seen. It had the body of a large dog and the head of a grotesque snarling rabbit. He immediately ran home to get his gun and hurried back to where the beast was still waiting, now, with a sneer to complement its smile. John Bell took aim at the beast and fired, but when the smoke cleared the beast was gone, having left no sign that it had ever been there.

Just a few days later, his oldest son, John Bell Jr. was out wandering the property when he noticed a large bird perched atop their roof. Well, he went inside to grab his gun, came out, took aim at the bird and fired a shot. But there was no rustling of wings, no flapping of feathers and when the smoke cleared, the bird was gone.

Then, just a few days later, young Betsy Bell and two of her younger brothers were out wandering in the woods where they came across a young girl hanging from a tree. They got closer and saw that the face of the girl was deathly white. Her eyes had sunken into the back of her head and from the sockets poured two steady streams of tears. The children were so frightened that they immediately ran home to tell their parents what they had seen, but their parents forbade them to mention the incident to anyone else in the community for fear that people may think that the family had been dealing with witchcraft or black magic. You see, John Bell had recently had a legal battle with a woman by the name of Kate Batts. Kate accused John of usury and, after he was convicted, he had to give a large portion of his holdings to Kate. But Kate was

not satisfied. She wanted to see John ruined and as she was leaving the courthouse, she cursed him, saying “John Bell, you are an evil man and something bad will happen to you and another member of your family.

One night, shortly after the trial, the entire Bell household was awakened by the sound of rocks being thrown against the windows and walls of their house. John Bell was the first up and he rushed to his window. But there was no one outside. Yet the noises continued. Each night something new was added. First, there was the sound of cats and dogs fighting in their yard. Then, the distinct sound of foot falls on the roof. Finally, the spirit came into the house. It began to pull the bed sheets from the children and make the sounds of gnawing and scratching at their bedposts. When the children would wake from the noise, they lit their candles but there was never anyone there, and their bedposts were unscathed. Upon blowing out their candles, the noises returned.

One night it got to the point where the family couldn't stand it anymore. They were awakened by shrieks coming from young Betsy Bell's room. John Bell was again the first up and arrived at the door to his daughter's room just in time to see her head smack from one side to the other and her cheek began to turn bright red. John Bell shouted out “Demon, leave this house!” With that, Betsy's head fell back to the bed and the spirit was silent for the rest of the night.

John Bell realized that they could keep this secret no longer and that something had to be done. So, he called on his close friend and neighbor, Mr. James Johnston. James came to the house the next night and he sat with the family around the dinner table and he made a fervent prayer for whatever was tormenting this God fearing family to please, leave them alone.

But later that night the family was once again awakened by shrieks coming from young Betsy Bell's room. This time James Johnston was the first to get there and he threw the door open just in time to see her being pulled from her bed as if by her hair, and as she dangled in midair, her face was repeatedly slapped back and forth, and back and forth until James Johnston shouted out, "Demon! In the name of the lord Jesus Christ I send you to Hell!" Betsy's head fell back to the floor and there was silence, but out of the silence came a whisper. "Demon! In the name of the lord Jesus Christ I send you to Hell!"

From that night on the Bell household was never without visitors. People came from all over to find out why the witch, as she had come to be known, was haunting the Bell family. One night a reverend came to the house and demanded "Demon, who are you?" The witch replied, "As you know, I am the witch sent by Kate Batts to torment John Bell. Or maybe I am the spirit of an Indian whose grave has been disturbed. But John Bell Jr. felt that neither of these answers were correct, so he asked the witch, "Spirit, who are you, and what do you want?" "John Bell Jr.", said the witch, "because you are an honest man, I will answer you truthfully. I am the spirit of someone who was happy, but who has been disturbed". And then there was silence. John Bell Jr. asked again, "Spirit, what do you want?" And the witch answered, "I will not rest until John Bell is in his grave." And that was the last they heard from the witch that night.

Shortly after the witch declared that her intent was to kill John Bell, she began to attack him physically. She would swell his tongue and his throat so that it was hard for him to eat or drink anything and he began having trouble breathing. At first, the attacks were somewhat mild and would last only 20 or 30 minutes, but they eventually grew in

length and became more painful. He became weaker and his sons were forced to take on the extra burden of the chores and the fieldwork which he was no longer able to do himself.

The witch's attacks remained constant for John and Betsy but she never once hurt another member of the community. In fact, to some, the witch could be pleasant, or even flirtatious, and on a few occasions ended up saving some lives. One time Lucy Bell, John's wife, had fallen ill. Her two sisters came to visit but had no idea how to cure Lucy. Then, one evening while the sisters sat up by Lucy's side, the witch's voice came to them and instructed them that the secret cure to Lucy's illness could be found in her favorite foods. The sisters were about to say that they had no idea what Lucy's favorite foods were when, from above them and out of nowhere, a shower of grapes and hazelnuts rained down upon Lucy Bell. She began to eat, and within a few days was back to her normal self.

There is also another story, one of a little boy who led a group of children into a cave. He had stayed about 20 yards ahead of the other children and held a single candle, their only light. After a short while he came to a point in the cave where it dipped down and noticed a hole in the wall. Being a curious young boy he stuck his head through the wall to see what was on the other side, but all he saw was the darkness of another part of the cavern. He tried to pull his head out of the cave, but realized that it was stuck. In his panic he dropped the candle and the light in the cave went out. He began to scream, "Help, someone help me!" but his screams echoed off the cavern walls and the other children had no idea where they were coming from. Suddenly, a ball of light appeared around the rest of the children and the voice of the witch beckoned them,

“follow me”. The children followed the light and it guided them to the spot where the little boy had his head stuck in the wall. They reached down and took hold of the boy and gently, yet firmly, they pulled, and they pulled, until finally the little boy came free. Then the witch and the ball of light guided the children to the cavern entrance and back to safety.

However, while the witch was helping other members of the community, she never once relented in her attacks on Betsy Bell. In fact, they became much worse. Betsy was thrown into fits. She would fall onto the floor and her eyes would roll into the back of her head. She would try to scream, but it was as if someone had their hands around her throat, preventing her from speaking. She tried to get up, but it was as if someone was pressing down on her, not allowing her to move. The attacks would last anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes and after each attack the witch came out much stronger. If it was not for the love of a young man named Joshua Gardner, the attacks would probably have driven Betsy out of her mind. It had been nearly five years since the witch first entered the lives of the Bell family and while the effects had definitely had their toll on Betsy, she managed to keep her composure and grow up into a beautiful young lady. Joshua would rush to her side and hold her until the fit had passed. By the time Betsy was nearly 17, Joshua had already begun courting her. He eventually proposed to her and she accepted. They decided they would announce their engagement at that year’s Spring picnic.

The day before the announcement, the witch came to the schoolteacher, Mr. Richard Powell, and informed him of the engagement. Richard told the witch that he wished them the best, but the witch spoke up and said, “I know, Richard Powell, that

you are secretly in love with Betsy Bell, but have never said anything, because of the great difference in age”. Richard had been Betsy’s teacher and had always enjoyed it when Betsy would come to him for help. She had a quality that none of the other children seemed to possess. A look in her eyes that made a person both nostalgic, and a little sad. Even when she was young he felt that there was a great beauty waiting to emerge from little Betsy Bell. Now, as she had blossomed into a beautiful young woman ready for marriage, Richard recognized that he had always been somewhat enamored with Betsy. He informed the witch that despite whatever feelings may exist, he would do nothing to interfere with Betsy’s happiness. He would simply avoid the engagement announcement all together.

The next day, as everyone was enjoying the picnic, Joshua Gardner stood up on a tree stump to announce his and Betsy’s engagement. After he had gotten everybody’s attention, he was about to make the announcement when a wind picked up and blew the hat off of his head. He leaned down to pick up the hat, but before he could get up the wind blew stronger until they knocked him clear off the stump. Soon enough everyone was taking cover because the wind was blowing with such gusto. When the wind reached its peak, a voice could be heard saying, “Please Betsy Bell, do not marry Joshua Gardner.” Then they heard it again, this time louder, saying, “Please Betsy Bell, do not marry Joshua Gardner.” Finally they heard it a third time, almost unbearable in its one and pitch, “Please Betsy Bell, do not marry Joshua Gardner!” Betsy burst into tears and told Joshua that as long as the witch was around, they could never be happy.

John Bell realized that something must be done, so he sent for the assistance of the famous Dr. Solomon Mize, who claimed to be the greatest witch doctor in all the

land. Dr. Mize came to the Bell family and began to set up his experiments throughout the house. These experiments were meant to help him detect the presence of any unnatural beings. Well, he set up his experiments for three days, and by the time he was just about finished, furniture had been broken, glass had been shattered, and the Bell family's pets would no longer enter the house. On the fourth day, Dr. Mize declared that he would perform his final experiment, one which would surely drive the witch from the house for good.

He made his way to the upstairs hallway where he began to concoct a potion that would allow them not only to hear the witch, but to see her as well! With that, he got to work, mixing many foul smelling vials of who knows what until the hallway smelled of rotten eggs and spoiled milk. As he was adding some of the final ingredients, those which would be sure to drag the witch into a physical form, he was startled by a voice behind him. "That's not right" it said. He turned around, but there was nothing there. "You are missing three key ingredients," said the witch, "and if the potion is to have any affect you can't simply let the smell permeate this hallway and hope that it will drive me into sight. You must aerate the potion, and then spray it on my being." With that Dr. Mize began spraying the potion to his left and right until the entire hallway began to smell. Meanwhile the witch snuck around behind Dr. Mize, lifted the remainder of his potion out of his hands and dumped what was left in the bottle onto the doctors' head. He quickly realized that ridding the household of the witch was far beyond his capabilities, and ran from the upstairs hallway, leaving a very foul smelling odor behind him, ran outside, hopped on his horse and just as he was about to start riding off, the witch spooked the horse so badly that it threw Dr. Mize and raced off into the night. Dr.

Mize quickly found his bearings and followed the horse into the darkness. And that was the last that the Bell household ever heard of Dr. Solomon Mize.

A few weeks later another famous visitor came to the Bell household. This was none other than General Andrew Jackson, soon to be the 7th President of the United States. John Bell jr. had fought under General Jackson during the war of 1812 and when the General learned of what was happening to one of his former soldiers, he immediately rushed to red river to offer what aid he could. General Jackson brought with him a witch-layer, and that night as they all sat around the dinner table, John Bell asked, “just how do you propose to rid our house of this witch?” The witch-layer reached into his jacket, and from it he pulled out a well polished pistol with a sandalwood grip. Half the Bell family burst into laughter, but the witch-layer said, “Now this may look like an ordinary gun...and it is, but”, and then he pulled out of the chamber a single silver bullet. And he said, “This bullet will pierce anything supernatural, be it spook, haint, or spirit, killing it instantly!” He slipped the bullet back in the chamber, and no sooner had he done this than a voice spoke up behind him that said, “Oh really?” Well, he turned around, but no one was there. Then the voice came from the other side of the room, “I’m over here” and the witch-layer began frantically pointing the gun at everyone in the room, not sure of which direction the voice had come from. Suddenly the voice spoke again, saying, “I’m right in front of you.” He stopped, and realized that he was pointing the gun directly at General Jackson. And then the witch said, “If you’re so sure of yourself, why don’t you shoot!” With that the witch-layer said, “All right, I will,” and before anyone could protest the fact that this man was about to shoot General Jackson in the face, he quickly set his sight and pulled the trigger...but nothing happened. The

bullet was lodged in the chamber and as the man was frantically trying to fix the gun the witch said, "Now it's my turn!" and before the man could do anything else he was suddenly swept off his feet and onto the ground, the gun flew to the other side of the room, and he was lifted up by his nostrils and onto his tiptoes. Then the witch said, "General Jackson, if you don't mind, I will remove this fraud from your party." The General simply replied, "Who am I to argue with the great Bell Witch?" And with that the man was led by his nostrils and on his tiptoes out into the night air. No one ever saw or heard from that man again. The witch then returned to the house and informed the General that there was another fraud in his party, and that the next night she would be sure to weasel him out as well. Fortunately, the General was only able to stay the one night, and as he was packing his things the next morning, someone heard him remark that he would rather face the entire British Army, than have to deal with the Bell Witch!

After General Jackson left, the witch began to focus all of her attacks on John Bell. He became so weak that he couldn't leave the house, and eventually was confined to his room. Then, one morning, Lucy woke up to find her husband was still asleep. She went downstairs to prepare breakfast for her family and after they had all eaten Lucy sent John Bell Jr. upstairs to give his father his medicine. John Jr. opened the medicine cabinet and instead of finding his father's medicine, he found a small bottle, half filled with a dark liquid. He rushed to his father's room and noticed that his father was breathing heavily. His face was ashen and his eyes had sunken further into his head. He tried to rouse his father, but he wouldn't move. He just continued his slow heavy breathing. John Jr. quickly sent for the school teacher, Richard Powell, as well as for the local doctor. Richard Powell examined the liquid and said that it was most likely

nightshade, a deadly poison. When the doctor arrived, he confirmed this and noted that if John Bell had indeed imbibed half a bottle of the potion, it was a wonder that he was still alive. Sure enough, as the day wore on, John Bell's breathing became slower and slower until finally, just before evening, John Bell drew his final breath.

The second he let that breath out, a laughter could be heard. It continued for the rest of the day. And the next day. And didn't stop until John Bell was firmly in the ground. After the funeral, the witch began to make fewer and fewer appearances until months at a time would elapse where the family wouldn't even hear from the witch, and it was during this period that Joshua Gardner again began to court Betsy Bell. One day Joshua took Betsy down to the river, and there, on one knee, he said to her, "Betsy, my love for you remains constant." He pulled out a ring and once again, asked her to marry him. Betsy was overjoyed; of course she would marry him. She reached down for the ring when all of a sudden the wind picked up. And on the wind, ever so faintly, they heard a voice: "Please Betsy Bell, do not marry Joshua Gardner." Then they heard it again: "Please Betsy Bell, do not marry Joshua Gardner!" And finally a third time, as if the witch was using all of her powers: "Please Betsy Bell, do not marry Joshua Gardner!" Betsy tried but she couldn't stop the tears from running down her face. She told Joshua that she thought the witch would never allow them to be happy together. Joshua said he understood. He packed up his affairs in Red River, and headed west.

The Bell family did the best they could to manage on their own. Over the next few years, Betsy's former school teacher, Richard Powell, regularly stopped by the house to check in on the family and make sure that they were getting along alright. It was during these many visits that he began courting Betsy Bell, and eventually asked for

her hand in marriage. Without protest from the witch, Betsy was inclined to accept the proposal. They were soon to be married, and the two moved out of the Red River community to start a life together on their own. They lived happily, and peacefully for the next thirteen years, until one night, Richard left his bedroom in the middle of the night and was headed down to his study, when he heard the sounds of rocks being thrown against his window. He rushed to look outside, but there was no one there. He returned to his bedroom and noticed that Betsy was tossing wildly in her sleep. He put his hand on her forehead, and she fell back into a deep sleep. He lay down by his wife's side that night and put his work off for the next day.

The next night, again bogged down with work, he left his bedroom to head down to his study, and again heard the sounds of rocks being thrown against the window, this time accompanied by the sound of cats and dogs. He rushed to the window but could see no one outside. He returned to his bedroom, and again saw Betsy tossing from side to side. He placed his hand on her forehead, and once again, she was still.

He realized something had to be done. He didn't want to worry Betsy by telling her of the noises, so he simply told her that she wasn't sleeping well. He asked if he could hypnotize her to see if he could find out what was plaguing her in the night. She agreed, so he pulled out his pocket watch and began to wave it in front of her eyes. Eventually Betsy fell into a deep sleep. He asked her a few questions to make sure she was under his control. When he was confident she was, he asked her if she had heard the noise of cats and dogs fighting in the yard at night.

She said "yes."

"Were these real cats and dogs, Betsy?" he asked.

“No.”

“If they weren’t real, how did they come about?”

“The witch,” said Betsy.

Richard Powell asked, “Why would the witch return after being silent for so many years?”

“To protect our daughter.”

“Why does our daughter need protection?” asked Richard.

“She is pretty. She is 12.”

“Is she not safe at home, with her parents who love her, and care for her?”

“She is not safe from her father.”

Richard knew that he would never do anything to harm his daughter, and he felt Betsy knew it as well, so he figured that there was something deeper to what Betsy had said. He walked up close to Betsy, and asked her if the witch had come to Red River, so many years earlier, to protect her from her father. Betsy tried to answer but the words would not come out. Richard asked again: “Betsy, did the witch come so many years ago to protect you from your father?”

The voice he heard was not Betsy’s. And it came from the other side of the room. “So,” it said, “you have finally figured out our secret.” And Richard knew at once the all too familiar voice of the witch. Richard asked the witch why Betsy needed protection.

“Late at night,” began the witch, “John Bell stole into his daughter’s room. And pulled the covers from her bed. He then began to run his hands slyly up her sides. When she was awakened by this, she went to scream, but he put his hand over her mouth

and said, ‘shhhhhh. I am your father. I only want to make you feel good.’ And with that, he took his hand off her mouth, bent down, and put his old, cracked lips upon her soft ruby ones. She tried to squirm away but he pressed his body onto hers, holding her in place. She tried to scream again but he put one hand back over her mouth and the other around her throat. By now he was angry. He said ‘The devil gave you such charms to tempt me. Well, I’m going to force those charms right out of you!’”

Richard Powell was shocked to hear that John Bell would say anything of the kind, but the witch simply said, “He did the deed. What are words compared with that?”

After realizing that the witch had come to protect Betsy, Richard asked how John Bell had died. The witch said, “I possessed young Betsy Bell and took her down to the river. There, on the bank, she squeezed the nightshade into the bottle. She then returned to her father’s room, where she poured the liquid down his throat. Betsy knew none of this, for she was under my control. She finished the deed, and returned to her bed. Now, before I go, I will allow you one other question.”

Richard said, “How do I convince my wife that our daughter is safe?”

The witch replied, “When night falls, stay by your wife’s side. Stay by her side until the break of dawn.” With that, the voice of the spirit left the house, and that was the last that anyone had heard of the Bell Witch.

Appendix B:

The Bell Witch Script

The Bell Witch: A Haunting Tale of Love and Abuse

The three platforms sit equal-distance apart. The center platform is slightly downstage from the others. Lights dim. Performers enter from audience. Tim walks to the front of the center platform and sits on the lip. Elizabeth sits upstage right of the stage right platform facing the audience, with the lantern placed behind her. Katherine sits upstage left, facing upstage. Lydia stands downstage center, facing the stage. Amanda stands at the upstage edge of the center platform. Once everyone is in place, Amanda lights her candle with a match, and giggles, as she does so. Tim pulls a candle from underneath his platform and lights it with a match. He begins to speak.

Tim

It's been a long time since it happened, but not long enough.

Katherine giggles

Tim (Cont'd)

I can still remember everything that happened as if I were still there...as if it were still happening.

Katherine giggles. Amanda crosses towards Elizabeth and lights the lantern. Katherine begins to play with gravel.

Tim (Cont'd)

It began...(pause) with noises.

Katherine continues to giggle. Amanda lights the lantern behind Elizabeth and shuffles to the other side of the stage quickly, and when she gets there, blows out her candle. Then, she shuffles slowly back towards Elizabeth.

Lydia

(whisper) It's about silence...

Lydia moves silently behind the audience. Katherine giggles and Amanda continues to shuffle.

Tim
Papa was always the first one up. He'd rush into my room
and say "get up! They're at it again!"

Katherine giggles.

Lydia
(whisper) It's about silence...

Tim
And we'd race outside to see who was out there, but the
noises would stop.

Silence. Long pause. Katherine giggles

Tim (Cont'd)
Then, eventually, we'd head back inside. Sometimes the
noises would continue, but sometimes...even when they
didn't continue, they would...there was always something
there. You couldn't feel it. But it would be there.

Lydia
It's about silence...

Amanda

*Shhhhhh...(begins as a shush, and as it fades out, it never
really leaves. The sound continues, feeling more like
wind.*

Tim
I didn't experience this myself, but I know the little ones
did. Drew, Jamie...Betsy. And I saw it. After they would
cry out, we'd rush to their room. The blankets were pulled
from their beds and there were, um, there were scratches
on the bedpost.

Katherine giggles

Tim
And, I mean the noises bothered me, but that was it. That
was all they did to me. Then, um, then, one night...I mean,
it was the most terrifying thing I had ever heard!

*Katherine screams. Sound of quick footsteps and door slamming. Lights
up on Katherine, huddled in the corner, with Amanda close, but back
towards her. Tim gets up and crosses towards Amanda.*

Tim (Cont'd)
Betsy, are you alright!?!

Katherine
(with tears) I'm...I'm fine. It just frightened me. And it, I think it hit me. I'm scared John. What are we going to do?

Tim
I don't know...uh, father, what do we do?

Amanda
It's gone. I don't think it will be back tonight.

Elizabeth laughs – similar to Katherine's, but more malicious.

Amanda (Cont'd)
Go back to bed John. I'll tuck your sister in.

Tim
Alright. Good night Betsy. Good night, Pa.

Amanda
Night, son.

Lights out. Katherine blows out candle. Blackout.

Lydia
I mean, everyone just wants their family to love them.

The platforms shift. Elizabeth picks up platform and moves towards the audience. She looks out with the lantern, searching for something. After a moment she stops.

Elizabeth
Origins

Elizabeth crosses back to the stage with lantern and puts on her flannel.

Elizabeth (Tanya)
Hmmm...you know, it's funny. Cause, I mean, we all found each other. Like, we all knew that we had fucked up childhoods, and we were all there for each other, but we never really talked about it. *(Pause)*. It'll be nice to talk

Elizabeth (Cont'd)

about it. *(Pause. Laughs.)* I mean, not nice to talk about it, but, you know what I mean. Well, let's see. My dad's a control freak. He can't stand when...he doesn't grasp that other people might have needs that might not match what he wants to occur. And...I think he, I don't think people like that should be parents, but *(laughs)*, but, yeah, if you did anything that he didn't like, he'd hit you. Cause that's how he learned to deal with things. *(Long Pause)* And I know that my brother got it a lot worse than I did because he was bigger and my dad kind of actually paid attention to him. Cause I, *(laughs)*, um...*(long pause)*. My, um, my dad told me when I was about 13 years old that I was an accident and I had no idea why he launched into this story. But he just kind of decided to tell me that, and um, he told me also that when my mom told him that she was pregnant with me, um, he said "oh shit". And then he said "I'm going camping". And then he left and just went camping for like a week. And then he said, then he came back and said that he had time to think about it and he said, no I really do want this baby, blah blah, blah, and he was full of crap.

My mom told me, um, that, uh, I was born a month late. And after she told me the rest of the, uh, oh shit I'm going camping story, I think I just kind of, knew better, than to come out *(laughs)*. I was like, fuck that!

Long Pause

Yeah. You gotta grow up quick.

Elizabeth begins to play patty cake by herself. As she does so, candles are placed around her, boxing her in. She begins to get nervous as the candles come. Lights fade. She continues to play until she's sure that everyone is gone, then leans down to blow out the candles, one by one.

Lights up. Tim Enters

Tim

It all started in 1817. The Bell family had moved from North Carolina to Red River Tennessee, and while no one knows how or why the haunting began, there are many speculations. Some say that the Bell house was built on consecrated land. That John Bell had violated ancient Indian burial grounds to build his family home and that the spirits of the dead rose up and tormented John Bell until his death.

Katherine Enters

Katherine

Still, others say that the ghost of a slave that John Bell had killed had followed the family from North Carolina, seeking vengeance. It had been a “justified killing,” as, according to John Bell, the slave had been making passes at John Bell’s daughter and had gone so far as to lure her into one of the barns with him. When John Bell found them together, he shot the slave without thinking twice. As the man lay dying, he cursed John Bell, saying that he would torment the Bell family for years to come. Well, when the Bell family had settled into life in Tennessee, the ghost of the slave began to torment the family, harassing the Bell children, and eventually killing John Bell.

Lydia

Others say that the witch was conjured up by Ole Kate Batts. You see, John Bell had been accused of usury by Kate Batts and even though Kate had won the case, she wasn’t satisfied. She stood on the steps of the church and cursed the whole Bell family, saying “no amount of money can amend the wrong you have done John Bell! I swear that neither you nor your family will ever forget the name of Kate Batts!” It was only a matter of days after that incident that the witch began to torment the Bell family.

Tim

Wait a second. I mean, Kate might have hated John Bell, but there was no way she could have killed him. She was just crazy. And I mean tie you up, lock you in a padded room and look at you through a little glass window, crazy. She just liked to talk big and make a show. Take for example what she did to poor Joe Edwards. Now Joe was a sinner, and a drunk, but one day, he walked into the old Red River Baptist church when they were having a revival,

Tim (Cont'd)

and old Joe walked up right to the front of the meeting, dropped to his knees, and said "Oh Lord! Please forgive me for my sins. They are holding me down and I can't walk straight."

Lydia

Well, as soon as he dropped down, big ol' Kate Batts jumped up and landed right on Joe's back!

Tim

And Joe screamed out "I feel him Lord, the devil is riding my back, and I can't shake him off! Please Lord, help me walk straight!" *(pause)* Poor Joe...but the story we're trying to tell isn't about any of this...stuff. It's about John Bell, and what he did. It's about...

Amanda

You're right. It's not about Indian burial grounds. It's not about a dead slave, and it's not about Kate Batts. No, the Witch took four years to kill John Bell. For what he did...John Bell needed time to die. Now, it's true that John Bell was excommunicated from his church. No one is perfect. John worked hard for his family, and when the, um...when the disturbances began, he tried to cover it up. To make sure that no one would know. I mean, how would you react if you found out your neighbors house was haunted? Then, one night, they just couldn't cover it up anymore...it was, um, there had been the regular disturbances, the noises outside, the scratching at the bedposts, the sheets being pulled from the beds, but this night we were all awakened by the sound of Betsy screaming. It was the most horrible thing you've ever heard...I rushed into the room, and, um, I was the first to get there. And I watched as Betsy was lifted from her bed, and something, something I couldn't see smacked her face from one side to the other. I heard a laughing, and then Betsy fell to the floor...(pause)

During the previous monologue, Tim, Lydia, and Katherine move upstage. Katherine lies on the floor and Tim and Lydia lean over her. As the lights come up on this scene, Tim and Lydia lift Katherine off the floor and move her onto one of the platforms. Tim sits on the side of the platform and then begins to sing to Katherine.

Lydia
What's going on John?

Pause

Lydia (Cont'd)
We have to do something. This is getting worse.

Long Pause

Lydia
And not talking will make everything alright?

Amanda
Well, God damn-it Lucy! What the hell am I supposed to do?

Long Pause

Amanda
What do you want me to say?

Lydia
All right, John. If you don't want to talk about this...I mean, you were...(pause). But if you're not going to talk about it. Fine.

Amanda
Fine.

Long Pause. Katherine has joined in the singing, but only to underscore Tim. They listen to Tim and Katherine finish the song. Tim places his hand on Katherine's head and brings up the covers. He comes out into the hall and sees Amanda. He tries to speak, but nothing comes out. Lydia and Amanda both look at him expectantly (pause).

Amanda
(Slowly) Um...uh, I'm going to go for a walk.

Amanda exits. Tim and Lydia regard each other for a moment. Tim tries to speak, but finds himself unable to do so. Lights begin to fade. Lydia looks up at the light and then down at the platform just as Elizabeth and Katherine begin to push the platform. As the platform moves, the lights go out with Lydia still watching Tim move away. The light comes up on Tim. He picks up the jacket and puts it on. He faces the audience.

Tim (Turner)

I...um...

Tim continues to try to speak, but with no success.

Amanda (Chava)

He was the good doctor, you know. I mean, everyone loved him, so when something happened, we couldn't tell anyone, because he was the good doctor, and no one would see what was really happening. No one would see this side of him. So, one day, he had thrown my mom on the bed. And he was leaning over her and slamming his fists down right next to her head. Over and over and over and over. And it was so hard. And then, he picked up her head in his hands, and he just (makes shifting motion with her hands). But that didn't do what he wanted it to, so he did it again (makes motions again). And this time he heard a crack. And then he got up and left. She was in pain, but she didn't realize that he had broken her neck, yet. So she went to teach her dance class, but was in so much pain by the end that she had to go to the hospital, and by the time she got there, she had to physically hold her head up. And at the hospital, she couldn't say what had happened, because everyone knew him, and he was the good doctor, so they'd just think that she was crazy. And she could never dance anymore after that.

Amanda

Look, we can't let this become about silence.

Katherine

It's already about silence.

Amanda

No, that's what the Bell Witch is about. I mean, ghost stories scare us so we think about how afraid we are, and not about why the ghost exists, right?

Katherine

So. We *have* to tell this story. We said we would.

Amanda

And if we don't, we're just stepping around the story. And then we don't really tell anything. We just sort of repeat.

Katherine
Right. So, we tell his story.

Pause

Katherine (Cont'd)
You were still pretty young, at this point.

Tim looks at Katherine, and sits up.

Katherine (Cont'd)
But you were already doing a lot more than you should have.

Amanda (Chava)
Sometimes you just had to make the decisions because, well, you never knew.

Katherine
So, you made sure that your brothers had done their homework, and then you started to cook them dinner. I mean, it was just hotdogs, and you burnt the buns, but otherwise, they might not have had dinner.

Amanda (Chava)
And you realize...now is the time when you're not making the right decision for your child...who is me...who is 8. And having to have the consciousness of, this is how a parent should act, and they're not acting that way.

Katherine
And you tried to scrape off the buns, but they were ruined, so you threw them away, and got some fresh ones, careful not to burn them.

Amanda (Chava) and Tim
(Standing up) This is how a parent should act.

Katherine
And you set the table, and called your brothers in, and you all began to eat. And then your mom came into the kitchen.

Amanda (Chava) and Tim
And they're not acting that way.

Amanda takes off her scarf and exits.

Katherine
She began circling the table and yelling at you. And insulting you. And then she grabbed a knife. You all sat still as she walked up and held the knife to you. You didn't dare move. You tried to stay still. (*Pause*). Then your brother picked up his knife and he held it up to your mom, and he said, if you hurt him, I'll kill you. So she put the knife down and laughed, and left the room. Your brother told you this story. Because you don't remember it. But that's how it happened.

Tim stands up and Katherine helps him take the coat off.

Katherine
You okay?

Tim
Yeah, I'm fine.

Katherine
You sure?

Tim
Yeah...I dunno. I mean, was that right? I couldn't tell it. Maybe he didn't want me to tell it.

Katherine
He said we could. And he said we could because he thinks we're doing good work, and he wants to help. I mean, that's what we're doing, right? I mean if we don't acknowledge the ghost and what it's doing, it's just the same old ghost story, right?

Tim
Yeah, I guess. I just think that there's something to be said about the stuff that can't be said.

Lights fade. Lights come up on Elizabeth and Lydia playing patty cake, without any sound. A loud clap is heard. Lights fade out with the two still playing patty cake. In the dark, Lydia moves away from Elizabeth,

who continues the motions of patty cake. 4 candles are lit and placed around Elizabeth. She stops playing patty cake, blows out the candles, and resumes playing in the dark. A spotlight comes up on her that is the same size square as the candles. She crouches down to shade herself from the light. Lights fade.

Lydia and Katherine enter with the lantern, and help Elizabeth to her feet. She staggers, but manages to be helped to one of the platforms.

Lydia (Ann)

The first time I had a sense of being different was when I was actually pretty small. I felt different, but didn't relate it to my family until I was older.

Katherine

Growing Up

Lights up. Elizabeth enters and puts on her flannel.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

It really wasn't until high school that I actually had friends. Cause when I was a kid, you know, I was that weird poor kid they could make fun of that would hang out anyway. But I could never really have friends.

Lydia (Ann)

When I was little I didn't think much about what other kids had. I knew I was different...I wasn't interested in the same things as the other kids. I had this sense of being tough.

When I was little we had "6th grade friends". Like pals, and they would help you with homework, and come play with you during recess.

Katherine walks up to Lydia and starts pounding on her back

Katherine

People are dying, children are crying, concentrate, concentrate. People are dying, children are crying, concentrate, concentrate.

Katherine gets up and pretends to stab Lydia in the back.

Elizabeth

Stick a knife in your back and watch the blood run down,
stick a knife in your back and feel the blood run down.

Katherine

People are dying, children are crying, concentrate,
concentrate.

Elizabeth and Katherine break from Lydia and move cautiously away from her.

Lydia (Ann)

One day, I came to school, and had a black eye. My “friend” was completely freaked out! And then my friend asked “what happened!?! What happened!?!” and I just started crying...My “friend” traded me. Right in front of us as well. I felt different, but didn’t relate it to my family until I was older.

Katherine (Andrew)

I was always really popular when I was a kid. I guess it was cause I was always outside, cause, you know, like hell if I’d be inside if I didn’t have to be! So I was just always playing outside, and I’d make friends with anyone, and I’d always organize the games...You ever play ghost in the graveyard!?!

Lydia and Elizabeth turn to hide as Katherine begins to count, 1 o’clock, o’clock, etc...when she gets to midnight, she stops and turns around to find an empty stage. She speaks to the stage.

2

Katherine (Andrew)

I would have friends, and I would spend the night at their houses, but, um, they would never be allowed to spend the night at my house. And my mom would, like, make excuses for them, so I wasn’t upset that they wouldn’t come over. Like they were afraid to stay away from home. And I was so brave because I could be on my own.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

During most of my childhood, I couldn’t be openly acknowledged for succeeding in anything because that would make my brother feel bad and then he would act

Elizabeth (Cont'd)

out, or whatever. When he was 5, he punched through a glass window because there were kids outside making fun of him. But, um. Kind of fucked up for a five year old. At one point, when I was older, I don't remember what he did, but he was just, trying to make it as hard on my mother as possible and she just snapped and she just started screaming and the neighbors called the cops, cause she was just, for like ten minutes, she was just screaming and couldn't stop. And, like (pause) I just remember holding her and she was just crying uncontrollably. And then the cops came and they yelled at my mom for having them called. (long pause). It was bull shit. (long pause) jerks.

Amanda

But, it wasn't all bad, was it.

Amanda puts on her scarf

Tim

No. That's the thing, she wasn't all bad.

Amanda (Chava)

It took a really long time to forgive him. It was still a while after our divorce...I call it our divorce, when me and my mom left him, and that's the way we refer to it (laughs).

Tim

Even though the Bell Witch would hurt John and Betsy Bell, there were times when she would help people. She even saved some lives.

Amanda (Chava)

It was a while before I could forgive him. And I needed to, so I could move on, because it was taking all my energy to be mad at him. And he wasn't all bad. No person is all bad, or all good.

Tim

One time, John Bell's wife, Lucy, was deathly ill, and no one knew what would cure her. As she was lying in bed, she suddenly heard the laughter of the witch, (*Chava*

Tim (Cont'd)

laughs) and from nowhere came a shower of medicinal fruits and herbs. After eating these, Lucy recovered.

Amanda (Chava)

And I want to figure him as all evil, but you can't do that. Because there were good times. And there were times

Amanda (Cont'd)

where he was really sweet. And, you know, he loved me as much as he could.

Katherine (Andrew)

Yeah, there were all these times where he would do these really wonderful things, and they were usually because he had done something awful, and was trying to make up for it, or something, but they were still pretty great.

Tim

There was a cave in Red River where some of the more adventurous children would play. One day, a few children broke off from the group that they were with and got lost in the darkness of the cave.

Katherine (Andrew)

I remember once, after a particularly brutal night...I had fallen asleep, so he took it all out on my mom, but, um, yeah, I woke up to the sound of him throwing rocks at my window at like 8, so my sister and I ran outside,

Tim

Out of nowhere, a giant ball of light surrounded the children, and the voice of the witch guided the children to the cave's entrance, and to safety.

Katherine (Andrew)

So, we ran outside, and he had filled his truck with snow! It was like 90 degrees out, but he had driven up to the mountains and filled his bed with the last of the snow. And we built a snowman, and had snowball fights, practically during summer. So, yeah, that was pretty great.

Lydia (Ann)

I remember me and my dad would watch Doctor Who together when I was a kid. He also had this massive

Lydia (Cont'd)
record collection that he would let me listen to. And that's totally where I got my love of music from. And he had these massive headphones, and when I was about 2 or 3, he would let me put them on and listen to the records. I remember I would listen to the records, and then he would come in and make me turn it down, and as soon as he would leave, I would turn it right back up again! (laughs)

Tim
The Witch had become so famous that it's rumored that when General Andrew Jackson encountered the Bell Witch, he said that he'd rather face the entire British army, than have to deal with the Bell Witch.

Lydia (Ann)
The entire British Army?

Tim
...yeah.

Lydia (Ann)
Yeah, me too.

Pause

Tim
Separation.

Tim exits.

Lydia (Ann)
As I got older he became more angry. And more and more angry (laughs). I developed tactics. It was almost like playing with him.

Amanda (Chava)
Well, cause you never knew when it might change!

Elizabeth (Tanya)
Right!

Amanda (Chava)

So, even when we were playing, and having a really good time, I was always conscious. I was always looking around, saying, Ok, where's my weapon? What can I use if he turns? (laughs). And, that carries over. I'm still very conscious, if I walk into a parking lot at night, ok, what can be a weapon? Where are the exits? So, it has made me more aware...of my surroundings.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

When I was really little...he can get along really well, I've noticed this, with little kids, and my little cousins. He can get along really well with children and he's really good with them. I remember, like being 5, and having, you know, a friend over, and we'd just be like playing and my dad was really silly and we were having a good time...(pause) And then I learned how to argue.

Amanda (Chava)

You have to constantly be ready. Ok, now I can play with the toy, because he's in a playful mood. But then, you know, also having to play the parent with him. Ok, now it's time to make that choice. Now is the time when you're not making the right decision for your child... who's me...who's 8. And having to have the consciousness of, this is how a parent should act, and you're not acting that way.

Lydia (Ann)

At first, when I started hiding from him, it was scary, but eventually, when he couldn't find me, it would become funny. He just wanted to control everything and would get pissed off if he couldn't. He would drag me around the house, or, he would threaten to lock me in my room...but, the lock's on the inside!

Katherine (Andrew)

Ok, this was funny. I got sent to my room. I think it was cause I was trying to call my dad and see if he could come pick me up. So I got sent to my room, and I was like 5 or 6...or something. Anyway, I was so pissed off that I decided I was going to run away. And I was on the second floor, so I opened the window, took out the screen, and began to climb on the roof. Well, he flipped the fuck out, burst into my room and pulled me by the legs back inside. And, um, he started hitting me, and I don't really

Katherine (Cont'd)

remember that, but, um, right before he started hitting me, he said “did you think I was an idiot!?! Did you think I wouldn’t hear!?!” And, the last thing I remember thinking before I blacked out was, what does you being an idiot have anything to do with your ability to hear me?

Elizabeth crosses downstage to address the audience directly.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

For a long time you don’t know that it’s supposed to be otherwise. And it also doesn’t occur to you that you have the option to not love them. And even after that, once you have that option, you still don’t want that feeling. I mean just because you can, it doesn’t mean that you want to.

Lydia crosses to join Elizabeth.

Lydia (Ann)

For the most part, I used passive resistance. Like, I would just go limp. Like he would pull my hair, and he would drag me by my hair, and I would just go limp. And it hurt, and I wanted to cry because it hurt so much, but I would just go limp and I would laugh. I would laugh like a maniac! And that would really piss him off. But I wasn’t going to give power to him by letting him make me upset. I was just going to defy him!

Katherine addresses the Stage right audience.

Katherine (Andrew)

I was about 12. It was the middle of the night. We all got into the car. My mom had a bloody nose and my sister and my brother were both crying. I think at that point I was just done. My mom said she needed a phone, but didn’t know where to go. I told her to go to the gas station. We needed a place to stay and I think she was just wrecked, and they were just crying in the back seat. I was numb to it at this point. Closed off. I was just done.

Elizabeth moves to address the stage right audience

Elizabeth (Tanya)

I don’t know about with my family, but when he had his girlfriend and her kids and me and my brother he kept

Elizabeth (Cont'd)

on...I just remember telling him a bunch of times, like we're not the fucking Brady Bunch. (laughs) We're not a giant happy family. You know. We're not her kids. Her kids aren't your kids. It's just not going to happen. (Pause).

I think, you know, hypothetically if it came up, like, if my brother or my dad actually went to AA, and got better, then yeah, I would like to have a decent relationship with them. I think I'm mostly past hating them at this point. I just don't want to be anywhere around them, cause, why would you want to be around anyone who makes you feel bad about yourself. But yeah, if they stop doing that, then, yeah, maybe we'll talk. I don't think it's likely.

Elizabeth exits upstage. Music plays over the scene change. Elizabeth begins to play "As I Sat Sadly by Her Side" by Nick Cave. Amanda lies upstage of the stage left platform. Tim, Lydia, and Katherine sit stage right

Tim

One morning, the Bell family awoke for breakfast, but John Bell didn't come down.

The sound of heavy breathing is heard.

Lydia

Lucy told the children that their father had been feeling ill and that he needed his rest.

Pause.

Lydia

John, dear, could you pass the milk please.

Tim

Here you go.

Neither move. Sound of rattling dishes is heard, punctuated by the sound of heavy breathing.

Lydia

Did you sleep well, honey?

Katherine
Yeah...yeah, I slept fine.

Pause.

Tim (Cont'd)
When the family had finished breakfast and John had still not come down, the rest of the family began to get worried. Um, should we go check on Pa?

Lydia
I suppose we'd better.

Pause. No one is sure who will make the first move. Finally, Katherine gets up first.

Tim
They went up to his room and found him lying in bed. His breathing had become heavy and strained.

Tim and Lydia move upstage and join Katherine standing over Amanda.

Lydia
He's not breathing right. John, can you hear me? John, are you alright?

Tim reaches down and picks up a bottle.

Tim
It was then that John Jr. noticed a small vial lying on the floor. Mother...I found this.

Lydia takes the bottle and touches the rim. She looks at the liquid on her finger, then leans down to examine Amanda's mouth.

Lydia
Lucy recognized the liquid in the bottle as nightshade and saw traces of it on her husband's lips.

Lydia hands the bottle back to Tim and Exits. Tim crosses downstage. Katherine kneels by Amanda. Lights begin to fade on them, but then stop.

Tim
By the end of the day, John Bell had passed away. As soon as John Bell died, the presence of the witch began to

Tim (Cont'd)
fade away, until eventually, the witch was finally gone
from Red River.

Elizabeth
No! No, no, no, no! This is not happening!

Tim
What!?! Who... what are you doing here?

Elizabeth
I'm stopping you from fucking this up...again

Tim
What are you talking about?

Elizabeth
(pointing at the scene) This! That! The lights fading out.
The story done. Your dad dead. Wrapping it up. Closure.

Tim
You don't know the first thing about my family and what
we've...

Elizabeth
I know that this story is far from finished.

Tim
No, you don't know. That's how the story goes. It is over.
The lights fade, the audience applauds, everyone goes
home. The story's done. What more is there?

Elizabeth
The story is not over! The story hasn't even started.
Look at her. Is that the image you want to leave? Does
she just let him die?

Tim
Well, why shouldn't she let him die? God knows the
bastard deserves it.

Elizabeth
And you think that that's enough?

Tim

What do you want me to do? Have her torture him?

Elizabeth

It's a thought...

Tim

Yeah, well it's not what happened. He just died. He lay in bed and died and we put him in the ground, and that was it. I told what I saw, what more should I do?

Elizabeth

Well, for starters, you could let your sister tell her story.

Tim

She's not the one telling it. Maybe she can't, maybe she just doesn't want to, I don't know. I'm the one telling it, and this is what I know. This is what I saw.

Elizabeth

Is what you saw all that happened?

Tim

What the hell do you think?

Elizabeth

I think you're not telling the whole story.

Tim

Of course I'm not telling the whole story. That part isn't mine to tell.

Elizabeth

What part?

Tim

It's not mine to tell.

Elizabeth

Then why are you telling it?

Tim

Because she's not...

Elizabeth

Then tell it for her.

Tim
Why do you think I'm telling it!?!

Elizabeth
I don't know. I've been trying to figure that part out all night. But if you were telling it for her, it seems like you might tell her story, and not about how you were too much of a coward to stop your dad from...

Tim
You don't know the first thing about what happened.

Elizabeth
Oh, and you do?

Tim
I was there.

Elizabeth
Yeah, so was I. What happened before you burst into your sister's room?

Tim
Shut up.

Elizabeth
What was your dad doing in there with your sister?

Tim
Shut up.

Elizabeth
Was the door wide open, or did you have to force it to get to your crying sister?

Tim
Stop it!

Elizabeth
Was she bruised? Was she bleeding? She wanted you to stop it, didn't she? She begged you to force him to stop it, but you couldn't. He was too powerful. He was your father and you had to obey. But you knew. You heard her. You heard him abusing her and there was nothing

Elizabeth (Cont'd)
you could do about it.

Tim
Yeah, I heard it. And I saw what it did to her. And you couldn't have any idea what that's like! You couldn't have any idea what it's like to have someone you trust and love violate you like that.

Elizabeth
Oh. Couldn't I?

Tim
I...um...I didn't mean to...I mean, I didn't know...

Elizabeth
No, you didn't know. But you knew what happened to Betsy. You knew that she was abused. And you knew that it was your father doing it. And you're not letting her tell her story.

Tim
But, what if she doesn't want me to? What if I shouldn't? Just because I know it, doesn't mean I should tell it. It's not mine to tell.

Elizabeth
Just because she's not telling it, it doesn't mean that she doesn't want it told.

Tim
But how do we know.

Elizabeth
We don't.

Tim
What if the story should just end without talking about what happened.

Elizabeth
Do you really think that the story will ever end? Do you think that this is something that can be over?

Tim
No...no, I guess not. But I still don't know if it's right.

Elizabeth

And you never will. But you can try...at least to do what you think is right. And we can help. You never have to tell it alone.

Tim

(Pause) I just...where would I start?

Elizabeth

Just let her tell it.

Tim looks over at Katherine who is standing over Amanda.

Tim

(Pause) Alright...

Katherine

The image of my father lying there dead stayed with me for years. I was 22 when I saw him broken, at his mother's funeral. It was weird to be there, among my step dad's family, who I hadn't seen in years...I was married, and had kids of my own, and I remember walking into my 12 year old daughter's room while she was asleep, and watching her perfect tiny body. Untouched, unharmed, untainted. His face was red with tears. I had never seen him cry, but I had seen his face like that. One morning, I watched him come out of my mom's room. There was screaming the night before, and there were silent tears and a broken nose this morning. She looked so calm and peaceful lying there and it made me sick to think that anyone could ever violate that innocence. And that's when it began to make a little more sense to me. It wasn't black or white. It wasn't love *or* hate. Watching him cry and remembering that he had cried...(pause) remembering that he had hurt me. Watching my daughter sleep...watching him cry. I did love him. I mean, he hurt me in ways that no one should ever hurt another person, and I hate him for it, but he loved me too...he tried...and I loved him too.

Lydia and Elizabeth enter

Elizabeth

Moving on.

Elizabeth and Lydia put on their character clothes.

Lydia (Ann)

I hadn't talked to him in about 7 years, but I needed money to go to University, and he wanted to pay for it. I mean, I could be hardcore and punk rock and do it myself. Mom couldn't help me...and wouldn't. He'd heard of the things I was doing, so he turned up to a show and he wanted to get in on it. The more attractive and talented I *become*, the better trophy, the more worthy investment than the fat kid I used to be.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

It's really hard for me to be a normal person now, because of how they treated me. And that kind of makes things really hard when you want to get out of that, out of that pattern. Um, Yeah, I guess I'm just over it. I'm over trying to...I mean, I...my dad might act differently later, but I'm over trying to have a relationship with them. I'm not going to keep trying.

Lydia (Ann)

He calls me about two times a week. He pays for me. For school. It's like he's trying to assume some sort of ownership.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

I just can't be close to them. If I do love them, it has to be at a distance.

Lydia (Ann)

Well, it carries over. I mean, like you said, it's really hard to be a normal person now. God, my last boyfriend was just like my father. You learn to expect certain things.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

You need some perspective. I mean, my first boyfriend that I ever had was wonderful. It's people who don't treat me like shit, and I don't know what to do.

Lydia (Ann)

So, what happened?

Elizabeth (Tanya)

I ended it because I didn't think that I could love him anymore. I was still living in the house with my brother, and that was when he started getting a lot worse at that point. He started doing a lot more drugs and getting a lot more violent. And I was still having to deal with my dad, and I just kind of snapped. I mean, not snapped, I just kind of broke, and I didn't think that it would be fair. I mean if you think that you're just not emotionally there, it's just not fair.

Lydia (Ann)

I learned that it wasn't ok to ask for, or to need comfort. You just wouldn't get it. With boyfriends now, I don't like gifts. I'm scared to be in debt to them. I also don't like depending on people. And it makes my partner feel like I think they're stupid. Which then stresses me out! It's all damage control. I try to manage any random variable that you can. Cover all possible bases. Try to plan way ahead. Relying on anyone implies disaster.

Elizabeth (Tanya)

And, yeah, after I dated my first boy friend and then dated all those people who treated me like crap, it gives you a bit more perspective. And now that I've had people who treat me like crap and am dating someone who's nice to me again, it definitely, you know, I've got more experience. A lot of that is positive, but some of it is negative, because I had all this time built up with people and relationships where they were treating me like crap and I'm still trying to, like, I'm still having this behavior, even though I'm in this situation.

Long Pause

I'm glad we did this. Like I said, we all had fucked up childhoods, and we never really talked about it, we all just sort of knew. And, when I was in high school, when I first really had friends, it was really, really great. But I'm not going to be one of those people who think that high school was the best time of my life, cause that's just fucking retarded. Cause I still had to go home. I mean, you know, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, rich tapestry, blah blah, blah. All that crap. No...(pause), but it was definitely the highest contrast.

Lights fade. Square spotlight stays up on Elizabeth. She begins to light candles and mark the outline of the square. The other performers then grab the candles, and as they do so, the light fades onto the rest of the stage. They carry their candles and place them on the empty chairs in the audience. They exit.

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