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Fire on the Prisoners: An Autoethnographic Study of Ethics in Historical Storytelling

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Reading

by

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ABSTRACT

Fire on the Prisoners: An Autoethnographic Study of Ethics in Historical Storytelling

by

A. Trae McMaken

During field experience as a storyteller constructing a performance based on the Battle of Kings Mountain on behalf of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association and the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, I encountered ethical and philosophical dilemmas. This challenge centered on ethical and spiritual convictions that put me in potential conflict with the task of creating a performance about war. This experience forms the basis of an autoethnographic approach to the art form, revealing the critical role played by personal ethics and a functioning engagement with historiography and narrative theory in producing effective performance stories. Historical performance storytelling has little developed theoretical discourse that takes into account contemporary theories of historiography and interpretation. My experience suggests that interdisciplinary thought on narrative, counter-narrative, performance, and historiography should be incorporated by storytellers to aid in the production of ethical and effective historical storytelling performances.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first rule of research along the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT) is to keep an extra winter blanket in the trunk of one's car. The storyteller cannot expect evaluate the needs of a performance by staying entirely in the library. Even in the early fall in Tennessee, high elevations can mean cool temperatures.

Gary, the quiet gentleman whom I had met 2 days ago, looked at his truck and calmly remarked, "No, I'm pretty sure it was down below 40. That's when the moisture on the windshield kind of gets that glassy look to it."

Two nights prior, Gary kindly had offered to let me sleep under the canopy he used for protection from dew and rain. The canopy was spacious and the hour was late. I did not feel like setting up my tiny tent in the dark. I grabbed my sleeping bag, laid my tent out on the damp earth as groundcover, and fell asleep. I woke at about 4:30AM and had to do the traditional breathe-in-sleeping-bag technique for warming up. The second night, that extra winter blanket from the car trunk managed to keep me warm throughout the night.

So, why was I sleeping on a hillside in southwest Virginia, amidst a small bivouac of men dressed in various states of 18th century garb? The evaluation process required it.

I was in Abingdon, Virginia, in a grove of trees located across from the Abingdon Muster Grounds. In 1780 ragtag frontier Virginian Whig militia gathered here to head south, join other forces, and eventually arrive at Kings Mountain,¹ South Carolina, to initiate the bloody battle that began the defeat of the British in the Revolutionary War (Jones, 2011, pp. 382, 527-528). They were part of a

¹ Both the possessive and plural forms of the name of "Kings Mountain" are arguably correct usage. I adopt the plural.

group of fighters whom historians later would refer to as the “Overmountain Men.” They had lived hard lives before they arrived at the muster grounds in Abingdon. They were experienced frontier fighters and campaign veterans of conflicts against the Shawnee and Cherokee. Many were no strangers to war and partisan raiding. (Draper, 1971; Dykeman, 1978; Jones, 2011).

They were not exactly going to fight the British at Kings Mountain. In fact, there was only one noncolonial British soldier at the battle, the commander, Patrick Ferguson (Dykeman, 1978, p. 4). In some cases, the Overmountain Men, particularly those who came from North Carolina, were going to fight their neighbors, their former friends, other members of their churches, and comrades from previous frontier campaigns. They were going to fight the American loyalists. It was American against American (Draper, 1971; Dykeman, 1978; Jones, 2011).

As someone raised on the works of James Fennimore Cooper and French and Indian War history, this material can easily get my blood pumping. The only problem was that somewhere between the time when I received my first copy of Cooper’s *Deerslayer* at around the age of 11 and when I showed up at the Abingdon Muster Grounds, I had acquired convictions of pacifism. These convictions were based on my faith in Jesus Christ. I do not believe that violence or war is always, in every circumstance, unjustified. Still, without explicating the depths of my perspective, when it comes to practical interactions in the world, pacifism may be the closest commonly understood term to describe my general antiviolence position.

This perspective on war complicated things for me. Not only did I need to travel, camp, and perform my way through the physical route of the Overmountain Men, I needed to navigate the complexities of ethics and historiography at the same time. As much as it helped, my extra winter blanket was the least of my problems.

Project Summary

My project is an autoethnographic case study of 2 semesters I spent working as a graduate assistant with the Overmountain Victory Trail Association (hereafter referred to as OVTA) and the National Parks Service.² My mission was to consult with these organizations on how to improve their storytelling and to perform for them. I followed portions of the OVTA march from Abingdon, Virginia, to Kings Mountain, South Carolina, and I observed and participated in storytelling performances. When the march ended, my mission shifted to the further development and marketing of a performance about the history of Kings Mountain. The objective of the OVTA and OVNHT were to spread awareness of the trail and educate audiences regarding the history of the Battle of Kings Mountain. Little direction was given as to the artistic or interpretive aspects of my performance, leaving me considerable room to develop my own interpretation of the history of the battle. I proceeded to develop a performance, based on the viewpoints of three characters, which could be adapted to various audience and time requirements. I marketed and performed this show for schools and organizations in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina over the course of 2 semesters.

Significant time in the field provides the basis of this autoethnographic narrative. I worked closely with the OVTA during the annual march, even encamping for a weekend with OVTA members on site at the Abingdon Muster Grounds. I traveled with them in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina, observing and performing. A long process of individual performances and experiences following this group work also forms a section of my narrative. These personal reflections are presented to wrestle with larger questions of historical representation.

How, then, does a functional understanding of historiography allow a storyteller to create and perform ethical and effective historical stories? This is the essential question behind this thesis. Writing

² The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail is overseen by the National Parks Service.

about the definition of historiography, Little (2002) states:

In its most general sense, the term refers to the study of historians' methods and practices. Any intellectual or creative practice is guided by a set of standards and heuristics about how to proceed, and “experts” evaluate the performances of practitioners based on their judgments of how well the practitioner meets the standards. (Historiography and the Philosophy of History section, para. 1)

Historiography is itself closely related to concepts of narrative and story. Johnstone (2003) writes that “For Labov, a ‘narrative’ was a sequence of clauses with at least one temporal juncture, but a ‘complete’ or ‘fully formed’ narrative included such things as orientation and evaluation as well” (p. 639). In distinguishing story from narrative, Johnstone writes, “Following Polanyi, I adopt this distinction in what follows, using ‘narrative’ to mean talk that represents events in the past and ‘story’ to mean roughly what it does in everyday parlance: narrative with a point” (p. 639). Historical storytelling, as I employ the term in this thesis, is storytelling that is ostensibly representative of historical events but which is essentially an interpretation and not equivalent to past events. White (1997) says that in addition to “factual statements,” histories “consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story” (p. 393). Thus, when dealing with historical storytelling, there are additional layers or components of discourse that must be dealt with in addition to facts of past events. In the case of Kings Mountain, my research revealed that written works on the subject intricately weave past events with narrative devices intended not only to relate events but to reveal motives, shape human reactions, and create a sense of narrative progression.

I employ autoethnography to examine the benefits an understanding of historiography can provide to historical storytelling. I examine my experience working as a storyteller with the OVTA and

the OVNHT to draw conclusions about my research question above. Autoethnography will be examined in detail in following sections, but Ellis provides a short definition: “Autoethnography is . . . research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection” (2004, p. xix). As part of my autoethnography, I have employed written records of my experiences with the organization, as well as reviews of performances, a transcription of one of my performances, and publications that I employed in developing the story. I interacted and encamped with members of the OVTA during their activities and traveled significantly in the process of developing my performance. Autoethnographic narrative provides the basis for my discussion of the ethical necessity and artistic benefits of practicing storytelling with a robust understanding of historical and narrative theory, as well as one’s own fundamental beliefs.

Significance and Justification

Historical theorists have undertaken much work on the topic of narrative's relationship to history, but when it comes to performance storytelling, the field is not highly developed in terms of written theory. In my work with the OVTA, I witnessed storytellers performing in a manner that demonstrated practical use of some of these concepts, particularly in representing marginalized perspectives. Personal social and cultural agendas, as well as artistic attempts at creating effective performances, can be expected to lead storytellers into an awareness of the issues I am discussing. Still, extant written work on historical storytelling tends to focus on the craft or methodological elements of story construction, rather than interpretive theory. In addition, while I did witness storytellers operating with at least an implicit understanding of historiographical concepts, I also at times have witnessed insensitivity to the ethical demands of historical storytelling.

There are a few ideas that form the critical foundation for this thesis. First, the events, personages, and conditions that comprised the past are not the same as the historical writings or stories that interpret and present the past. White (1997) writes, “There is an inextinguishable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena. The relativity of the representation is a function of the language used to describe and thereby constitute past events as possible objects of explanation and understanding” (p. 392). The past and that which is written or told about it are not the same because the use of relative language does not equal the past events. Past event is inaccessible to a storyteller and cannot be experienced again. What the teller possesses is the historical record. The historical record is comprised of renditions of memory and artifacts that can come in the form of physical objects and written records. Locations also form an important part in our record of the past. The OVTA and OVNHT exist because of the geographic location. These are presumably elements of the “historical phenomena” about which White writes. The project of the historian is to interpret the record.

Interpretation can take a number of forms or genres, but it arguably consists of narrative or storytelling. Scheub (1998) writes:

History is a story that is never wholly told, never entirely true, but always at least partially true, always true at least in its parts: the events keep sliding around, as each storyteller, each historian, rearranges the incidents, reinterprets, retells, and meanings alters—often slightly, sometimes more dramatically, with audiences providing a necessary set of contemporary emotional reactions. The events of the past are never sealed. Story provides insight but never closure. These traditions are in the care of the storytellers. The substance of history depends on “my feelings,” argues the historian. (p. 3)

Scheub synonymizes truth and story (1998, p. 3), and so it is perhaps not surprising that he claims that the story of history is “always at least partially true.” In *Telling the Truth About History*, Appleby, Hunt,

and Jacob (1994) provide a perspective on the travails of the historical discipline's struggle to come to terms with its heritage as a self-perceived scientific endeavor that can represent objectively the past and the threats of antirealist absolutism and postmodernism. It is necessary to take a moment and define some of these terms. The problem of objectivism, Newall (2009) writes, refers to “the classical question” of “whether what we take to be our knowledge depends exclusively on the object of inquiry and hence is independent of what we think, hope, or expect to find?” (p. 172). If a definition of objectivism is derived from Newall’s statement, objectivism is the view that our knowledge can at least primarily represent the “object of inquiry” and not ourselves. Regarding postmodernism, Aylesworth (2013) writes:

That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning. (Postmodernism section, para. 1)

One way this conflict particularly affects the study of history relates to the antirealist stance of historical interpretation: “Anti-realist philosophers of historiography who are sometimes called *constructionists* claim that historiography is not a representation of the past, but a construction in the present” (Pataut, 2009, p. 190). “Realism,” in contrast “. . . may be taken to mean that the referent actually exists or has existed at some time in the past” (Murphey, 2009, p. 181). In one evocative passage, Appleby et al. write of the postmodern challenge to history:

Dorothy's dog Toto exposes the Wizard of Oz as an ordinary middle-aged man; similarly, the skeptics believe, they have revealed historians to be no more than specialized storytellers whose claims to recover the past as it actually happened belong to the smoke screen of scientific

pretensions. (pp. 243-244)

They then follow up with a counter challenge, “Denying the absolutism of one age, the doubters, however, seem oblivious to the danger of inventing a new absolutism based upon subjectivity and relativism” (p. 247). Appleby et al. seem to espouse what they refer to as “practical realism.” This stance:

. . . presumes that the meanings of words are never simply ‘in our head,’ nor do they lock on to objects of the external world and fix reality for all time. Linguistic conventions arise because human beings possessed of imagination and understanding use language in response to things outside of their minds. (Appleby, et al., 1994, 247)

In the words of Iggers (1997):

There is therefore a difference between a theory that denies any claim to reality in historical accounts and a historiography that is fully conscious of the complexity of historical knowledge but still assumes that real people had real thoughts and feelings that led to real actions that, within limits, can be known and reconstructed. (p. 119)

In this thesis I take the position described above as practical realism, and in keeping with Iggers’s definition, claim a historiography that “still assumes that real people had real thoughts and feelings that led to real actions that, within limits, can be known and reconstructed” (1997, p. 119). From this perspective it can be argued that Scheub’s statement that history is “always at least partially true,” (1998, p. 3) is only valid in so far as history can be seen as metaphor or commentary rather than accurate representation of past event, and even so makes troubling assumptions about truth claims regarding metaphor and commentary. A total misrepresentation of history must be possible if the story fails to align at all with this assumed reality seen in Iggers’s definition above. For example, a historian who claimed that Ferguson did not die at the Battle of Kings Mountain but actually slipped away into

the gun smoke, basing this claim on nothing but the thrill of the story, would not be telling a true story about Ferguson's fate. Whether it could be metaphorically interpreted to discuss the "immortality" of Ferguson is arguable, but not from the perspective of achieving an accurate account of the past. Still, in the passage above, Scheub argues two critical points. The first is that the storyteller's perspective influences historical narrative, and second, that the audience in a sense collaborates with the storyteller by its reaction. This audience reaction is contemporary, or present, as Scheub points out in the passage.

The very structure of a study of history is a kind of narrative framework, creating boundaries and engaging in selectivity as it catalogues events. Linguist Deborah Tannen discusses this concept of boundaries and selectivity in terms of ellipsis (2007, p. 37). Tannen looks at how scholars have acknowledged that ellipsis, or that which is not said, is a "fundamental aspect of language," and that it is critical in saying anything at all (2007, p. 37). Selectivity, then, must be a key idea in interpretation, if interpretation or "historical storytelling" belongs to "the order of discourse," as White argues (1997, p. 392). It would be absurd to attempt to catalogue the entire historical record, which in the broadest sense consists of every object, place, condition, and recorded memory. Limits, always arbitrary to some degree and often artful, are set when considering the history of the Revolutionary War, for example. Further limits are set when narrowing one's focus to the Battle of Kings Mountain. Further limits are set when selecting what events, artifacts, and geographical places should be related.

Meaning is perhaps the goal of story, if one equates Scheub's use of the word "truth" with his subsequent use of the word "meaning" in the quoted passage above, but there is no objective way to identify what is meaningful. Historians select what is meaningful based on their own beliefs and agendas. This is perhaps what Scheub means when he writes, "The substance of history depends on 'my feelings,' argues the historian" (1998, p. 3). A historian attempting to show how an African American participant held an ambiguous role in the Battle of Kings Mountain would examine certain

aspects of the historical record and interpret them, perhaps neglecting others the person found unrelated. This historian might be less concerned about the treatment of horses during the campaign than might be an animal activist. Such a historiography might include the belief that African Americans, as a group that had been oppressed and enslaved, must have participated in the Revolution for reasons quite different from those of members of the dominant group. Someone intending to argue that Major Patrick Ferguson, in fact, did not attempt to flee the battle would look at military achievements and records of valor, and might suggest that previous historians had examined the battle with an anti-British bias.³ Someone examining the battle believing that the war was justified would interpret the event differently than someone examining the battle from the perspective that war is not justifiable.

The story created from the historical record depends in large part on the fundamental premises held by the historian-storyteller. These fundamental beliefs may be spiritual and ethical concerns. Historical stories, then, are created on the basis of the spiritual and ethical nature of the storyteller. This ethical basis can be seen in Ankersmit's (2004) work. He asserts, "ethical and political (and, even more obviously, cognitive) values are so inextricably tied up with historical writing that they could have led to what is both the best and the worst in the discipline's past" (p. 25). Rather than argue that such values are a problem, Ankersmit argues that values are a helpful tool in understanding history (p. 25). Rather than being a limitation or liability, this awareness is a key to telling effective historical stories, as well as to telling stories that are ethical in their interpretive meaning and presentation.

Although I write in this thesis from a perspective of practical realism as discussed above, it is not imperative for a practicing storyteller to share that perspective. What is important is the awareness of how one's own beliefs and interpretations can help guide in the storytelling process. The telling of

3 See Dykeman, 1978, p. 65 for one account of Ferguson's last moments.

history is an ethically fraught field, and it is not a passing curiosity for performing storytellers to understand concepts of historiography; such an understanding can be employed both to navigate the ethics of storytelling and to create powerful, effective performances.

Limitations

It is not my intent to provide a thorough explication of such theoretical discourses as historiography or storytelling. I employ theory where it is illuminating and practically applicable to the process of historical storytelling, as I present it below. In other words, this is not a thesis on the current debates on historiographical theory. This is a thesis on how an understanding of historical interpretation is necessary to ethical and effective storytelling.

As autoethnography, this thesis covers most of 2 semesters of work with the OVTA and OVNHT. It is not a complete account of my entire work with the organizations. It is not an exhaustive or even representative ethnography of the organizations or their organizational cultures, but rather an examination of my own task-oriented encounter with a story-creation process.

In this thesis I do not attempt to make a thorough investigation of the Battle of Kings Mountain. History of the battle is necessary to explain and contextualize field experience and draw from the experience an understanding of historical storytelling, but at times I have chosen to limit my discussion of historical and cultural issues in order to maintain a focus on the primary concepts of ethics in historical storytelling.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge a limitation regarding my discussion of pacifism. I was not raised in a tradition that espoused Christian Pacifism as a theological or theoretical concept, and I am not from any of the well-known Christian traditions or communities associated with pacifism, such as the Mennonites, Moravians, Quakers, or Amish. I was also not raised with any remembered teaching

on Just War Theory, which would be a theoretical counterpoint to Christian Pacifism. I had little exposure to any of these theories at the time of my performances or experiences with the OVTA and OVNHT. Further, pacifism is not the sole property of Christianity (or even a uniform belief within Christianity), and as Fiala (2010) writes, “a variety of religions can support pacifist positions. Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists share a concern for *ahimsa* or nonviolence as a basic moral virtue. Likewise, Christians also find a commitment to nonviolence at the heart of their tradition” (Section 5.1, para. 1). Fiala writes that “pacifism in the West appears to begin with Christianity” (Pacifism section, para. 2), yet it is apparent that pacifism does not need to be accompanied by religious or spiritual self-designation: “most basically, pacifists hold that war is wrong because killing is wrong. Pacifism, as it is used in ordinary discourse today, includes a variety of commitments on a continuum from an absolute commitment to nonviolence in all actions to a more focused or minimal sort of anti-warism” (Fiala, 2012, Pacifism section, para. 5). Just War Theory, by contrast, allows for the possibility of war. Orend (2008) describes the context for what “just cause” for a war might be, writing that “the just causes most frequently mentioned include: self-defense from external attack; the defense of others from such; the protection of innocents from brutal, aggressive regimes; and punishment for a grievous wrongdoing which remains uncorrected” (section 2.1.1, para. 1).

The varied perspectives on Just War Theory and pacifism are nuanced and complex. It is not the object of this thesis to make any significant exploration of Christian Pacifism, the histories of spiritual groups who have adhered to Christian Pacifism, or of Just War Theory and its corresponding adherents. In my teen years, I began to question how Biblical teaching on sanctity of life corresponded to ideas of abortion and war. I believe in Christ and the Bible as God’s revelation to humans, and I believe that God teaches that humans are made in His image. I also believe that human beings have an eternal soul and that it is of ultimate importance to receive reconciliation with God through Christ. Over the years,

my relationship with Christ and my questions about killing naturally caused me to question the American wars that have profoundly defined my teen and adult years in America. In my recollection, it was during my years at Wheaton College that my questions and concerns began to take the form of conviction. A couple of professors in my department were Mennonites, and though I was never taught much about the particular doctrines of the Mennonites, and though I did not become close with the professors, some interactions and comments did help me realize the viability of my concerns.

A fully developed exploration of Christian thought on the topic of pacifism or of my own personal journey and relationship with Christ is not practical here, nor am I able to mention all the people who influenced me and how. My beliefs do not support politically, economically, or ideologically motivated war. These beliefs form the basis of my dilemma as a storyteller with the OVTA and OVNHT.

Also important to note is a limit I set myself, which arguably may hinder the artistic element of my autoethnographic work, but which I have chosen to follow for ethical purposes. I have chosen to limit accounts of my interactions with, and observations of, members of the OVTA and employees of the National Park Service. This limits my ability to paint as vibrant a picture of this community, but also, I hope, respects them as individuals and as a community who graciously accepted me into their midst. It is important to me to protect their privacy.

Methodology

This thesis makes use of autoethnographic methodology. My perspective has been shaped by field experience and narrative best reveals how the field experience influenced my ethics in historical storytelling. If autoethnography is to do as Ellis (2004) suggests and “. . . connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social,” (p. xix) then my discussion of a spiritual basis for ethical

decisions makes it critical to include myself as a narrative voice. Spry (2001) writes, “Autoethnography can be defined as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (710). Ellis (2004) states that “this form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection” (p. xix). Throughout my experience with the OVTA and OVNHT, I encountered serious moral, intellectual, and artistic challenges that shaped my conception of how a historical storyteller operates. These experiences can best be addressed in narrative. Autoethnography is a natural fit because of its congruence with storytelling and because it enables me to critically express my personal experience.

This methodology fits well with a storytelling thesis because of its narrative form joined to critical discussion. As Polanyi (1989) argues, “Stories are told to make a point, to transmit a message—often some sort of moral evaluation or implied critical judgment—about the world the teller shares with other people” (p 20). Autoethnography as a methodology is similar to Polanyi’s view on storytelling in that it is narrative oriented, has a purpose or a message, and takes into account social context. Further aspects of autoethnographic theory are offered below in the literature review.

As previously discussed, significant time in the field provides the basis of this study. I worked closely with the OVTA during the annual march. Individual performances and experiences following this group work also forms a section of my narrative. Chang (2008) outlines a few pitfalls of autoethnography: “exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source” and “negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives” (p. 54). To avoid the pitfall of over-dependence on my own memory, I have used historical research, ethnopoetic transcription, performance information, performance calendars, reviews, and my surviving field notes to augment my memory. To protect my companions and coworkers, I have changed names where appropriate and hidden identities of some of those discussed herein, and I have limited my discussion of OVTA

members and National Park Service employees.

Literature Review

There are four basic arenas of literature that I examined for this project. They are literature on autoethnography, literature pertinent to storytelling craft in areas such as linguistics, story creation, or historical storytelling, literature on historiography and history ethics, and finally literature on the Battle of Kings Mountain and the Revolutionary War.

Autoethnography

Madison's *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2011) examines a number of aspects to critical ethnographic work (an overarching term under which she includes autoethnography) that closely relate to my purpose. Madison writes that critical ethnography is by definition a political or change-motivated methodological approach.

The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. (p. 5)

For Madison, critical ethnography is fundamentally concerned with justice and ethics (p. 10).

Madison also includes Michelle Fine's triad of positional voices. I pursue the third mode that is referenced as the "activism stance." This stance is one where "the ethnographer takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of

marginalized locations while offering alternatives” (p. 7). As an interesting departure from the terms of this definition, in this project I pursue this mode within a primarily narrative world. The “material effects of marginalized locations” are perspectives and stories of Tories, nonparticipants, and pacifist Moravians, and how they affect current worldviews. Hegemony in my study takes the form of master-narrative. My advocacy is framed in counter-narrative. Autoethnography allows me to discuss my work of developing performance counter-narrative in a closely-related narrative form. My work as a historical storyteller fulfilled these same functions within the OVTA and OVNHT and writing an autoethnography about that work coincides in method with the storytelling itself.

Wood (2004) suggests that performance ethnography “sometimes pushes beyond the goal of understanding” (p. 131) in order to initiate change, and she raises the question, “if we understand something about a group of people that we did not previously understand, how can our attitudes *not* be affected?” (p. 132). Wood also cites the stance that sees “performance as a political act,” (p. 132).

Peterson and Langellier (1997), writing from a performance studies paradigm, discuss personal narratives in terms of context and power in such a way that correlates with autoethnographic theory and illustrates that scholars across disciplines recognize personal narrative as dealing with power systems (p. 136-137). The very reason that this thesis deals with concepts of ethics is because the power systems in place in the narratives I encountered of Kings Mountain were potentially ethically compromising for me and, therefore, I had to navigate power structures within historical narrative construction, employing the first person to more effectively give audiences the illusion or impression of hearing personal narrative. With first person narrative, I believe audiences were more receptive to my interpretation than if I had performed in third person. Audience feedback I have received lends support to this concept. I attempt to fulfill a similar function here with autoethnographic narrative about that process. My autoethnography is authentic personal narrative and not creative illusion, as was the case

with my performance. The personal perspective allows me to participate in scholarly discourse and still place myself clearly and openly in the study. This placement of self has to be navigated carefully within scholarly discourse, and autoethnography unlocks the potential power of personal narrative and clear self-representation.

Peterson and Langellier examine personal narrative in terms of context theory that reveals a similar awareness of “remote” or surrounding contexts of narrative. I have had to address surrounding contexts in the field and in this thesis (p. 137, 139) Their context theory suggests that one does not perform to the immediate context of a particular setting and audience alone, but to the greater surrounding cultural context.

Madison discusses positionality to indicate that the critical ethnographer must work with the awareness of one’s own position and influence. The critical ethnographer must take into account one's hegemonic acts in creating the study and examine these through the ethical perspective of who else is influenced by the study (p. 7-8). Critical ethnography, Madison writes, causes ethnographers to “critique the notion of subjectivity as well,” in large part their own subjectivity (p. 10). Madison goes on to write: “positionality requires that we attend to how our subjectivity *in relation to others* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others” (p. 10).

A key related idea behind the placement of my own personhood in this thesis is reinforced by Madison when she writes, “This 'new' or postcritical ethnography is the move to contextualize our own positionality, thereby making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation” (p. 9). Here is the valuable crossing point of three critical factors in this thesis:

1. The belief that my own personal voice is uniquely able to impact my audience, as opposed to adhering to customs of discourse that limit personal transparency.
2. Awareness that the storyteller's perspective and historiographical interpretation are

critical to ethics and effective telling.

3. Understanding that the theoretical framework of critical ethnography is one in which the personhood of the author is incorporated into the effectiveness and ethics of the study.

Madison's work also incorporates some interesting theory regarding narration. She cites Richard Bauman's ideas of narrated, as opposed to narrative, events. In my case, the difference is between the event of the Battle of Kings Mountain about which I narrate and the event of my narration (p. 34).

Madison develops this idea in discussing oral history performances. While she references oral histories as told by those actively remembering their own pasts, her idea applies in an interesting fashion to those like myself who artistically create oral narratives as if they had experienced the events, when in fact they have not. Madison writes,

Oral history performance and its poetics attempt to embody the *mise en scene* of history. Oral history performances therefore do not function as factual reports or as objective evidence, nor are they pure fictions of history. Instead, they present to us one moment *of* history and how that moment *in* history is *remembered* through a *particular* subjectivity. The emphasis here is a felt, sensing account of history as well as its particular materiality. (p. 34)

Madison goes on to discuss further the relationship between narrated event and narrative event and the way that the latter, particularly oral history performance, relates to the former. This concept resonates with performance feedback that I have received from select audience members who felt they were listening to someone who was really at the Battle of Kings Mountain.

Regarding the definition and practice of autoethnography, Madison relies less on analysis and more on example. Still, it is clear that she considers the autobiographical element a key factor in autoethnography. She cites others when providing the initial definition that "autoethnography is most often referred to as the ethnography of one's own social, ethnic, or cultural group or to an

autobiographical focus that has an ethnographic or extended contextual interest” (p. 197).

While Madison elucidates a number of aspects of autoethnography that have encouraged my use of the methodology, Spry's (2001) work immediately confronted me with a potentially negative element of autoethnography, in particular, the very authorial voice that makes it so valuable.

The article begins with an excerpt of Spry's own poetic autoethnographic work. In her introduction, Spry states that her use of autoethnography is an attempt “to dis-(re)-cover my body and voice in all parts of my life” (p. 708). Writing about her own article, in which she mingles the autoethnographic and more traditional scholarly paradigms, she states “It is interesting and not surprising that I find the authorial voice in the autoethnographic texts (BEING THERE) far more engaging due to its emotional texturing of theory and its reliance upon poetic structure to suggest a live participative embodied researcher” (p. 709).

The potential liability is the necessity that the autoethnographer possess literary skill and the demand upon the reader to engage emotionally. I felt an aversion to reading the autoethnographic poetry out of a desire to shield myself as a reader from Spry's poetic voice for no other reason than not wanting to engage emotionally. Though Spry goes on to discuss useful aspects of autoethnography, this initial experience as a reader signaled to me a potential liability of autoethnography. It requests an emotional exertion on the part of the readers because of its personal voice. In its strength is a potential weakness. Spry addresses the idea that writing skill is important (p. 713). She writes, “Mediocre writing in any venue lacks the ability to transform readers and transport them into a place where they are motivated to look back upon their own personally political identity construction” (p. 713). Although I am hesitant about her use of words like transform and transport in this context, this quote elucidates an important point. If one intends to write autoethnographic poetry, one must be a good poet and have an audience willing to engage with it. The same is true for any genre. Without doubt, traditional styles

of academic writing take a great deal of functional skill and are not bereft of imagination, but literary writing has a unique claim on imaginative artistry. This artistic demand is a daunting challenge and a potential liability. Nevertheless, autoethnography as a methodology allows me to address power, narrative, and ethics in a way directly relevant to storytelling itself and the process of developing historical performances.

In her work *Autoethnography as Method*, Chang (2008) states, “Keeping in mind the triadic balance, I argue that autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (p. 48). Chang lists three basic benefits of autoethnography. She writes, “(1) it offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; (2) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others and (3) it has a potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building” (p. 52). This thesis is an attempt to promote cultural understanding, yet through a discussion of historiographical storytelling rather than through a traditional ethnographic analysis of an external culture.

Chang includes “cross-cultural coalition building” in the benefits of autoethnography. This is a function of the personal, narrative aspect of autoethnography: “personal engagement in autoethnographic stories frequently stirs the self-reflection of listeners, a powerful by-product of this research inquiry” (p. 53). If I had walked into the Reserve Officers Association meeting, as I describe in Chapter 4, and simply talked about my viewpoints rather than tell a story, I would have met with a different reception. Having benefited from this function within my storytelling work itself, it seems natural to pursue it within my discussion of process.

Storytelling

It would be possible to pursue many different directions with literature related to storytelling, but in this case sources particularly relevant to historical storytelling, selectivity, and the purposes of storytelling are examined. Tannen, a linguist, provides some important thoughts regarding story craft and discourse. She particularly supports the concept that speakers sponsor in the audience what she calls “participation in sensemaking.”(Tannen, 2007, p. 37). In other words, the audience and speaker collaborate on creating meaning through “shared context and background” (p. 37). She further states that putting meaning-making in the hands of the listener by including “unstated information” actually “makes discourse effective because the more work readers or hearers do to supply meaning, the deeper their understanding and the greater their sense of involvement with both text and author” (p. 37). Coupled with Scheub's focus on emotion in storytelling and Polanyi's work on shared worldviews, Tannen lends support to my perspective on why storytelling is so effective in communicating about history. Tannen writes that “a fundamental aspect of language is what literary analysts call ellipsis and analysts of conversation call indirectness (or, in formal pragmatics, implicature): conveying unstated meaning” (p. 37). She ties this “conveying unstated meaning” in with the idea of “participation in sensemaking,” a powerful tool in communication through audience engagement (p. 37). Tannen furthermore discusses the important role of dialogue in emotional evocation and the centrality of scene to meaning-making (pp. 39, 42).

Harold Scheub's work deals with the importance of rhythm, image, and other qualities of story to the development of emotion. The centrality of emotional impact in his work has drawn out that element in my considerations of how to influence an audience with storytelling about history. Related to historical narrative, Scheub's arguments show that emotion can be a tool of influence in how an audience perceives the past. He has also contributed ideas concerning the cultural framework of

storytelling (Scheub, 1998, pp. 23, 185).

Polanyi (1989) argues that “stories are told to make a point” (p 20) and making a point was central to the construction of my story performance. One of Polanyi’s most significant distinctions is the difference between report and story. She states that a report relies on the hearer to make meaning, while in storytelling the teller “constrain[s] the interlocutors to infer the same point from the goings on in the story worlds which he himself infers,” based on the idea that “they share a common world view” (pp. 20-21).

Richardson's (2008) thesis on historical stories synthesized a methodology based on a number of storytellers and their methods. She also related her project to historical theory, taking her beyond other work in the field. Her project differs from mine in that I focus not on a methodology for story-creation, but rather, on the importance of theory in relation to ethical and effective performances.

In Ellis's (1992) *Researching and Crafting the History Story*, the main focus is on basic elements of story craft. The message of the research question concerns primary and secondary sources and the idea that a researcher should learn as much as possible about the chosen topic. The initial section of the guide focuses on research and includes a concept of the historiographical basis of secondary sources. Ellis writes, “It is important to understand the social, political, economic, and philosophical temperament of a time and place” (p. 3), and “it is within these constraints that an act of courage, humanity, bravery, or deceit is defined” (p. 3). She does not elucidate the essential problem of the ethical implications and challenges of the historical record and historical interpretation. This article also focuses on the craft of storytelling to the general neglect of critical interpretation.

Historiography and Narrative Theory

Historiography and narrative theories relate closely to performance storytelling, particularly in

the historical storytelling vein. Even though these theories have their own array of conflicting positions and perspectives, these conflicts do not necessarily hinder a storyteller's ability to give effective and ethical performances. In addition, the existence of such complexities does not force the storyteller to choose sides. Storytellers can still function in their craft if they do not see narrative as bearing direct claim to representing historical event, in keeping with Pataut and White, as discussed above. A teller can see stories fundamentally as parables of the present that use historical events and persons as narrative fodder. If storytellers accept a practical realist position similar to that of Appleby et al. or Iggers, they may also tell effective and ethical historical stories by claiming simply that their tales bear a relationship to what actually happened in the past, while still being intended for, and performed in, the present. A realist, as defined by Murphey, may claim that the story being told represents past reality. So, while interesting and relevant, the disagreements and battles of theorists do not necessarily affect the storyteller's ability to tell ethically and effectively. What is important is that awareness of one's own and others' beliefs and perspectives about history can function as a critical element of storytelling craft and ethics.

Below I cover a few concepts related to historiography and narrative in addition to those already discussed. In particular, I begin with Newall's (2009) discussion of the importance of interpretation to meaning. This is followed by a brief examination of White's (1997) theories on the "poetic and rhetorical" (p. 393) nature of historical storytelling. I then examine Iggers's (1997) discussion of middle or common ground in historical interpretation. In concluding this section, Nelson's (2001) work on counternarrative provides discussion of the intentional telling of stories to accomplish specific cultural ends.

Newall (2009) cites evidence from neuroscience that claims "if our brains held no hypotheses about the world when encountering it (or alternatively, if these hypotheses were fixed) then we would

not be able to *learn* from new information. This is to say that observations and experiences have to be *interpreted* to be meaningful . . .” (p. 175). He goes on to claim “if theory is an unavoidable part of inquiry then the identification of objectivity with neutrality must be given up. The charge that historians are biased thus becomes not a criticism but what makes historiography possible in the first place” (p. 175). Newall does seem to claim a practical realist position in so far as he writes, “although accounts of the past are based on the evidence historians have at hand and hence limited by it, not all possible historiographies are equally valid” (p. 179).

White provides probably the most concise and clear explanation I have encountered of the foundational idea I employ regarding the difference between storytelling and history. I take the position that the past exists in past events and conditions, and that discourse regarding those past events and conditions is based on beliefs and interpretive storytelling. White elucidates in much more technically acute language that the actual past, that which happened, is not by nature story. Scholars of history – the academic discipline – often try to create narrative or story to encapsulate or understand the past. White (1997) writes about how history is at times viewed:

. . . first, narrative is regarded as a neutral “container” of historical fact, a mode of discourse “naturally” suited to representing historical events directly; second, narrative histories usually employ so-called natural or ordinary, rather than technical, languages, both to describe their subjects and to tell their story; and third, historical events are supposed to consist of or manifest a congeries of “real” or “lived” stories, which have only to be uncovered or extracted from the evidence and displayed before the reader to have their truth recognized immediately and intuitively. (p. 392)

White disagrees with this perspective. He writes:

But narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential

propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story. Among these elements are those generic story patterns we recognize as providing the 'plots.' Thus, one narrative account may represent a set of events as having the form and meaning of an epic or tragic story, and another may represent the same set of events – with equal plausibility and without doing any violence to the factual record – as describing a farce. (p. 393)

These passages illustrate White's elucidation of the difference between history as a set of what I would call supposed facts and historical writing as the narrative interpretations of those supposed facts. It is interesting to note that White's position may not be particularly far removed from the practical realist positions of Iggers and Appleby et al. White places history writing in "the order of discourse" (1997, p. 392) and he states that "obviously, considered as accounts of events already established as facts, 'competing narratives' can be assessed, criticized, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain" (1997, p. 393).

Although Iggers (1997) writes that some – and he includes White in the list – "question the distinction between fact and fiction, history and poetry," he claims, "practicing historians seldom went so far. There was no radical break between the older social science history and the new cultural history, but the themes and with them the methods of the new historiography changed as the center of gravity shifted from structures and processes to cultures and the existential life experiences of common people" (p. 100). Iggers claims that "the basic idea of postmodern theory of historiography is the denial that historical writing refers to an actual historical past." (p. 118).

Throughout his work, Iggers touches on issues in 20th century historiographical theory that show an awareness among historians and narrative theorists of how history *can* function as an insight

into reality (p. 119), but that history is also art (p. 122). In general, theorists have moved away from the scientific to the interpretive perspectives on understanding history (pp. 126, 133). Iggers claims a moderate position and also claims that there are not that many extremists, that “historical accounts, even if they use forms of narrative that are closely patterned on literary models, still claim to portray or reconstruct an actual past to a greater extent than is the case in fictional literature” (pp. 132-133).

In *the Ethics of History* (2004), Ankersmit argues that ethics help one understand history. Rather than misrepresenting history as devoid of ethical content, or rather, that history is forged in an ethical fire, he argues that ethics are part of our understanding of history. He considers historical interpretations to be proposals that should be evaluated. He acknowledges that historians make poor proposals regarding ethics in historical work, but he suggests that history as a discipline will be able to deal with ethics, political viewpoints, and cognitive issues because historians can evaluate ethical propositions (pp. 24-25). This position essentially harmonizes with the practical realist stance as described above.

In *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, Nelson (2001) discusses the concept of counternarrative in a way that is applicable across academic disciplines. Counternarrative is a story that targets weaknesses in a master narrative with the purpose of rehabilitating an identity within cultural discourse (Nelson, 2001, pp. 159, 156-157). Nelson focuses on the idea of groups or individuals repairing their own individual or group identities through counternarratives that target “the cracks and fissures within and among master narratives, and the gap between the oppressive narratives' description of certain people and what those people actually do and are” (p. 169). Nelson defines master narrative as “. . . the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings. Master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types, and we use them not only to make sense of our experience but also to

justify what we do” (Nelson, 2001, p. 6). The idea of counterstory applies to the project of this thesis, which focuses on the creation of counternarrative based on history, for example, the story of a Tory in the American Revolution. Such stories target the same kinds of gaps. Nelson sums up her views of counternarrative this way:

“To begin with, they [counternarratives] are identity-constituting stories that have a necessary relationship to certain types of master narratives. Second, the relationship is one of varying degrees of resistance. Third, the master narratives resisted are those that are generated by oppressive forces within an abusive power system, and which impose on a subgroup an identity that marks its members as morally defective. Fourth, counterstories set out to repair the damage that has been inflicted on an identity by an oppressive master narrative. Fifth, through their function of repair, counterstories aim at freedom of moral agency. Sixth, counterstories are acts of purpose moral self-definition, even if at first they are not taken up self-consciously. And finally, it should be noted that a counterstory could itself be a master narrative, though it never oppresses the individual it identifies. Indeed, optimally successful counterstories *must* be master narratives, since success consists precisely in the counterstory's becoming widely circulated and socially shared. (pp. 156-157).

For Nelson, the goal of counternarrative is to establish the counternarrators as “competent moral agents” (p. 150). As a pacifist storyteller narrating on war, I am less concerned with establishing one violent partisan side as being in the right than I am in dispelling propaganda about the use of violence. A storyteller could accomplish Nelson’s goal of counternarrative by showing nonparticipants and fighters from “the wrong side” to be competent moral agents. One can also accomplish the goal of dispelling propaganda by revealing or arguing a lack of competent moral agency on “the right side,” contrary to popular bias. The Revolutionary War is seen in popular American culture as being

unquestionably justified. In other words, the particular event of the Revolutionary War *itself* is seen as a competent moral agent, an event that was *good* as much as the people who rebelled against Britain's rule are seen as *good*. The war in some cases has become so mythologized that it is seen as a kind of good monolith, an entity of itself, not a conflict among persons. A counternarrative to that idea could show questionable moral agency related to the war. Nelson focuses on three areas of resistance, "refusal, repudiation, and contestation" (p. 169). Stories concerning historical individuals or groups can accomplish the ends that Nelson advocates for counternarrative.

Nelson's concept of counternarrative does not focus on the idea of alternative narratives, so much as on "narrative repair" (p. 154). The goal for Nelson is not to change or switch identities but to repair an individual or group identity (p. 154). This approach can also be applied in retrospect. Can the identity of the Tory or the Quaker or the Moravian pacifist be repaired in relation to popular conceptions of the Revolutionary War? Can the very idea of the Revolutionary War be repaired by revealing it to be a conflict that rested on a debatable moral foundation? To apply Nelson's concepts to such historical repair, what is to be avoided is to say the Revolutionary War was not a war or to say that the Tory fighter in fact was a pacifist. But historical narrative repair can claim that the Whig partisan raider did not acquire supplies but plundered just as the Tories plundered. In this way, historical narrative repair could also take an aggressive role in not only establishing the counternarrator but in more directly addressing the dominant position.

Nelson also discusses the fundamentally selective nature of story-creation (p. 62). She writes of counternarrators employing elements of master narrative: "the teller of a counterstory is bound to draw on the moral concepts found in the master narratives of her tradition, since these played a key role in her moral formation regardless of how problematic her place within that tradition has been, but she isn't restricted to just these concepts" (p. 67). But while this passage seems to take a negative perspective of

the master narrative, it is liberating to apply Polanyi's idea that a storyteller “constrains” the audience to arrive at certain conclusions based on a shared framework of suppositions (1989, p. 21).

Performance storytelling inhabits a unique position in this discourse. It is capable at once of acknowledging its creative role and incorporating the critiques of a theorist such as White. Storytelling also tends to operate naturally in a perspective of practical realism such as described by Iggers or Appleby et al., which claims a real correlation to the past while being aware of the performance’s situation in language, art, and the task of meaning-making for the present.

Revolutionary War, Kings Mountain, and Exceptionalism

The fourth and final arena of literature to be examined is that of historical works. These include a number of books on the history of Kings Mountain, the American Revolution, as well as some on Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism. The sources are mentioned here but those that are particularly pertinent are analyzed later in the thesis. Of course, the tome that Draper produced in the 19th century, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It*, is used as an example both of a rich source and a biased one. In addition, the illustrated book *With Fire and Sword* by Wilma Dykeman is examined later to show that, while further removed from firsthand accounts and primary sources than Draper’s book, it maintains a higher level of scholarly ambiguity and nonpartisanship than does Draper's tome.

Choosing Sides on the Frontier in the American Revolution by Dunn (2007) pursues a counternarrative historical course and examines the viewpoints of a variety of groups during the war, including nonparticipants, loyalists, and Native Americans. One section examines the questionable land speculation of individuals such as George Washington. The work is a nonidealized representation of the war and certainly had an influence on my storytelling approach to the Battle of Kings Mountains.

Two other books on King's Mountain are worth noting regarding what contributed to the performance. Jones's (2011) contemporary interpretation of Kings Mountain, *Before They Were Heroes at King's Mountain* still pursues the story from a noticeably partisan angle. Epley's (2011) historical novel *A Passel of Hate*, centering around the events leading up to, during, and following Kings Mountain, manages to be a partisan, though fairly even-handed, look at the period and battle.

As an example of a book with an overarching view of the American Revolution, the impressive scholarly work, *The Glorious Cause: the American Revolution, 1763-1789* by Middlekauf is examined in the next chapter in terms of its initial claims regarding the war. This book, a masterful examination of historical events, was one of the books recommended to me by my National Parks Service contact during my time of research for the OVTA and OVNHT assistantship. No question, Middlekauf's book is a scholarly achievement. It is also a good example of how interpretation is critical in coloring the understanding of events. The position that the cause to which Middlekauf refers is not the war is addressed. Yet if ends and means cannot be separated, acceptance of Middlekauf's interpretation regarding the glory of the cause relies largely on the presupposition that war *can* be glorious. This in turn depends on whether the war is seen as an essential part of the cause or if in fact it is a separable means to an otherwise glorious end. A pacifist will likely disagree with the view that the Revolutionary War was a glorious cause. One who believes in redemptive violence might claim the war was indeed glorious. That said, Middlekauf also acknowledges and discusses inglorious sides to the American Revolution.

Research in the area of American Exceptionalism is necessary because many of the beliefs I encountered regarding the Revolutionary War are tied to that ideology. American Exceptionalism is closely bound to the idea of Manifest Destiny (Madsen, 1998). Madsen writes: "my argument is that American exceptionalism permeates every period of American history and is the single most powerful

agent in a series of arguments that have been fought down the centuries concerning the identity of America and Americans” (p. 1). Madsen locates the foundation of this ideology in America in Puritan thought, although she acknowledges that “the arguments themselves change over time” (p. 1).

Somewhat contradicting Madsen, Greene (1993) includes an overarching understanding of European worldviews in his work *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800*. Greene claims that the origins of exceptionalism predate Puritan settlement. He writes of exceptionalism:

. . . rooted in the earliest efforts by Europeans to come to terms with the newfound continents on the western side of the Atlantic, and the new societies they were creating there, this concept, already by the end of the sixteenth century and well before the English had succeeded in establishing permanent settlements anywhere in the Americas, had become one of the principal components in the identification of America. (p. 6)

During the American Revolution, humanist ideas about inalienable rights were a point of reference to justify separation from Britain, an act that could be seen as an expression of exceptionalism. Further, Madsen shows how ideas of democracy helped forge the concept of Manifest Destiny (1998, p. 89). Greene discusses how “exceptional social conditions” became a point of interest to “contemporary social analysts” (1993, 200). He writes:

In their efforts to conceptualize and identify these entities, analysts devoted especial attention to explaining the many ways in which they seemed to be exceptional in relation to the societies of the Old World—in particular, the ways in which they appeared both superior and inferior to the metropolitan society to which they were attached. With the American Revolution and its attendant developments beginning in the mid-1770s, the societies and free inhabitants of the United States became objects of great curiosity and elicited considerable admiration among

British and continental social thinkers. Combined with the success of the Revolution, that admiration helped Americans both to put what they had long regarded as their many continuing deficiencies in a new perspective and to fabricate a more positive sense of collective self. This development in turn functioned to sharpen and intensify the by then old and well-established concept of America as an exceptional country. (pp. 200-201)

Here Greene ties in the social and economic realities of the era. His explanation of the origins of exceptionalism seems to be broader and more holistic than Madsen's.

In conclusion, it is important to reference American Exceptionalism as an overarching cultural framework that I had to navigate as a storyteller with the OVTA and OVNHT. Because the topic of this thesis is focused on a particular case study of a storytelling project related to Kings Mountain, the more immediate history of the individual battle is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Plan of the Work

Chapter 2, titled "Crafting the Story," employs autoethnography to reveal the process I experienced in researching and developing my story performance. After a discussion of my personal background, my introduction to the project, and my research, it proceeds to narrate my experiences at the Abingdon Muster Grounds and Rocky Mount Historic Site and Living History Museum. This narrative explores the early process of story creation.

Chapter 3 provides a transcript of my performance, *Tales of Frontier Conflict: The Battle of Kings Mountain*, as I performed it on November 18, 2012, at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park. This transcript provides a textual representation of the live storytelling performance. This transcript provides the reader with a better basis for understanding both the crafting and performance processes.

Chapter 4, titled "Performing the Story," is an autoethnographic exploration of various

performances of the story. In addition, I reflect on how the story was shaped by performance, how audiences affected the story, and how the story was received in a variety of circumstances. These narratives and reflections demonstrate strengths and weaknesses of my performance and reveal how an awareness of historical interpretations and cultural understandings aid ethical and effective storytelling.

Chapter 5 provides a conclusion. In brief, it is a discussion of the importance of the beliefs that form the foundations of historical interpretation. It is a discussion of the presence and function of ethics in historical interpretation and it is an acknowledgement of the transformative journey that I experienced in relation to the story of Kings Mountain during my time performing on behalf of the OVTA and OVNHT. It closes with a brief discussion of potential further work on this topic.

CHAPTER 2

CRAFTING THE STORY

The Abingdon muster grounds today consist of an early 19th century house built on a rise above a wide, shallow creek. An even yard leads up into a sweeping, grassy hill that is surrounded by other houses and developments. On the back of the property stands a small grove of hardwoods. There, or at least somewhere close by, in late September of 1780, gathered a militia of men. The National Park Service is fairly certain that this ground was *part* of the land on which the muster took place (Carson, personal communication, ca. September 20-23, 2012). The town of Abingdon purchased the property and created a small museum there.

I was there with members of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association, the nonprofit group that formed in support of the Overmountain National Historic Trail. The OVTA is dedicated to retelling the story of the Overmountain Men and the battle of Kings Mountain every year in their “march” down to Kings Mountain, starting in Abingdon, the northern trailhead. In years past, the re-enactors actually walked the entire distance dressed in period garb and shouldering flintlock rifles. Now, their focus is mainly on storytelling for groups all along the way. They do this in the roughly 2-week period it took the Overmountain Men to reach Kings Mountain over some extremely difficult terrain. The distance and terrain is tiring enough to drive, let alone ride a horse across. As a former Wisconsin-based horseback trail guide, I appreciate at least to a small degree the intensity of such an undertaking. At times, the ruggedness of the landscape is breathtaking, and looking out at it, one wonders if the Overmountain men ever stopped just to admire the view.

Historical and Personal Background

I was offered the OVTA position through a graduate assistantship at East Tennessee State

University. I was attempting to complete a second master's degree while I taught as a part time adjunct professor in the Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music Studies program at the university. My first master's degree was in Liberal Studies at the same university, where my culminating work was an interdisciplinary study of the fiddle traditions of Michigan. When I was offered the position as a historical storyteller with the OVNHT and OVTA, I immediately had a few serious concerns and reasons for hesitation. As addressed previously, the first and most important to me was that I am a Christian and my faith directly influences my thought on issues of violence. Certainly, not all Christians share my views on violence, yet as a result of my faith, I am a pacifist in my leanings and I am also morally opposed to nationalism and patriotism as they often function to justify war. I do not ascribe to the common justifications of the American Revolution, and I feared having to work in a group of people who may not merely have different views, but also might be unreceptive to how I would likely proceed. Telling war stories raised real concerns for me.

In addition, most of my storytelling work in the past, while containing many historical elements, was not in monologue. It was my understanding that the OVTA focused on reenactment style of monologue storytelling that would have a first-person voice and would take on a separate character. My storytelling was generally in the genre of personal stories incorporating local history along with some traditional tales. Typically, I did not take on the full-fledged persona of a historical character and tell stories from that perspective. With a couple of exceptions, first-person historical characterizations were outside of my previous performance experience. That said, I deeply enjoy history, consider myself at least an amateur historian, and spend considerable time working in a historical vein.

As a result of these considerations, I was concerned that the position would be difficult or morally compromising. This latter concern did not go away quickly and the former always proved true. Despite my serious reservations, I reasoned to myself that, if told as accurately as possible, it was

ethical to tell historical stories. With that perspective, I would not be trespassing against my beliefs and ethics. After all, history happened, I thought. If I represented history accurately, it seemed to me that it should be ethical. Still, that would not protect me from setting off an incendiary bomb by telling a story from a radically different perspective than what would meet the approbation of the community.

I have since discovered that while my initial position about the ethics of telling accurate history stories contains some truth, it does not adequately address the complexities of telling historical stories. Still, this thought helped spur me to accept the position. After a teleconference and an all-day organizational meeting in Morganton, North Carolina, I found myself beginning to research the Battle of Kings Mountain and the history of the Revolutionary War, particularly in the frontier back country of what is now Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. While I felt I had a fair understanding of history aided by liberal arts and liberal studies degrees and my own deep interest in history, I realized that my grasp on the Revolutionary War was slight. Being from Michigan and the Canadian border on the Great Lakes, I had a fairly solid grasp on the early-to-mid 18th century and my own region's history in general, but I was in a new region with a new period of focus.

In the first organizational meeting I attended, I learned that the foundational book on the battle was written by Lyman C. Draper in the 19th century. I went to the university library and checked out this book, along with a small, illustrated book on the battle put out by the National Park Service. These books were my first major foray into the story I was supposed to tell.

The Draper book is a thick tome. It contains close to 600 pages of accounts and information relating to the Battle of Kings Mountain, including long appendices. Draper worked at a time (beginning in 1839) when he was able to still speak to or correspond with individuals who were involved in the events of Kings Mountain or knew those who were (1967, p. iv). As a result, his work contains some valuable primary source information. At the beginning of the book, Draper states that the

work is unbiased and even-handed. His actual words were “truth alone has been the writer's aim, and conclusions reached without prejudice, fear or favor”⁴ (p. iv).

There is no question that Draper's work was extensive and his book a feat of historical sleuthing. There is also little question that Draper's book is heavily partisan. In addition, I believe Draper's book set a poor standard, though not necessarily atypical for his time, for historiography and patriotic bias in subsequent works on the Battle of Kings Mountain. One of the ways this can be seen in Draper's work and subsequent works is the use of biased explanations. At one point, Draper recounts:

Culbertson, with his characteristic daring, had a personal adventure worthy of notice. Meeting a dragoon, some distance from support, who imperiously demanded his surrender, the intrepid American replied by whipping his rifle to his shoulder and felling the haughty Briton from his horse. (p. 93)

The descriptors associated with each side of this conflict show the kind of partisan world within which Draper operated. One could tell the same story in reverse: a dragoon, unwilling to kill a solitary Whig, kindly hesitated and offered the man quarter. Instead of being given response in kind, the ungrateful American used the merciful delay to shoot the dragoon. It is a simple change of interpretative bias.

One revealing passage of the book finds Draper sermonizing about those hearing or reading of the Tories and supposing they never would have been Tories had they been alive at the time. He writes, as part of the longer passage:

As he reads the history of the stirring events connected with the war, he concludes that had he been there, he would, as a matter of course, have been on the right side, periling life and fortune at every hazard in the cause of freedom. (p. 239)

After discussing how “one's associations, surroundings, and temptations oftentimes exert an

4 Assuming Draper wrote the introduction. I have no evidence to the contrary.

overpowering influence,” he goes on to say, “Let us judge even the Tories with as much charity and leniency as we can. Some of them were cajoled into the British service, and not a few forced into it under various pretenses and intimidation” (p. 239). Phrases like “right side” and “even the Tories ” reveal the essential bias both of Draper's time and his own writing. I would even argue Draper's claim of being impartial was perhaps not intended by him to refer to the issue of Whig vs. Tory. It likely had more to do with reputations among the Whig officers, some of whom had been accused of cowardice since the battle (Draper, 1971; Jones, 2011).

Another notable example of partisanship comes when Draper spends a few pages attempting to reconcile the reader to the atrocities at the Biggerstaff farm after the battle. The Whigs there hanged, under dubious and arguably condemnable circumstances, a number of the Tories captured in the battle. (Jones, 2011, p. 482-487). In attempting to excuse the Whigs, Draper includes a number of arguments as to why they should be dealt with kindly. For the sake of brevity, only one, perhaps the most far-fetched, will be mentioned. He writes the following about the Whigs:

The calmest and most dispassionate reflection upon their conduct, on this occasion, will lead to the conviction, that if they committed any offence, it was against their own country—not against the enemy. That instead of being instigated by a thirst for blood, they acted solely with a view to put an end to its effusion; and boldly, for this purpose, took upon themselves all the dangers that a system of retaliation could superinduce [. . .] but the men of King's Mountain (for it is avowed as a popular act, and not that of their chief alone), merit the additional reputation of having assumed on themselves the entire responsibility, without wishing to involve the regular army in their dangers. (p. 337)

The mental contortions necessary to say that hanging enemy prisoners was not an offense against the enemy but really showed how brave and heroic they were in taking on *danger* for

themselves of possible retaliation (though not the danger of letting captured able enemy leaders or fighters live), are quite impressive. The entire process of the executions, whether justifiable, legally done, and with fair trials, can be examined at length by the reader if desired. It is no simple matter to attempt to work out. Yet outlandish attempts at justifying it show a deep desire to create sympathy for the Whigs who, incidentally, were not the ones who were hanged. Reflecting again in this light on Draper's introductory claim that “conclusions [were] reached without prejudice, fear or favor” (p. iv), may bring a starker understanding of the inherent bias present in the work.

When I checked out Draper's work from the library, I also checked out a small, illustrated work on the battle. I was pleased yet amused that it contained far more ambiguity about the story and from a historian's standpoint, had a much more unbiased interpretation. The book struck me as a “family book” designed to be informative for an adult but also visually appealing and possible to share with a child. My initial impression was that it was for children. It is the kind of book found at park museums and historic sites, likely designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. It was not until much later that I noticed that the book was published by the National Park Service, and that I was informed that its author, Wilma Dykeman, was a notable writer. One passage of the book outlines the mutual hatred and violence of both sides with remarkable even-handedness.

Vengeance became a way of life. When Nathanael Greene arrived in North Carolina late in 1780 to lead the patriot forces in the South, he found that “not a day passes but there are more or less who fall a sacrifice to this savage disposition. The Whigs seem determined to extirpate the Tories, and the Tories the Whigs.” Greene, a Quaker who may have recoiled with more than normal dismay at the daily horrors compounded by such internecine warfare, warned: “If a stop cannot be put to these massacres, the country will be depopulated . . . as neither Whig nor Tory can live.” (Dykeman, 1978, p. 15)

This passage continues to discuss forms of Whig punishment of Tories as well as the raiders and unaffiliated plunderers who were hunted by both combatant sides (p. 15). This book does not hesitate to own that horrors were perpetrated by both Whigs and Tories.

When I began reading Draper's book, I considered the reasons why people on the frontier in 1780 would be fighting this war. What I discovered was a truly horrific scenario. Draper and others seemed to be writing about the Overmountain Men as heroes and patriots. I found confusion, hatred, violence, and fear all mixed up with ideals and profit. Though the formula is reductive, I have thought that much American and world history could be summed up in this idea: *people fought and died for their freedom to live and enslave others*. It seemed no different on the frontier. The understanding I developed as I read the history of Kings Mountain and connected it with previous research and reading led me to this kind of an assessment: disenfranchised people from Ulster, Ireland, and the Highlands of Scotland, Huegenots or their descendants run out of France, Germans from war torn Europe, and the poor from colonies fled poverty or eviction from their homes and fought to impoverish and dispossess the Cherokee and Shawnee (Draper, 1971; Dunn, 2007; Dykeman, 1978, p. 4-5; Jones, 2011). Neighbors fought and killed each other to keep their British citizenship, to overthrow the British, to stay alive, to plunder, and on. They raided and pillaged. Others, such as the Moravians, refused to fight altogether and in turn were victimized during the conflict (Draper, 1971; Dykeman, 1978; Jones, 2011).⁵ How could I tell such a complex story? What perspective could I employ? How could I come into an atmosphere that sought to celebrate this event when I wanted to mourn it?

The reader can no doubt tell that I was approaching this story with a perspective that reflected my ethics, spirituality, and understanding of other historical events. Any story that I was going to tell

⁵ In addition to these sources, my interpretation derives from extensive work with the Appalachian, Scottish & Irish Collection in the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, broader personal readings in period and regional American history, and significant time participating in OVTA and OVNHT events.

would come from my perspective, just as would be true of any other teller.

The Muster Grounds

The first event I attended took place at the muster grounds in Abingdon, Virginia, where I encamped for a few days with the OVTA. It was the unofficial beginning of the OVTA March. On the first full day, hundreds of school children came to hear an approximately 35-minute presentation on the story of Kings Mountain; they then split into groups and walked from station to station every 14 minutes to hear various presentations on aspects of the time period. There was a Cherokee re-enactor who impressed me with his skill at portraying his character and added a non-Eurocentric viewpoint. There were in-character French lace makers whose meticulous detail was entrancing. There was a salt maker, women from the Daughters of the American Revolution contributing handicraft and daily life demonstrations, an African American re-enactor-presenter, and other re-enactors and demonstrators.

At the muster ground, the smell of woodsmoke was in the air as I walked down the gravel driveway. I smelled a horse as I approached, though it was out of view. Folks with muskets and sporting 18th century dress wandered about the grassy fields and beneath the trees. Some canvas tents were scattered about. The day was beautiful with a clear sun and blue sky. It quickly burned the autumn dew from the grass.

I was there in the capacity of a learner and a consultant. I expected to gain knowledge from the experience. It was also one of my tasks to start formulating ideas on how to increase the effectiveness of the organization's storytelling. As the school children arrived and filed into folding chairs lined up on a hillside, I sat down with a notebook and prepared to listen to a presentation of the story I would be telling for months to come. At the end of the day of observations, I would be meeting with the director of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and the president of the OVTA to discuss my

observations and suggestions.

Beneath the blue September sky, the chairs were arrayed in rows on a hillside, with the sound system speakers at the bottom of the slope. The rows of chairs filled up with approximately 50 students and teachers. Two OVTA members were going to give the presentation. One of them in period garb stood with a microphone at the bottom of the slope.

Before the presentation formally began and while students and teachers were still arriving, the OVTA presenters asked students' questions about the time period, such as "Who can name all 13 original colonies?" The students buzzed and the teachers whispered answers to the questions. Once all the students had arrived, the formal presentation began. The OVTA presenters, amateur historians with a sweeping knowledge of the traditional aspects of a historical recitation, began to relate facts, figures, dates, and names in an overwhelming array. There is a complex retinue of names and figures associated with the Battle of Kings Mountain and the events leading up to it. The numbers of troops, the names of the many commanders who led the troops, the dates and places correlating to the march from Virginia to South Carolina, and the countless episodes that led up to the battle can easily dispel a sense of storytelling or narrative in a whirl of information. This whirl was to be taken in by students who had not been able to name the original 13 colonies and who had made some interesting wrong guesses.

The presentation offered by the OVTA consisted primarily of these data. There was one brief moment, however, when the presentation quickly turned into a *scene*. The presenter who had opened recounted the threat sent by Patrick Ferguson to the Overmountain Men. Patrick Ferguson threatened to hang the leaders of the Overmountain settlements if they did not cease to support Whig endeavors (Jones, 2011, p. 378). At that moment, one of the OVTA members who had been standing on the side gave a great shout.

“Hang me?” Richard cried as he strode to the center of the stage area. He took the microphone from the other presenter, still bellowing. “Hang me?! He wants to come over these mountains and hang me?” The children had at that point been listening to about 15 minutes of primarily facts. So had the teachers. At this moment, everyone snapped to attention. Richard had them. They were in his power. So was I, in fact. But that was more or less the end of the scene. It was a brief foray into the imaginative world. Richard slipped away from an in-character sense of scene and began to relate more facts and data, trying to keep an “I” or first person perspective, but for the most part, employing the same data-heavy method of telling the story.

But I jotted down, “*I liked Richard's entrance. Good for getting kids' attention.*” Throughout the presentation, I knew that the fact-heavy method did not work effectively. I also saw that the presentation was entirely partisan. It was told from the Whig perspective and there was little consideration given to the discussion of violence. At one point, a presenter indirectly suggested that name-calling was a justification for fighting war. I was concerned about the message that the children were receiving about violence.

Overall, my opinion on the presentation was clear. The individuals making the presentation had great knowledge of the record of information, but the audience was not involved imaginatively to any great extent in the presentation of the record. This meant that, on one level, they were not involved *effectively*. Now, throughout the day I came into contact with re-enactors who engaged the imagination of the children to great effect, and throughout the following 2 weeks, I met other OVTA members who told portions of the story with great imaginative involvement. When storytellers involve the imagination in scene, they create images in the audience's minds that impress narrative onto their memories. I believe these narrative images are more lasting than facts or figures, and that they are capable of producing emotion. This concept is closely aligned with, or even partly derived from, the

thinking of Scheub (1998) regarding emotion, image, and rhythm as key elements in storytelling.

At length, the events of the day came to a close. Underneath the dark canopy of a large dining tent, I met with the president of the OVTA and the director of the OVNHT. I shared my concerns about the effectiveness of the overall presentation of the story and also my concerns about the ethics of how presenters addressed violence. I suggested that the most interesting aspect of the story was the conflict inherent in it. It was a battle fought primarily between Americans, whether loyalist or revolutionary, not between Americans and an invading force of foreigners from Britain (Dykeman, 1978, 4). Even so, interpreters of the history sometimes use the misleading term “British army,” rather than saying colonial Loyalists or even Tories. The term “British” serves as a kind of shorthand in dealing with “the enemy,” but this shorthand misleads. I have since found myself falling into the same habit.

The two men received my thoughts kindly and openly. I had been nervous about bringing up my ethical concerns, but they both supported me. The OVNHT director, however, did express his belief that violence was how our country got its beginnings, that the war was a noble cause, and that the history of Kings Mountain was valuable and important. He also stated that the sacrifices of the individuals who brought about the founding of America were worth telling. He saw the fact that it was accomplished through violence as simply part of its history. The president of the OVTA consistently stated in my hearing that the aspect of the story he most desired to draw out was the concept of teamwork, determination, and American perseverance. His belief was that these concepts are important to teach today, especially to children.

How could I, as a storyteller, tell a story that satisfied the requests and interests of three people with differing values, interests, and interpretations, let alone the whole OVTA and my audiences? How did our three perspectives relate to what I could find out about the actual event of Kings Mountain?

Yes, violence occurred. I did not think it was just. That said, my position was not common. On

the one hand, rebel Americans showed great perseverance in overcoming the obstacles. On the other hand, some of the obstacles were other Americans, generally Loyalists who held differing beliefs and experiences. One set of people killed another to achieve its ends. The philosophical problems were hardly going to be worked out at the Abingdon Muster Grounds, and so I did not feel it necessary to bring up my own perspective. At the same time, I had a job to do, and that job was to tell a story.

This whole process was further complicated by another factor: audience and venue. My task and the task of the OVTA in general was, and is, to present this story to a wide variety of audience demographics, in a wide variety of locations, and with a variety of time allotments. One day, the story might be told to 3rd graders, the next to a civic organization, the next to 11th graders, and the next to those attending a family event. Anyone familiar with these different age groups will see the challenge of how to connect to such different groups without developing a different performance for each. Added into it were all the other dilemmas already mentioned. Third graders might not get upset at the suggestion that the “patriots” in the Revolution were not so spotlessly heroic, but senior citizens might. Senior citizens or 11th graders might not flinch at depictions of violence, but families and third graders might be offended. Further, I might have to tell the story one day for 7 minutes and the next day for 45 minutes. What kind of performance could be so flexible as to allow for all these possibilities?

I spent 3 nights camping around the Abingdon Muster Grounds, getting to know participants and their perspectives on the events of Kings Mountain. On the last day, I was fitted out in 18th century garb like the other OVTA members. I admit I have never become entirely comfortable in 18th century frontier garb, especially not when walking into a high school before a storytelling event or stopping to pump gas on the way. In just 2- days’ time, I would be asked – unexpectedly and on just a moment’s notice – to begin telling the story.

The Unexpected Performance

I returned home on Sunday at the end of the first weekend I spent with the OVTA at the Abingdon Muster Grounds. It had been my boot camp into the OVTA. Now, I even had the uniform. The next event I was to attend was an interpretive event at Rocky Mount Historic Site and Museum in Tennessee. It was one of the stops on the Overmountain march. I arrived that evening in costume, but I was prepared simply to continue observing. I pulled up to the museum and soon found the OVTA members standing around beneath and beside a canvas tent sheltering a table of membership brochures and a few items for sale. The tent stood beside the old Rocky Mount barn. Chairs were set up in rows on the grass in front of the structure. A few tents framed the back of a stage area in the grass. Speakers had been set up and directed at the chairs. The expected audience was a couple or few dozen people from the community, families or interested individuals. A small television crew pulled up, consisting of one reporter and a cameraman.

The event was not meant to start for another 20 minutes when the director of the OVNHT called me over to him at a distance from the other OVTA members.

“Now Trae,” he said. “I’ve talked with Jamie and the others and we’re going to ask you to introduce the presentation tonight with some storytelling. We want you to do 5 minutes, just set the stage and play some fiddle. Don’t go into the march itself, let the others do that. We want you to set the stage, describe the opening of the conflict. It’s a good opportunity to demonstrate what you do and hopefully get people interested, kind of lead by example. Is that all right?”

With 20 minutes to go, I was being asked to develop a 5-minute program opener for a live audience and news camera.

“Yeah, that’s fine,” I said, trying to cover any deer-in-the-headlights expression. I walked out behind the barn and began to pace, my mind racing. I needed a character. Obviously, I had to fiddle. It

was an easy asset. But to get fiddling in and tell a coherent story in a 5-minute time frame? This was not easy. Any experienced storyteller knows the challenge of telling a story in under 10 minutes. It often takes serious crafting, practice, and thought to accomplish an effective story under such constraints.

My best and natural bet was to play a character who was a fiddler. I also knew that for reasons stated above I could not ethically portray a character who reinforced the concepts of war that would likely be portrayed by the rest of the presenters that night. Another person with different beliefs than mine might, but I was unable to do so. Furthermore, I knew by this time that the story was complex. From having seen previous presentations, I could also expect that the other presenters would tell the story with a fairly straightforward partisanship. Being partisan is not wrong, but my perspective on the Overmountain campaign did not allow me to engage in partisan storytelling.

I had a few minutes, a character who was a fiddler, and a certain amount of philosophical and ethical constraints. I could not actually tell the story of the march; I was to “set the stage,” or frame the story. I was about to be in front of a live audience and a news camera.

In all honesty, I was in a great position. It was a slightly nerve-wracking position, but I had everything I needed with which to fashion an effective story, even with the dramatic deadline. I like deadlines, anyway. The above constraints were exactly what I needed. First of all, I knew my audience and my setting. I had a requirement; my character was a fiddler. He was a non-partisan fiddler caught in a partisan situation, in a potentially hostile environment, caught between competing forces, and put on the “hot seat.” Here was a fiddler under pressure. Influenced by Quakers and the Bible, he did not espouse violence, but war was coming to the frontier. His position as an “undecided” but able-bodied man was making him a target for both the Tories and the Whigs. When the news came that Patrick Ferguson sent his threat over the mountains to the backwaters, this fiddler was being forced to make a

hard decision? What would he do?

I could not get up there in front of the audience and say that. That would not be storytelling. Cars were pulling into the parking lot. People were getting out and walking to their seats. Some of them probably noticed the young bald man pacing back and forth behind the barn with a fiddle in his hands and talking to himself. Really, I was not talking to myself. I was attempting to talk as my character. I was trying to find the voice of the undecided frontier fiddler.

I had to create scene. I could not get up there and summarize and talk in the abstract as I have in the above paragraphs. I had to take that historical ambiguity of character and embed it in story.

I walked out in front of the audience with a lapel microphone clipped to me. Even as I walked towards the center of the grassy stage, I began to fiddle. The text below is not a transcript; it comes from memory and is an example of what I can remember of what I did.

I finished the fiddle tune with a quick bow-stroke, turned to the audience, and said:

I remember the war. This frontier was a dangerous place in those days. The Whigs were raidin' the Tories and the Tories were raidin' the Whigs. Now some of the Quakers told me that it wasn't right to kill a man over taxes, that the Bible said to honor the king. Now, I didn't want nothin' to do with it. I minded my own business. But it was dangerous. Horse raidin'. They called it acquisitioning supplies, but if the other side caught 'em, they'd hang 'em as horse thieves.

I remember the day, I was sitting in my cabin by my fire playin' the fiddle. Now, in those days, I didn't sit playing the fiddle in my cabin without my huntin' rifle right next to me. And there came a knock at the door. Well I sidled up there and looked through the slat. And I said,

"TUCKER! How many times have I told you not to come through that treeline without givin' a haloo out, I'm libble to put a bullet through that door one of these days."

“Open up McMaken,” he said.

Now, old man Tucker went up and down the river givin' the news and eatin' a meal at each cabin, and it showed. He looked at me and said,

“Have you heard the news?” I said,

“Of course I haven't heard the news.”

“The British General Cornwallis has taken Charleston!”

I said, “What's that to me? You know I haven't taken sides.”

Well, I hoped that maybe the war would end and we'd get some peace around here again. But there came another knock at my door. I grabbed my rifle and sidled up, quiet like and looked out.

“TUCKER! How many times have I told you not to come through that treeline without giving a haloo out, I really outta shoot one of these days.”

“Open up, McMaken, open up!”

“What's it now?”

“The British Major Patrick Ferguson has sent a threat over the mountains. He says that if the Whigs here don't stop supportin' the Patriot arms, he's gonna march his whole army over here and lay waste the land with fire and sword, hang the leaders, and burn us out.”

I said to him, “you know that's not my problem.”

“McMaken, you know you're settled here illegally. The British drew that proclamation line, you're not supposed to be here. Ferguson will burn you out just the same, just the same.”

“Tucker, get on outa here.”

Now, I don't want none of this war. But it's gettin' pretty risky. I'm not sure what to do. But maybe, maybe it's about time I made a decision.

I raised my fiddle, played another tune, and walked off the staging area as I played.

Again, that is not word for word, but that is the general idea of what I did, no doubt shaded by my subsequent development of the story. It is far removed from the actual event, being written on a still page rather than performed by a living person in 18th century garb, carrying and playing a fiddle, to an audience on a grassy sward in front of a pasture of grazing sheep and a distant hillside. But the above might provide a sense of the event in some way. This basic story would be shaped into the opening of my longer performance, as well as a piece that I adapted for use on its own in a number of time-constrained circumstances. The longer, more finished performance can be found in Chapter 3.

As is often the case with impromptu and sudden speaking, I did not have a clear sense of how it went. Having to be so concerned mentally with telling the story and not having the confidence of a tried-and-true crafted piece, I was unsure of its reception. Later that week, I received an email from one of the supervisors of the event. The above presentation was their first time seeing me perform. They wrote, “I believe everyone in attendance was very moved by your presentation. Great job!” So, I felt reassured to continue my development of a different perspective in storytelling.

Honing, Experimentation, and Continued Development

Over the next days, I had the opportunity to tell more with the OVTA and develop the story more, both in short spots like the one above and in longer 15-to-20 minute performances for groups. At Unimin Corporation in the mountains of North Carolina, the OVTA held a day for local schools. The gravesite of one of the Whig Overmountain Men, Robert McDowell, is located on the property now owned by Unimin. Unimin opens the site to the public through the OVTA event there. Students in separate groups hiked to the gravesite as presenters interpreted the history of the Overmountain Campaign along the way. They arrived at a large tent in a meadow where I waited with my fiddle. My directions indicated that I should act as entertainment with music and perhaps some storytelling. After

all the groups arrived, we ate lunch before the groups rotated once more for a ceremony at the gravesite and volleys fired from period rifles.

I took the opportunity of having an audience and appreciated not really being supervised. I at one point received a quick glance from a lead OVTA member who walked by just as the character I was portraying said to the audience of students, “And that's why I was a Tory,” or something close to that. Interpreted through my general hesitancy and fear about the reception of such a perspective, it made me nervous. Nevertheless, this came at the end of the presentations. It was a good time to experiment with story development. Because I was with the OVTA, I consistently chose to represent Tory or nonpartisan characters as a balance to the primary message the OVTA presented. It was during this time that I was able to hone my story and character ideas in longer forms semi-improvisationally in front of an audience. This process was a valuable chance for me to explore different ideas. Because I was just part of a longer program, and because I had music to cover over any deficiencies of storytelling, I was able to be more comfortably experimental.

It was during this middle time of work with the OVTA March that I became conflicted about the ethics of my involvement. I began having conversations with confidants who shared or understood my beliefs about the dilemma of being involved in an organization that largely promoted viewpoints that contradicted the ethics that derive from my faith.

I was opposed to what I saw around me. My faith is in the redemption of humanity and creation through the Kingdom of God ushered in by Jesus through whom God seeks to reconcile humanity to Himself. While this kind of statement may be unconventional in scholarly discourse, it is necessary for expressing my own positionality in autoethnographic terms. I do not view politically, economically, or ideologically motivated war as coinciding with a mission of reconciliation and redemption for human souls. What I saw around me and what I heard largely from other presenters was a message about the

fundamental redemption of 18th century America through violence and a promotion of nationalist war. These two messages do not coincide for me. I was struck with an ethical dilemma, as I felt convicted that I was participating in the presentation of a message I believe to be false. I was finding that it was not good enough for me to say that it is always ethical to tell a history historical story accurately. I found that my context had much to do with determining what was ethical or not. Because of the OVTA's general message, I found myself attempting to provide ambiguity for the situation and to promote my own perspectives on the history and on reality through my storytelling. But was my very participation, overall, somehow contaminating or compromising me ethically? Was I being complicit in moments when I was not in control of the storytelling (which was most of the time)?

I prayed about the issue and I also spent time in discussion with trusted advisors who also prayed for me. After discussion and prayer, I decided to continue on with my work at least until further clarity came. There is no clear-cut ethical line that can be identified about social participation within the broader discourse. It would be one thing were I offering a counter-narrative on my own terms, but I was doing so as a participant within an organization. To outside observers, I was just seen as a part of the OVTA. The dilemma I faced was “How could I participate in this organization when the primary overarching narrative was one I opposed?” On the one hand, I was lending at the very least my physical presence in tacit approval to the events. On the other, if I did not participate in the organizational presentations at all, then my voice would be lost. I already knew that my voice was being heard through my storytelling and that I was creating discussion and thought. I had been influenced by Christian thought on nonparticipation. How was this situation any different? Nevertheless, after prayer and advising, I continued to operate until further clarity arrived that would give me peace about a course of action.

The confirmation to my heart came at Quaker Meadows on the outskirts of Morganton, North

Carolina. It was the last day when I would be participating with the OVTA March. After the march, I would have to branch out on my own to perform the story at schools and functions. It was a nice, though somewhat humid, afternoon at Revolutionary War Days. A few vendors had set up around the historic house at Quaker Meadows. I spent the early portion of the afternoon playing music with and for a local fiddle club. The OVTA was to present the story of the Overmountain Campaign to a crowd of approximately 40 people, a mixed audience of adults and children of various ages. By this time, I had managed to perform my 6-7 minute opener a number of times and had begun to hone the language and imagery of the presentation, as well as the ideas I wanted to communicate, to a much greater extent. I had added more music through the presence of Scottish Gaelic singing to catch audience attention early on and give a flavor of the cultural distance of the times.

Before the presentation, I began speaking with an older gentleman who is one of the OVTA's finest presenters. This gentleman portrays the historical character of Reverend Doak, who at the Sycamore Shoals gave a sermon and prayer to the Overmountain Men to send them on their way (Jones, 2011, p. 389). In speaking with this man, a retired pastor, I learned that he shared not only my faith, but also a number of my views regarding political discourse in the church.⁶ I immediately felt more at ease and found that he was supportive of my efforts to bring different perspective and a sense of conflict to the presentations of the OVTA. It was not any sense of his authority as a retired pastor that eased my mind, but the sense that, in fact, there was more diversity in the group than I realized, and that this individual shared a number of my own views regarding political discourse in the church. Yet, it did not provide an answer for my dilemma. That was yet to come.

Again, my presentation served as the opening to the entire OVTA program. I walked out in front

⁶ I do not wish my perspectives regarding political discourse in the church to be a point of discussion in this thesis. That said, the issue was one of not using the church as a platform, for instance, to tell people how to vote.

of the bleachers full of people sitting to receive a message, and I presented my conflicted character in a way that incorporated the perspectives I wanted to share. My piece served as a framework commentary on the entirety of the program. Indeed, if my voice had been lost, I would have left the audience solely to an interpretation that I disavow. The audience experienced an entirely different program as a result. In some sense, the characters that followed could be seen as potentially unreliable narrators, not as participants in an authoritative, singular. As I finished my portion of the presentation and walked away from the stage area, the gentleman playing Reverend Doak stood there, and with swing of his fist and a smile on his face, told me I had done a good job. I realized that I had a significant amount of power to control the discourse. I had been asked to open the story. I was directed not even to talk about the March itself. But in a capacity that may have been seen as marginal, I was able to put my own contextualization on the whole program that followed. Further, I believed that such a role was good.

Seeing my own influence on the discourse did provide some confirmation to my heart.

Fundamentally, I have found the only way a conflicted ethical situation can be resolved for me is to receive a confirmation or release in the heart or spirit. This is more of a spiritual reality than a matter of rules and guidelines. I had to feel that what I was doing honored God. The confirmation that my role within the OVTA was beneficial and good and ethical came from a confirmation of spirit. The context will always change. Like storytelling itself, ethics cannot be codified to work in every context. Spiritual confirmation for unique situations is necessary. In my case, this confirmation was relational, based on my relationship with God. If others do not have that central relationship, they must rely on something else, perhaps a choice to make ethics relative to culture or to believe in an inherent *a priori* existence of perceivable morality or some other spiritual⁷ explanation.

⁷ I use spiritual rather than personal or philosophical because I consider this a priori type of acceptance to be fundamentally faith oriented; that is, a foundation of belief.

Granted, this was my last performance with the OVTA March, and the rest of my foreseeable work for the OVTA and OVNHT would consist entirely of my choices on the topic. Yet, the above experience did help solidify my ability to participate with the organization. After the march there was no ethical dilemma about group involvement; I had control of my representation within the discourse. I still did not have control of the context of discourse, however. Each venue, each audience, each school child or civic organization provided a new context or collective contexts for me to navigate as I performed the story of the 1780 Overmountain Campaign to Kings Mountain.

CHAPTER 3

A TALE OF FRONTIER CONFLICT: THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

Told November 18, 2012, at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park in the lobby of the visitor's center.

This performance of the story was recorded with digital video camera and digital audio recorder. Because the Sycamore Shoals presentation room was in use, I was asked to present the performance in the part of the visitors' center that also contained the gift shop and a variety of displays on the historic site, as well as on Kings Mountain. I was bedecked in my Overmountain man garb. Both long sides of the room were covered in windows and had doors. The stage area that I employed was towards the side that would be less likely to be used by people coming and going during the performance. About 20 or so chairs were set up, but the audience ended up consisting of about 10 people (which increased slightly during the performance). The audience included one child and the adults ranged from 20-somethings to a couple approximately in their 60s or 70s.

This was not my first performance of the entire story, but it came fairly early in my overall performance schedule. I had given seven performances of the whole story between October 24th and November 18th. Some of these other performances are discussed in the next chapter. The below was a critical performance of the story because it provided me with valuable feedback. My faculty advisor was present to provide feedback on the performance.

The following is a transcript of the digital recording of the performance I gave at Sycamore Shoals. This transcript includes my introductory frame for the story. The frame is the context, which the storyteller provides before actually beginning the story, and it is an important element of a storytelling performance.

[storyteller standing, holding fiddle]

Well, my name's Trae McMaken.

I'm a – storyteller with the Overmountain Victory Trail Association and the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

I'm going to tell you a story today that centers around the Battle of Kings Mountain which took place in South Carolina in 1880.⁸

And I'm gonna tell you about this battle using three different characters.

(unclear) tell in first person from three different characters' perspectives.

And uh one way that you know I switched characters is I'll sit down or stand up.

I'll also put a hat on for one of 'em.

[Those are?] cues you can follow along.

But uh.

the

Battle of Kings Mountain,

which is where

men on this ground right here

some of them mustered to get ready to go to that battle and march down to South

Carolina

fight in that battle

um, was fought between British forces and American forces.

But one of the problems is there was only one person from

Britain

at the battle.

The battle was fought entirely between Americans.

An American army supporting the British and an American army attempting to overthrow the British.

So this is a story about that conflict

of Americans and Americans

on the frontier.

[storyteller sits] It starts out with a song.

[rhythmic foot percussion commences]

[Sings song with foot percussion in Scottish Gaelic. A rhythmic Puirt a Beul]

That's a song my mother always used to sing

When she dandled me on her knee

[that's] bounced me

when I was a child.

Course she didn't speak any English she only spoke Scottish Gaelic.

She's from the Highlands.

Landed with my father in Philadelphia but the land there was already taken

it's too expensive

So they moved down the Valley of Virginia

8 Only in transcribing this did I realize I misspoke and said 1880 instead of 1780. Mistakes happen.

But the Germans had got there first.
And they were good farmers.
They couldn't afford any land there so they moved out
to the east side of the Appalachian mountains.
And that's where they settled.
[sigh] In those days,
and still
people love to dance.
So
They used to have dances in the
in the cabins
or even outdoors if the weather was
fine and
They didn't have a fiddle!
So, in order to dance they
they sang.
And my mother had a beautiful singing voice
but she had to sing pretty fast
for dancing.

She'd sing.
[sings a Puir a Beul Scottish Gaelic, fast and rhythmic]
[speaks right away]
And if she ran out of breath someone would take her place.
And they could dance to it.
But one day a man came into the settlement
And he was carrying a fiddle.
It's an easy instrument
to carry to the frontier
it's light,
you can throw it in a sack
carry it on the back of yer horse.
well the people
in that settlement
they
thought maybe they could get a hold of that instrument so,
they offered the man a cow.
Well it took two cows before they got the fiddle from him,
But they got it and after that,
they had tunes.
[Plays fiddle tune, *Big John McNeill*, fast peppy tune]
[audience member comes and step dances]
[immediately out of tune] And they could dance just like that.
[audience: applause, laughter]
[over applause]

And I'll tell you right now, this fiddle right here
it's the only thing that kept me alive during the war.
I'll tell you how that happened.
I first came out
west of the mountains
to the
Nolichucky River
[heh] with the long hunters
goin' on huntin' trips.
Take a year or two years just to go on a trip.
I saw the land there I liked it.
So when I heard that the first settlers were goin' over.
Well,
I went with them.
And I cleared the land like I
I'd seen the Cherokee do it.
You cut
the bark off from around a tree
Girdle it.
'n come spring that
that tree won't give off leaves.
You clear a few acres of that where the sun will shine down all summer long you can plant yer
corn right amid the trees and have a crop your first year.
I cut down enough
enough trees for a cabin, though.
And that's where I lived
after the war broke out.
I didn't think the war would
make it to the frontier.
I was wrong.
I thought it was somethin'
somethin' those
rich folks
on the coast had to deal with
the gentry, the aristocrats, the merchants.
People worried about taxes 'n
liberty.
But,
I thought
that I'd have real liberty out on the frontier that I'd
be able to mind my own business.
But it seemed like
it just got worse.
There were the Tories the ones who supported the British.
And there were the Whigs

the ones who wanted to get rid of 'em.
 And they'd raid each other's
 cabins and farms.
 They'd drag 'em out,
 steal everything they owned take their horses their cattle.
 Sometimes
 they'd string 'em up to a tree.
 [exhale]
 It was pretty dangerous.
 I tried to stay out of it mind my own business.
 The Quakers down river they told me that
 God wouldn't be happy with me if I got involved that
 it wasn't right to kill someone over taxes
 and that the Bible said to honor the king well
 that was fine.
 It seemed like it made sense
 but heh
 I didn't even wanna to join any sides to be honest.
 I remember
 I remember the day
 when
 the knock came at my door.
 Now I never sat playing the fiddle by my fire without havin' my rifle right next to me.
 So I took it up and I
 made my way to the door
 and I looked through the slat and there I saw old man Tucker
 I said "Tucker, how many times have I told you not to come through that treeline without giving
 a haloo out I'm lible to put a rifle ball through that door one of these days."
 He said "Open up MacGregor," I opened the door.
 He walked in he saw some
 half eaten meal on the table.
 Sat himself down started helpin' himself to it.
 That man could go up and down the Nolichucky River start – stoppin' at every cabin on the way tellin'
 the news and gettin' a meal.

 Now he looked at me he said, "have you heard the news," I said "of course I haven't heard the news."
 He said,
 "The British General Clinton,"
 He's taken Corn-
 He's taken Charleston.
 It's fallen and they've captured the
 entire Continental Army.
 And then I said the most foolish words I've ever said in my life
 I said "good, maybe that'll be the end of the war."
 I don't think Tucker had it out for me

but you know how it is with tellin' neighbors something and the next neighbor knows about it
and pretty soon everyone's talkin' about that Tory
fiddler down on the Nolichucky.

Got me pretty nervous.

I started hidin' my
horse out back in a
cane break and
stopped playin the
fiddle at night 'n
didn't burn a fire.

Wanted it to look if anyone was just passin' by like maybe I'd gotten out—
outa the settlement.

And so when that
that next knock came at the door
I real careful took my rifle in my hand and I crept up there and I looked through the slat and I
said,

“Tucker!
How many times
have I told you
to give a haloo out
I really outa shoot one of these days.

He said “Open up the door MacGregor.”

I opened it up.

He walked in.

He looked around but there was no food
no fire.

He looked disappointed.

He said “have you heard the news?” I said “of course I haven't heard the news.”

He said,

“Major Patrick Ferguson,
the leader of the loyalist militia,
he sent a threat over the mountains.

He said unless

the Whigs here stop supportin' the patriot arms,
he's gonna march his men over hear some say there are thousands of 'em
he's gonna burn us out,
he's gonna hang our leaders he's gonna steal our cattle said he'd lay waste
with fire and sword.

I said,

“Tucker, what is that to me? You know I haven't chosen any sides.”

He said,

“You've settled here illegally.

The British don't recognize the treaties we fought to make the Cherokee accept.

They drew the proclamation line and we crossed it.

We're not supposed to be here.

They'll burn you out just the same.
I said "get out of here Tucker."
And he left.
[exhale]
A couple days later early in the morning.
[long exhale]
I'd fallen asleep.
They came through my door too fast for me to get to my rifle even though I
slept with it.
They dragged me out.

They took everything I owned out of that cabin.
They set it on fire.
Well, one of the men
was arguing over my horse another took my fiddle.
I recognized some of my neighbors.
And then they threw a rope up over a tree
and I asked em'
just give me one
last tune on that fiddle,
one last tune.

[exhale]
They looked at each other for a minute
and the man who'd taken my fiddle he handed it back.
And I played.
[begins slow, mournful tune on fiddle]
[while playing]
and as I played
I saw some of those hard times
gatherin' up behind the eyes of the men around.
[music continues]
And when I saw that
I changed tune.
[Tune changes to fast dance tune, *Mason's Apron*]
And when I'd done
they looked at each other and they looked at me.
And one of them finally said "ah, we've taken his horse we've taken his gun
he's not goin' to Ferguson
let's leave him be."
And with my cabin burnin' behind me they walked out into the trees.
[sets fiddle down]
[picks up hat, stands up, puts on hat]
[moves forward and adjusts hat]

[PART II]

I remember the day
 when I reached the Watauga River
 at a place they called the Sycamore Shoals.
The river divides around an island there into two channels
 Low, and unless there's a flood on and it's been rainin' hard
 you can cross without getting too wet.
It was early in the morning and there was a heavy fog on I couldn't really even see the far side of the
river very well.
I took my rifle and I took my horse
 his reins in my hand and I went out.
When I got to the middle of the river
 I heard the voices of men muffled in the fog on the other side.
I heard a – horses whinnying
 and in the distance a shot fired.
And the thought struck me just there
 that maybe
 maybe Ferguson had already arrived
 maybe I wasn't walkin' into our own militia mustering,
 I was walking
 into Ferguson's camp.
And as I stopped there hesitating, a voice called out to me from the other side and said, "Patrick!
 That's an odd place to be taking a break."
I recognized the voice it was Henry
 Henry MacLeod's and I
 I walked to the other side of the river he was
 he was kneeling down fillin' up a kettle for breakfast
I said to him,
 as I got my horse scrambled up the muddy bank, I said,
 "you really honestly think
 that I should leave my family
 my wife and children fifteen miles from anyone
 and me with the only rifle
 and come follow you
 and march across those mountains
 go chase after some British army for all I know,
 the Chickamaugas have already scalped my family.
He said "Patrick,
 you know we'll be leavin' men behind to protect the settlements."
I said "yeah, the old men
 and the lame horses
 and the bad rifles.
 Think I should

let my family be protected by them?
He said “you know as well as I do what a standing army does far from home
when they need supplies and there're civilians around.”

You can take your choice Patrick.

You can take your choice you can come with us
and stop Ferguson
or you can stay here.

But one way or another

if we're not successful you will deal with Ferguson, he said.

I led my horse up into the meadow.

First thing I noticed in the fog was the
damp smell of hundreds of horses.

And I could hear them rustling in the grass.

Up on the high ground there was a line of campfires
where the men were trying to cook breakfast.

We were there a couple of days more joined us.

We had a pretty good militia force
by the time we marched out joined by others
from further north
and all those settlements along the rivers.

We headed up

towards Yellow Mountain Gap.

When we were down towards the bottom of the mountain it was
rainin', it was cold.

And when we got up, it was snow on the ground enough to cover your
shoes and the hoofs of the horses and

no matter what you did

at night

to try to stay warm try to stay dry

whether you leaned up against a tree

found a buddy to lean up against just to keep you up off the ground

the cold in that air and the mist risin' off the ground

it'd get in your clothes

and soak 'em down to the skin.

There was no way you could get warm. You might have a fire

but pretty soon you'd wake up

half of ya would be toasty the other half u'd be freezing cold.

You'd have to roll over every fifteen minutes.

Half the time we got up early in the morning before light

just kept going

trying to get warm with the movement.

As we rode the

those horse's breath

came pouring out in fog against the cold.

We marched for two weeks like that.
Eatin' what we could.
Stirring corn meal in our hands as we rode with some water
to form a dough ball.
We got to a place called Cowpens it was a Tory farm we helped ourselves to some of his cattle.
We burned his fence posts for fire.
And we heard
that Ferguson was nearby that he was runnin'
he was runnin towards Cornwallis army and if he joined up with them
there was no
chance
that we'd be able to win that fight.
And some of the men by that time were lame
couldn't walk horses as well.
[sigh]
Our ranks had swelled
as the weeks had past but
we marched all day.
As we ate
half cooked
beef
I looked around at some of the men around me I
I can't say I was proud to be with all those men.
Some of them I knew were my neighbors and I liked them they were good men some of 'em
were plunderers
they smelled a fight comin'.
But when it came to Ferguson we all
seemed to agree.
Ferguson a Scottish aristocrat.
The kind of man
that my family left Europe to get away from.
Aristocrats – a few people ownin' almost everything.
And after rent and taxes
us poor people we had
next to nothin' left so my parents
they sold themselves into indentured servitude
to get a chance to get over to America cause they'd heard there was enough land to make
everyone an aristocrat.
When they got here
they were enslaved for years on the Chesapeake.
And
by the time they finished their servitude
they were given
a few tools and a rifle
a change of clothes

sent west to settle land.
And at the same time the British told them
you're not allowed to settle that western land.
We're savin' it for the Cherokee and the Shawnee.
Stay here.
Rent land from the aristocrats.
My f-- [vocal stumble on "father"] parents didn't take kindly to that.
And I can guarantee you I'm not gonna let any rich aristocrat march over these mountains and enslave
my family again.

[sigh]
So they
picked nine hundred of the best men who could still walk.
Nine hundred horses that were still fit.
Nine hundred of the best rifles.
And they set off at night to chase down Ferguson.
We rode all night it was raining and cold
We needed to keep our rifles dry. Some of the men took off their shirts and with their skin exposed to
the rain and sky they wrapped the locks of their rifles to keep them dry
so that they'd fire.
Others rode with the locks tucked into their armpits
all night long and half the next day.
About noon the sun came out.
[sigh]
It was beautiful[?]
a little warmth.
And we reached a little place they called Kings Mountain.
It was more of a hill compared to what we were used to.
And our commanders gathered us up
and they told us
to fight
like each of us were our own commanders.
To fight like the Indians who we'd been fightin' for years for the land.
We knew how to do that.
We'd all taken to carrying our rifles as well as knives and tomahawks.
We knew how to dodge from tree to tree.
They said fight like hell
scream like devils.
And when they charge down at us with their bayonets

just to
turn around and come right back as soon as they turned around.
So we encircled that mountain.
Got ourselves ready.

[takes off hat and sits down]

[Part III]

After the men left
my cabin burning behind me
I went to the nearest Whig farmhouse and acquisitioned a horse.

And I rode
until I got to North Carolina and
crossed the mountains found Ferguson's camp.
and they gave me a new set of clothes
and a musket
with a bayonet.

And that morning, [sigh] it'd been rainin all night
and the sun came out so we went up on top of that hill where there were no trees
just [sigh]
laid out our clothes, laid out our
muskets
just tried to get warm and dry.

To raise our spirits we sang songs
makin' fun of our opponents.

[singing]
Our sad decay in church and state
surpasses my descrivin'
o' the Whigs came o'er us like a curse
and we hae done with thrivin'.
Awa' Whigs awa'
awa' Whigs awa'
yer just a pack o traitor loons
ye'll nae dee good ata'.

[end song]
And as we were on top of that mountain tryin' to dry out
the first of the sentries returned.

Pretty soon we heard a couple shots.

[unclear] moving down the bottom of the mountain.

Our commanders were running back and forth trying to form us into lines all along that ridge-line.

[sigh]

and I heard one of the officers say,
“it looks bad, them's the yellin' boys.”
They formed us into two long lines
and pretty soon we noticed men
circling around the bottom of the mountain we fired down at 'em
but there were trees on the sides of the mountain.

and they started to come up.
and their rifles
could fire two-three times as far as these muskets they gave us.
Our one advantage was the eighteen inches of sharpened steel
that we had on top – the bayonets – so as the
Whigs came up the mountain our officers
ordered us to charge down and we did.
And as soon as we started down at 'em those Whigs turned
and raaan.
[sigh]
And as soon as we got about halfway down the mountain our officers
they called us to return, take the high ground
and we went back up.
And as soon as we turned around those Whigs turned around and started firing into our backs as we
went up the mountain.
When we got back up to the top
they were on our heels.
We turned around and we charged down again
and again.
I remember one of the times we were charging down
I was – takin' my bayonet down that hill and I got to an oak tree.
And there a Whig jumped out from behind it.
I didn't even have time to think
I was runnin' down that hill so fast my bayonet slid right along the barrel of his gun
pierced through his hand
and pinned that hand to his thigh.
He fell in front of me and I
I stopped and I stood there and I looked at him and he looked up at me.
And then I heard the, the whistle
calling the retreat.

And I left him there.

When we got back up to the top
the Whigs were all around us there were bullets flying from behind us
in front of us
so we ran down to the end of the mountain
it was a little flatter
where we had circled some wagons
and made camp.
We tried to form a circle there
and our officers were doing the best they could but the g--
the gunfire.
Some of the men started to raise white flags but there was Ferguson,
on top of a white charger

ridin' back and forth
along those lines
where alllll the bullets
in the world could find him.

But he didn't
he didn't blink.

His right arm hung
by his side useless from an old war wound he held his sword and his reins in his left hand, and
he rode back and when he saw those white flags go up he'd cut 'em down.

Tried to rally us.

Now some say
that he was trying to get away
but I don't believe it not of a man
as brave as Ferguson
when he turned that horse
and rode toward the Whig lines,
and he rode into 'em.

And we saw him fall.

And when –
when we saw
Ferguson fall we started to throw down our weapons
raise our hands
yell for quarters, surrender.

Now,
some of the Whigs later they said that they didn't know what white flags meant.

Others,
others started yellin' "Buford's play, Tarleton's quarters."

As much as we yelled for mercy they kept firing and they kept firing for a while.

And when they finally did
circle us all around three men deep with us
crouched on the ground,
our rifles scattered.

Finally, the si–
the gunfire ceased.

Someone,
somewhere
[sigh]
never decided who it was.

But they fired.

And one of those Whig offers,
looked a little jumpy,
pointed to us,
said,

“fire on the prisoners!”

[stands up]

[Part IV]

Guten Tag. Ich heisse Johann.
Komme aus Bethabara.
Ich bin Moravian.
Ich erinnere das Krieg.
Does no one here speak German?
[audience member laughs]

That's odd that more of you don't speak German cause
during the war a lot of people spoke German around here.

I said I'm

Johann, I'm Moravian.

And I remember during the war.

I come from Bethabara, a town we built
in North Carolina
after we got out of Europe.

In Moravia most of my people
were slaughtered for what they believed.

Came to America
lookin' for
freedom.

But we're more concerned with the Kingdom of Heaven than the kingdom of this earth,
so when this war broke out
we didn't want a part in that violence.

But we're Germans.

We're good farmers,
everyone knows that.

So both armies

they realized pretty early on that they could come to our towns
take what they needed
and we weren't gonna fight 'em for it.

Sometimes they issued paper receipts saying that they'd pay us
sometime in the future, sometimes they didn't they just
took what they wanted.

I remember

the day the army marched in after Kings Mountain.

They'd been marching in and out
partisans from both sides all fall.

That was the biggest group yet.

They had prisoners, hundreds.

[sigh]

And the man that led 'em,

when I saw who it was a chill ran down my spin, it was Cleveland,
a Whig partisan leader.

I knew how he marched into Salem one day.

Yeah. His idea of a good Tory was,

one who was hanging from a tree.

He marched into Salem he found two Tories in jail.

He didn't like the idea of jailin' Tories, see, so he had 'em pulled out and he hung one,
and said to the other, "I'll let you go, if you cut off your own ears."

That was the man,

that was the man in charge of the prisoners.

It showed.

But, as angry as I was at these violent men who come into our town,

eat up our harvest,

kill our cattle,

steal our hens,

empty our

storehouse of cornmeal,

[sigh] I knew God wouldn't be happy with my anger, so,

I took a bowl of water and a clean cloth,

and went among the wounded.

I saw a man kneeling down

on the ground he had a

wound in his hand,

it'd healed but

he had one on his thigh and when I knelt down next to him the smell of it was . . .

I looked at him,

in the eye and I knew and he knew,

he didn't have long.

I did what I could for him I cleaned it and I bandaged it.

And I couldn't help but ask,

I said "what's your name?"

He said "my name's Patrick."

I said, "was it worth it?"

"Was it,

was it worth it?"

He looked at me.

He said "I know you're Moravian I know you're a coward you won't fight.

You won't protect.

But I tell you what,

we beat Ferguson and we'll beat Cornwallis.

[unclear, stammer] won't be any aristocrat

who'll come over those mountains and enslave my family.”

I stood up.

There were other prisoners,
there were other wounded.

It was a while before they left,
and when they did we didn't have much.

Some of my people, though,
are plannin' on sending missionaries to the Cherokee,
and the Chickamaugas,
the ones who are at war.

And I admit,
I'm terrified
of the Cherokee.

But I think I'll go.
Especially now.

[sits down]

[picks up fiddle]

[PART V]

[plays slow, dark march on fiddle]

[end music]

After the war ended, [sigh]
after my parole.

Most of those who had fought
with Ferguson,
well they got out of there.

Some went back to England some went to
Nova Scotia in Canada.

Others,
went to
the Caribbean.

Not many returned to the settlements.

I don't blame 'em.

But I did.

Back to the ruins of that cabin.

I rebuilt it [sigh].

For a while,
no one wanted much of anything to do with me.

But if there's one thing that's true on the frontier its this,
if you don't work together nothing
gets done.

You don't have
 apple butter.
You don't have
 maple sugar.
You don't pull in a harvest.
You don't get your lost cattle returned.
You sure don't dance.
People like to dance, so
 pretty soon
 I started getting invited up and down the river.
Before long people stopped talking about
 who I fought with.
Like it or not,
 we were all Americans by that time.
And we'd have to deal with that.
[plays slow dark fiddle march]
[transitions into fast happy dance tune, *Big John McNeill*, same tune as at the beginning]
[music ends]
Thank you.
[Applause]

(The performance was within seconds of being 30 minutes long at this telling, from introduction to applause).

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMING THE STORY

With the OVTA march completed, I moved into the duties of booking myself for solo performances. Occasionally, I was given a booking directly from the OVNHT or OVTA, but for the most part, I created informational materials for schools and organizations publicizing my story and distributed them. I told the first section of the story at a few different performances of the East Tennessee State University TaleTellers troupe of storytellers. My first performance of the entire story occurred on October 24, 2012, when I performed my full-length story titled *Tales of Frontier Conflict: The Battle of Kings Mountain* to two social studies classes at West McDowell Junior High in Marion, North Carolina.

My completed performances list with an approximate count of people reached is given below. This list does not include partial performances. Because I constructed the story in a modular form, I was able to perform just parts of it when dealing with time constraints. In such instances, I always performed scenes or adapted monologues belonging to the opening character, MacGregor. I adapted that story to time frames of anywhere from 5 minutes to 20 minutes, performing partial versions for roughly 1,100 people. This list also does not include performances done as part of the OVTA march.

October 24, 2012: West McDowell Junior High. Marion, NC. Two performances. Ca. 115 8th graders.

October 25, 2012: West McDowell Junior High. Marion, NC. Two performances. Ca. 115 8th graders.

November 9, 2012: Freedom Trail Elementary. Elk Park, NC. Ca. 110 3-7th graders.

November 14, 2012: Asheville Day School. Asheville, NC. Ca. 25 highschoolers.

November 16, 2012: Abingdon Muster Grounds. Abingdon, VA. Ca. 40 11th graders.

November 18, 2012: Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park. Elizabethton, TN. Ca. 10 mixed age.

November 26, 2012: Sullivan East High School. Bluff City, TN. Ca. 30 11th graders.

November 28, 2012: Holston Valley Middle School. Bristol, TN. Ca. 50 8th graders.

November 30, 2012: Mary Hughes School. Piney Flats, TN. Ca. 40 8th graders.

December 7, 2012: Table Rock Middle School. Morganton, North Carolina. Ca. 180 8th graders.

January 13, 2013: Netherland Inn/Exchange Place Association Annual Meeting. Kingsport, TN. Ca. 70 adults.

February 19, 2013: Kingsport Civic Club. Kingsport, TN. Ca. 30 adults.

February 24, 2013: Virginia Chapter OVTA Kick-off. Abingdon, VA. Ca. 24 adults, 1 boyscout.

February 25, 2013: Kings Mountain High School. Kings Mountain, NC. Ca. 70 highschoolers.

February 25, 2013: Kings Mountain Middle School. Kings Mountain, NC. Ca. 300 8th graders.

March 1, 2013: Sharps Chapel Elementary, TN. Ca. 50 3-5th graders.

March 4, 2013: Gate City SAR Chapter, VA. Ca. 15 adults, 1 youth.

March 22, 2013: WC Friday Middle School, Gaston CO., NC. Four Performances. Ca. 275 7-8th graders.

March 28, 2013: Reserve Officers Association, Johnson City, TN. Ca. 13 adults.

April 4: Johnson City Public Library. Ca. 40 mixed age.

April 5: OVTA Conference Storytelling Presentation, Abingdon, VA. Ca. 40 adults.

April 8: Southwest Branch Library, Hickory NC. 9, mostly adults.

April 8: St. Stephens Library, Hickory NC. 8, mostly adults

April 17: Heritage Christian Academy, Tazewell TN. Ca. 35 mixed-grade students with teachers.

April 20: Sons of the American Revolution, North Carolina State Convention, Asheville. Ca. 65 adults.

May 1: Cherokee National Forest Team Training event, Watauga Lake TN. Ca. 15 adults.

My 8: Arthur Morgan School, Celo North Carolina. Ca. 15 mixed-grade students with teachers.

May 10: Home schoolers event, Union County Library, TN. Ca. 7 mixed students and adults.

Ca. 1,733 people reached with full story performance.

Each of these performances posed unique challenges regarding venue and audience. Each has contributed to my awareness that my story is not something that is set in stone. Each time I perform, I have to re-enter and re-create the story I am trying to portray. Influenced by all the factors involved in each performance, this necessity produces a unique experience each time. Below, I examine a few instances of performances that I found enlightening and which continued my development and understanding of my story.

At West McDowell Junior High in Marion, North Carolina, I gave two performances a day for 2 days of the story with time for Q&A afterwards. I spoke to approximately 230 eighth graders over the course of the 2 days. It was a trial by fire – my first performance of the whole story.

I arrived at the junior high parking lot with some element of trepidation. I was concerned about the performance, but I was also concerned about having to walk into the school wearing 18th century frontier clothing. I have never been able to get entirely comfortable in my garb. Stopping to pump gas or help clear loose horses from North Carolina route 226 on my way to a performance has made me feel awkward, even with a hoodie on top. It is especially so when teachers have not alerted the office staff that a presenter will be arriving for their class. An office manager with a raised eyebrow is effective at making the costume feel conspicuous. Further, I have never entirely come to feel at home in the mountains of southern Appalachia.

The performances at West McDowell Junior High taught me a few very valuable lessons. The first one was that my performance took about 15 minutes less time when in front of a crowd than when I rehearsed it at home. While I had been expecting 40-45 minutes, I came out at 28-32 minutes, give or

take. This left me with a lot of time to talk to the students afterwards, as I had been given an hour slot for each class. Unprepared as I was, this was too much time for discussion and too little presentation. The teacher who invited me to do the presentations was enthusiastic throughout both my visits to the school, and my feedback from teachers was positive throughout the 2 days. My experience with the students revealed some flaws in my performance.

Two things became apparent when answering questions afterwards. I received more questions from eighth graders at this school than at any since, which speaks to me positively about this school's atmosphere concerning openness towards questions. Consistently, I was asked questions that made me realize the students were having difficulty differentiating me as the presenter from my characters. Questions like, "Were you wounded in the war?" or "How many wars did you fight in?" made this clear. Also, one young woman asked me, "So, did you rebuild your cabin?" or something to that effect. Careful to provide the benefit of the doubt, I answered, "The character I was portraying – in the story it does not say." This led to her vocal realization that I was not the character, followed by some ridicule from other students. I was saddened to witness that. In a much more recent portrayal of an 18th century character, I was asked by fourth graders, "are you a real person?"

These kinds of exchanges have been consistent in my performances for younger audiences. This was particularly perplexing to me because I was changing character in my story. It immediately became obvious that my framing was lacking. I was largely jumping into the story and expecting the audience to pick up on my cues for character change. I expected that students would be able to intuitively understand that the performer in front of them did not actually fight in the Revolutionary War. Unfortunately, storytelling can have a bewitching effect that can captivate a youngster into accepting what is put in front of them. Questions like, "Do you always dress like that?" or "Are you a normal person?" revealed the struggle that some students had in dealing with the framework of the experience I

was presenting to them.

My way of addressing this was to start putting more effort and time into my introduction. The introduction tends to change much more than the story does, but I attempt to hit a few main points that can be seen in the story transcription in the previous chapter. I try to make it clear I will be switching characters. Consciously or not, I tend to ground myself in the present by talking about who I am. In the transcribed introduction, that was through mentioning my organizational affiliations. I also try to indicate one of my central ideas; I focus on the conflict of Americans against Americans. I doubt many people really remember my introduction. I hope they are quickly lost in the story. I hope they remember that there was only one British soldier at the battle. Yet this short, and likely forgettable framework, hopefully gives children a greater context.

Another thing I have begun to do more and more is to actually say, out of character, “I’m switching characters now.” I often do this for the first change or two, and then hope that the audience has caught onto the cues. Recently, performing for a set of adults, I mismanaged my physical cues to the audience and instead of seeing me as going through the character switching process, they thought I was finishing the performance and applauded. I had to actually say, “there’s a bit more,” before continuing. Despite that danger, I find actually telling the audience that I’m changing reduces the risk of confusion. There might be some more effective costuming, propping, or distinct character differentiation that I could do. At the same time, especially with young students, I believe at this point that while sharpening character distinction is always good, it can be expeditious to just go ahead and tell them. I have received feedback from storytellers who wanted me to focus more on characterization or costuming to differentiate character, but my experiences in the trenches have encouraged me to verbalize at least the first change. Framing continues to be one of the critical factors in my performances of this story.

Feedback from the Audience

I enjoy getting reviews and feedback from my audiences. Reviews are useful for me in publicity materials and feedback gives me more insight into what I can improve or change. I have an online feedback and review submission mechanism consisting of a website form that makes it simple for me to harvest reviews and feedback from those who have invited me to perform at their schools or organizations. I have received a fair number of responses from those who have organized for me to perform this show. Mostly, I received positive and some glowing reviews. I would like to use the suggestions for improvement or negative comments as items for consideration here.

The Negative Review:

“Perhaps more acting to the story to show the characters and the story. It was confusing trying to follow the story line from 3 different view points all coming from 1 person for this age group.”

– Teacher

I call the above “the negative review,” partly because of the experience that produced it. As much as I disliked getting this review, I was not surprised.

That morning at a school in Tennessee with the ETSU Taletellers, I performed a Jack tale for the younger children and for the older children the opening of my Overmountain story. This was as part of a larger storytelling troupe presentation at that school. Afterwards, I drove back to my cabin near the North Carolina line, changed into costume, and hopped back into my car, heading to a small North Carolina elementary not many miles away. This was my second school performance of the whole story. My 2 days with eighth graders had preceded this telling.

It was a very nice, modern elementary building without much wear and tear, leading me to believe it was new. It had a number of floors, and after I met the teacher who was my contact, I was taken down to the gym where I waited until a gym class was finished. A helpful teacher was there to set up the sound system, which consisted of a speaker and a microphone on a straight stand – not a folding boom stand. The space and the sound system were not ideal. I hoped I could present to the students without the sound system but I wanted it just in case.

Gyms are often terrible places to do storytelling, a topic often discussed in the ETSU Storytelling Program. They tend to be wide-open with excessive space in the background, booming acoustics, poor sound equipment, and a generally performance-unfriendly setting. This gym was quite large, and I was in for more than I anticipated.

I was going to be presenting to the third-fifth grade. I had performed for this age group before but primarily with traditional tales. When the students began to tramp in and fill row after row in the center of the bleachers on one side of the gym, I started to be concerned. Some of them looked quite young. I have since learned that this is a difficult age-spread. I understand the desire to include more students into a presentation, but it is better to separate ages so that the story can be told appropriately. The students kept coming and filling up bleachers, so I used the microphone to speak to them. This was my first performance of the story employing a microphone, which was awkward because of my sitting and standing delineation of characters as well as my general movement and tendency to look in different directions. Hand-held or stand-held microphones hinder my movement and simply break the frontier look of my costuming. When lacking a boom stand, they also interfere with playing the fiddle.

Needless to say, these factors contributed to my being a bit “off.” I decided to just tell my story as best I could, aiming for the older grades. I did not attempt to sterilize the performance for the third graders who had been brought in. I believe I may have held back some of the violence in the story, but I

mostly directed my style to the older part of the audience. It didn't take long before I became uncomfortable giving the presentation. There was a weight of negative energy in the room. At times, though I never looked to apprise myself of what, there was activity going on behind me in the gym and I could see the faces in the audience turning their attention behind me.

Then, the worst part of the presentation took place. It was during or right after the battle scene, one of the critical points of my story. I could not tell what was happening, but one of the older girls, from high up on the bleachers, came down to the side where my teacher-contact was sitting. People looked. I did not turn to join them as I told my story, but out of the corner of my eye it appeared she was crying and emotionally distraught. The teacher left with her for a few moments. The attention of many in the audience was given to that situation. It was a while before the teacher walked back in.

I finished the performance and my Q&A section. The principal of the school, an older woman, walked up to me and thanked me quite sincerely and expressed how she thought the performance was excellent. "I was only able to be here for the last part of it," she said. In my sparse interaction with the teacher who had brought me in, she was reserved and though I was not sure what took place, I sensed negative tension. I received the above review. I have since put more attention into framing my story and making character shifts clearer, even verbally commenting on it as it happens.

I have never known what took place in the heart of the young lady who left. It may have not been related to me at all. Then again, my story may have triggered something. While discussing this with a family member, I came to realize more acutely that as our country continues to engage in the longest war in American history, our schools are populated with students whose parents or siblings or other family members have been killed, maimed, or otherwise adversely affected by war. Like the Revolution on the frontier, our current war has been framed by a discourse of revenge, the opportunity for gain, and the fear of harm being done to us. We are still on the frontier.

To undergo a storyteller speaking in-character about bayonetting another human being may be emotionally traumatic for a young student whose family member has returned maimed or has died. Is that an issue of storytelling or an issue of war? No doubt, it is both. It is my hope that from the hearts of those students who have undergone such pain as war-related loss, the tendency to glorify violence will be driven away. If my story serves a humanizing and empathizing message in the midst of the story's inherent violence, then I will continue performing it. If our lives are lived in the midst of violence – and they are – then we should pursue a humanization and empathy. If that is the responsibility of living in the midst of violence, then perhaps that must be the responsibility of storytelling in the midst of violence. It is better to be stirred to tears than be stirred to a chorus of resounding huzzahs. As Christ taught, *“blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God, and blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

All of this, and I should still make sure the audience knows when I'm changing character.

The suggestions that I have received since then generally relate to background information and framing. Here are two comments:

“The performance was engaging and held the students' attention. If you could tell people beforehand some of the key vocabulary words like the political groups and the main real people involved in your stories that would help students as they follow you through your narrative.” –
Teacher

“Maybe give a little more background to the American Rev before beginning... help to provoke kids to ask questions in some way...” – *Teacher*

The above indicate that at least two schoolteachers wanted their students to have some more knowledge of the American Revolution and the time period prior to experiencing the storytelling

presentation. I try to get a few general ideas over to the students in my introduction. The essentials that I try to communicate are that there was a war with the British, it was a long time ago, it took place around here, there was a battle between Americans, there was only one British soldier, and this is a story about why Americans fought Americans at Kings Mountain. Of course, I put the information a little more specifically than that, but not too much more. A North Carolina seventh grader recently asked me after I finished the story, “Why was the war fought?” I was able to answer that question from a few different perspectives. Yet, in another North Carolina high school, 300 energetic eighth graders lined up on gym benches threatened to overcome my introduction, so I had to “abandon ship” on some of the framework and jump into the story as fast as possible. Where they had been talkative and inattentive during my introduction they soon became subdued and attentive to the actual story.

I expect young students to have learned general platitudes about the American Revolution and to have been told about George Washington – his military exploits, not what Dunn (2007) writes regarding his land speculations – and to have seen pictures of the British “redcoats.” I picture in their minds a jumble of muskets, colorful uniforms, George Washington, colonies. Basing it on my own experience to some degree, I expect the children have mental pictures in their heads. While working in North Carolina, I learned that in eighth grade, the students there get more of the history, which I expect to amount to more mental pictures of horses, ships, wigs, and maybe a date or two.

So, I am not necessarily working with much background knowledge in the audiences, and some of what I am working with is disturbing: for example, there is the Mel Gibson movie *The Patriot* (2000). On at least two occasions, I have had experiences with this movie while in schools. In one instance, a well-meaning teacher informed me that the eighth graders had just watched *The Patriot* and so they had that background to go on for my presentation. The movie *The Patriot* represents much of what I want to counteract regarding the image of the Revolutionary War. Bluntly put, I consider the

movie to be xenophobic, violence-glorifying, nationalist propaganda. That said, it is very exciting. I recognize media violence as a kind of pornography,⁹ which gives the viewer a chemical buzz that results in shifted thought and behavioral patterns. It is perfect for indoctrinating children into an ethos of one-sided glorification of violence-for-country. The main character, played by Mel Gibson, had previous war experience; he committed barbaric acts that led to victory and his own popularity as a war hero but, that tormented him into espousing a nonparticipatory view of the revolution. The character does not want to participate in the war until the demonized British character comes and captures one son and kills another. He then leads brutal partisan raiders in a campaign of death-dealing to the effete and brutal British who wear nice red coats, rather than the clothing of neighbors and friends of Tory persuasion. The overarching, though not exclusive, impression is that the war in the southern theater, particularly in terms of partisan raiding, was primarily against foreigners. The film depicts the British as barbaric, snobby, and other negative or dehumanizing cultural stereotypes. An underlying message is the concept that peace is noble until vengeance overrules it.

One day, I performed for a group of students in a Tennessee school cafeteria. In the Q&A after the performance, one of the teachers began expressing some confusion. “You know, some of the Overmountain Men were from around here, and yet Kings Mountain doesn't get in the history books. Certainly the Overmountain Men were heroes,” she said. “But you seem to describe them as kind of mean.” It was a golden opportunity. Now, I do not see the Overmountain Men as heroes, but openly arguing that word was not the right approach. Kings Mountain was a situation where the lines were not clear. It was partisan violence, enacted by men who had been living and killing on the frontier.

I suggested that one reason the battle is not in their history textbook is because it was apparently

⁹ I believe this concept derives in my thinking from comments by Professor David Wright, a Mennonite, in a course at Wheaton College, Illinois.

so unclear, confused, and violent. If one really looks at what was happening, I indicated, it was anything but clean, nice, and simple. It was brutal. Maybe someone could find it justifiable despite all the confusion and conflict. There is no picture of a heroicized George Washington standing on the prow of a boat. The battle violence cannot be portrayed as ethnic or national and subsumed beneath the cleverness of command.

After I fielded some more questions, the teacher got up to thank me and to tell her students that they should be proud to be from that geographical location. People from right there had been a major factor in how America had won its freedom. She expressed that they should be grateful, otherwise they could still be under the British. “And people over there don't get to vote.” She turned, looked me in the eye, and gave a little shrug. I hope and believe my face remained impassive at this comment. Inside, I was troubled. Voting and freedom is not limited to the United States. I suspect that had the teacher thought about it, she would have known that her comment was misleading. It was a spur-of-the-moment piece of pro-Revolution propaganda. I have no question in my mind that this teacher was a nice person and that she was simply trying to make a point based on her emotional attachment to the idea of American liberty. The teacher was quite friendly and thankful for my visit and asked if I would be willing to come back and present to her next class of students. It was a pick-your-battles moment and not one I thought right to pick.

If I have to compete with Mel Gibson for the interpretation of the nature of the war in the southern theater of the American Revolution, then I am going to give a few facts, and then I am going to get into the story. It may seem like an impossible task, a single storyteller standing in a gym with a microphone as opposed to a Hollywood production replete with special effects and blood. But if Mel uses the pornography of violence to dehumanize the man he stabs with the bayonet, then I do not need to use special effects, nor do I need to demonize Mel Gibson. I need only turn that other man, the one

he's stabbing, into a human being. Hence, I need to tell a counterstory about him.

The Reserve Officers Association Meeting

On March 28, 2013, I performed in Johnson City, Tennessee, for the Reserve Officers Association. I had been hesitant to perform my story for military personnel. When the association was described to me by the contact setting up the booking, I envisioned young officers and possibly spouses. I hesitated, not wanting to present my story to a potentially hostile crowd, as my story can be seen as critical of traditional understandings of the Revolutionary War. My faculty advisor suggested, however, that military officers are not unified in their perceptions and may come from a more practically experienced and nuanced point of view as a result of their involvement in warfare.

I parked in the lot of the Empire Chinese Buffet, stepped out of my car in 18th century garb, and slung my fiddle case over my shoulder. I did not relish the experience of walking into a Chinese buffet in such apparel, and I was glad to make it to the back room where a young server directed me upon my curious arrival through the opaque glass door. Shortly after I entered the room and was greeted by the organizer, I was sent back into the public eye to get a plate of food. Members of the ROA began to trickle in as I sat and ate an egg roll in my hunting frock.

What I learned from engaging in conversation with my tablemates and through observation was that my audience was largely an older crowd, including a retired rear admiral, a general, and a colonel. Though I did not inquire of the service record of these high-ranking individuals, I gauged that one of them may well have been a World War II veteran. Another man I spoke with was in fact a veteran of World War II. I found myself, a 26-year old antiwar, no-military-service storyteller, standing in front of such an audience, about to tell them a historical story about war in a way which I perceive to be critical of war. The audience was largely attentive throughout the performance. Afterwards a question and

answer time was opened wherein mostly historical points were discussed with a crowd that was not unaware of Kings Mountain. When my Q&A section was over, a logistical association meeting ensued, during which one member, a former colonel, approached me at the side of the room. He introduced himself in character as a frontiersman to show me he had done historical work himself. Then, he commiserated with me on part of my story where I told of the slaughter of Tory prisoners. He reflected on the terrible treatment of prisoners at and after Kings Mountain and the lack of military support that existed for dealing with prisoners at that time.

After the meeting ended, I received such an amount of positive feedback regarding my presentation that I was surprised. At least one of the men I understood to be high ranking officers requested my information so they could contact me to perform for other events, all while expressing their appreciation for my program. Had I walked into that program and discussed my antiwar, pro pacifist convictions, I might have met with a different reception. Instead, I told a story based on my interpretation of researched events. Because the three different characters of the story challenged each other, the audience perhaps did not have to feel personally confronted by me as a storyteller.

Third Graders, Take Two

If framing is one of the critical factors in my performance of the story, explicit violence is the other. When speaking to high schoolers and adults, I simply assume that I can represent violence. “Fire on the prisoners,” a moment in the story I often use to surprise and horrify my audience, is appropriate for teens and adults. The horrors of that moment and other moments, though, are not appropriate for younger children who may have difficulty processing them.

After my first experience presenting this story to third-seventh graders described above, and after receiving the most negative feedback I have to date received regarding this story, there was a 4-

month gap in which I had no opportunity to present to an audience primarily comprised of those below the middle-school age. During the winter, I received a phone call from the principal of a school in Tennessee, about a two-and-a-quarter hour drive from my residence near the North Carolina border. The principal, a very friendly-sounding man, wanted me to come to this school to present the program. At that time, I was focusing on publicizing to middle schools and up, and I was generally not contacting elementary schools unless they went through fifth grade, as some elementary schools tend to do, especially in rural areas. Although I have no written record of that first phone conversation, I had been presenting to older grades so long that I might have assumed I was agreeing to present for my usual grades. This principal had received my information not from me directly but through another school principal.

After agreeing, I realized I might have made a mistake. I contacted the principal and learned that this elementary school only went through fifth grade. I suggested that I tell my story only to the older children, as I did not think the war-related content age-appropriate for the younger children. The principal suggested that I present to the third-fifth graders, to which I agreed. I also suggested that I would do a non-war-related presentation on frontier life with music for the younger children in a separate presentation. This the principal readily accepted.

The arrangements for this presentation were made significantly in advance and the performance date arrived at a time when I had a fairly full schedule of performances. As the day quickly approached, I remembered that this performance was slotted for third-fifth graders. Remembering my previous experience at a school with that age group as an audience, I began to consider my approach for this upcoming school.

I felt my program was too violent to tell in the same way I had told it earlier in the week to eighth graders. Threats of hanging, talk of ears being cut off, and scenes of bayonetting and

descriptions of wounds would not be appropriate for third graders. I did not want to be the source of nightmares. Furthermore, would the students understand the whole approach of the story that included switching characters and a focus on conflict? Would they be able to understand a story told from multiple perspectives, and empathize with opposite sides? I knew that the emotional pitch of my usual performances would be too strong for this age-group. I also knew I had to be careful about comments such as that by the character Patrick when he says, “For all I know the Chickamauga’s have already scalped my family,” because these students would not have the ability to see that negative comment as being located within a historical character's biases.

I began to grow concerned. How was I going to present the story of Kings Mountain? Due to time constraints, it was not an option to construct an entirely different story from scratch for that age-range, and even if I could, in what way could I ethically and accurately describe the battle of Kings Mountain to third graders? In terms of content sensitivity, I had to keep the youngest in mind most for ethical concerns¹⁰. In terms of entertainment and conceptual value, it is good to speak to the middle, but for ethical reasons, the third graders were my greatest concern.

My recourse was to begin to consider how to frame my story in terms of their perceptions. The day of the performance, in a phone conversation with my mother, I shared my concerns. I often am able to develop ideas through speaking about my barriers and conflicts in conversation. Through this conversation, I settled on the concept that I would use the stories of Kings Mountain, stripped of age-inappropriate violence, to speak about conflict resolution in parable-form. This would require special framing in the introduction and in special dialogue with the students. I determined to ask them if they witnessed arguments between themselves and siblings, on the playground, or in their families. I would ask if they ever thought about the different sides of the arguments and why people were fighting. War,

¹⁰ Though I had not done that in a previous performance, as discussed previously.

I planned to say to them, is the worst kind of conflict, and I intended to tie this in with bullying. After relating that I was going to tell stories about Kings Mountain, I intended to explain carefully that I would portray characters on different sides of the conflict, and ask them to follow with me. I would try to make it a kind of presentation on conflict resolution. This would be my frame, and I hoped the students would be able to enter into those ideas and think about the different sides and why people were fighting.

It is important to note that stripping the story of age-inappropriate violence did not mean attempting to sterilize war. My goal is to raise emotions and thoughts in the audience. Young audiences are capable of processing different levels of emotion. It was still not my intent to give the idea that war is clean and gentle; the story would hopefully provide the same essential messages through an age-appropriate level of emotion and intensity.

That morning I awoke from a nightmare. In it I was late for a performance and terribly stressed. Dressed in period garb, I was pulled over for speeding. I began to have an emotional meltdown as the police officer spoke to me. But, as it turned out, the officer was an OVTA member and graciously let me off to go do my performance.

I tried to wake up and shake the stress of the nightmare as I pulled on my moccasins in the dark of the morning. I got in my car and headed out onto the highway. I had scheduled myself to arrive at around 12:30 for a 1:00 PM performance. I left even a few minutes early in addition to that. The conversation with my mother left me excited to try out this new framework for the younger kids. I drove up into the Clinch Mountains. As snow flurried down, and my Honda's engine growled, I made it up to the crest of a mountain. A brown sign read, "William Bean Pass." Oh, I thought, the pass is named after the first white child born in Tennessee, William Bean. I knew of that because of my storytelling work with Rocky Mount Historic Site. Past the sign, there was a scenic lookout, then a

cabin rental site and resort. Another 15 minutes and I came to Tazewell, and there, the lack of an expected road sign made me confused. I second-guessed. To make a long story short, I got lost. I turned, turned again, and backtracked. Then I made a turn and believed myself to be on the right track. I drove for another 10 minutes. I thought I missed my turn. I backtracked and then rebacktracked. I watched my odometer. I had driven too far. Where was the road I was looking for? I often take wrong turns, but I normally catch them quickly. I have grown fairly adept at turning around. I kept driving. Then I noticed a cabin-rental site, then a scenic overlook, and then. . . William Bean Pass. My heart sunk. I realized where I had made my mistake instantly.

In panic, I turned around. Realizing I would be cutting it close, I called the principal of the school to inform him that I had gotten lost but was on my way now and would be there. Though I found my way, it was 1:10 when I pulled into the school parking lot. This situation is really a nightmare for me.

Dreams aside, I was quite stressed as I entered the school. The principal of the school met me immediately, greeted me warmly, and was remarkably laid back. His school was a small rural elementary and a delay in 15 minutes did not seem to bother him much at all. After I was led into the modest elementary gym, the first group of students was ushered in.

I began my framing work with the students, introducing myself, speaking a little about the history of the battle, emphasizing its distance in the past but relating it to them by talking about the lifespans of grandparents. I then began asking them questions about conflicts at school and with family as planned. I received overwhelmingly positive reaction from the students at this point. I asked them to think about the stories in terms of these conflicts as I pretended to be characters from different viewpoints. I failed to use the term bullying, which I regret. It was an oversight of the moment.

I began the story of MacGregor. While I took out references to hanging and killing, I told the

story very close to my usual performance. Immediately, I saw that these students were with me. They were quite fascinated. I perceived, through a performer's intuition and from watching the expressions and postures of the students that my framing work had succeeded in helping them to latch on to what was going on in the stories.

“Now, I'm going to switch characters, all right? I'm going to be a person who fought on the other side,” I said as I finished MacGregor's tale. The students vocally responded their assent. Through Patrick's tale they listened intently as well. As MacGregor told about the battle, without any explicit descriptions or the bayonetting scene, they remained riveted.

Again I switched characters and launched into Johann's portion. That's when I realized I had a problem on my hands. Johann's experience is largely based on the violent elements of the story. I found myself focusing more on food being taken, and then abstracting and being vague about prisoners and excising Cleveland's section entirely. What was left of Johann's story if I could not talk about Cleveland making someone cut off his own ears or the treatment of the prisoners? Children all across the bleachers were fidgeting and getting restless, though they remained quiet. I walked over and picked up my fiddle again. Their attention perked up. I included an interaction with Patrick minus explicit descriptions of his wound. Johann spoke of becoming a missionary. I ended the presentation there. I then opened it up for questions, of which there were a few, and spent the rest of the time slot playing music and talking about instruments. I was given a full hour, and the presentation was shorter than usual.

Johann's portion was less effective without the usual elements of violence that drive his character's experience and emotional reactions. Without the explicit violence, Johann is something of a nonentity. There was not enough action to catch the attention of the young students. Nevertheless, it was a problem amidst the overall success of the performance. Within the day, I created a new modular

storyline to use with Johann for young children in which the Whigs eat his pet cow, which he raised from birth. The children at this rural school were interested in animals.

My greatest failure of the morning, besides my poor navigation, was the failure to follow up with the frame I had put in place. The new frame for the story worked and it helped the students engage with the experience. By imagining conflict in their terms, they were enabled to search for the perspectives of the characters and to think about more than one side of a conflict, even at their age. MacGregor's cabin being burned down was an opportunity to discuss bullying, as was Ferguson's threat. Bullies on both sides of the conflict caused people to fight each other. It escalated. I believe this is the kind of scenario that children would be able to discuss.

The most powerful opportunity to get a message to children was in asking them if hearing those stories helped them understand why MacGregor and Patrick did what they did. The pedagogical objective here is to help children understand that if they experience bullying, they can tell their own stories to help them avoid fighting. Encouragement to go tell their stories to parents, teachers, counselors, and other safe adults could hopefully help them deal with conflict.

Even though I failed in the area of follow-up that day, it has spurred reflection and hopes for future use of the story I have crafted. It allows me to perceive its function in a new way. The Overmountain Men used war as conflict resolution, but the *story* of that war can be a tool for teaching peaceful conflict resolution.

The reason I write about this in a work on historical storytelling is because of the ethos that storytelling about the past is about the present. This ethos posits that students can learn the data of history, but if that history does not teach them about the present, it fails at its primary purpose. Furthermore, in storytelling performances, framing has to be audience specific. Framing can entirely change the way an audience perceives a story, and can even enable third graders to digest and

understand stories that otherwise might confuse. In addition, storytelling about conflict can become an opportunity to teach children that they can approach conflict through storytelling, understanding, and empathy. In a sense, storytelling about war becomes an apologetic for peace. History becomes a parable.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

People who hold different ethical and spiritual assumptions can arrive at different interpretations. Those who believe that violence can be redemptive, whether they have considered it or not, might see the American Revolution as a glorious cause. Though Middlekauf (1982) does not necessarily argue that war is redemptive, he does represent the American Revolution as a glorious cause. Middlekauf wrote:

The title that I have given this book may be understood in this day—when all is suspect—as irony. I do not intend that it should be. The Americans, the 'common people,' as well as soldiers and great leaders, who made the Revolution against Britain believed that their cause was glorious—and so do I. But their cause, however glorious, had its inglorious sides, and the Americans' manner of advancing it was sometimes false to the great principles they espoused. And therefore, while I have tried to convey a sense of the achievements of the Revolution, I have also pointed to its failures, and tried to understand both achievements and failures and their peculiar relationship.” (p. vii)

Middlekauf believes that the Revolution was a glorious cause, although he acknowledges the “inglorious sides” and with considerable openness examines both sides. His excellent work is not about the ethical or spiritual basis on which belief in the Revolution’s glory or lack of glory is founded. Middlekauf obviously did not intend the spiritual basis to be a point of his work, and yet it remains a basis. The belief is an acknowledged, but otherwise silent, foundation for his interpretation that follows. But what is the Revolution? It could be argued that the “cause” to which Middlekauf refers is not the war or does not include the war. The cause could also be a set of ideals separate from the means

by which the cause was achieved. In the passage above, Middlekauf includes soldiers in the discussion, but how does one finely divide cause and means? Is it even possible? Those who do not agree with his belief that it is possible for war to be separated from the cause and who do not agree war can be glorious might disagree with Middlekauf's presentational shadings, despite perhaps acknowledging the historicity of the events and figures he presents. It is the interpretation and consequent presentation of those events that are at stake, and they have major implications.

Middlekauf writes further:

The narrative form, I believe, allows one to recover much that is central to an understanding of the Revolution and to revive at least a part of the passions and commitments of the people who struggled and fought. A narrative, moreover, can recapture some of the movement of the years of conflict, movement which saw the cause grow into something considered glorious by a people who came to recognize themselves as set apart by Providence. (p. vii)

The historical record of the Revolution is not necessarily a narrative, and Middlekauf acknowledges that he has chosen to represent it as a narrative. He also recognizes the emotional function of narrative when he writes, "the narrative form, I believe, allows one to revive at least a part of the passions and commitments of the people who struggled and fought" (p. vii). Middlekauf's role is essentially the same as a performance storyteller, though the medium is different. s

As a storyteller with the OVTA and OVNHT, I wanted to change people. As a historical storyteller, it was my role to tell people about an aspect of history. Perhaps I could do so just for their enjoyment, but in my work with the OVTA and OVNHT, I certainly had the express commission to teach people about the history of Kings Mountain and the OVNHT. Further, I had the personal mission of influencing people to see the historical event at least a little bit more as *I* saw it. It was impossible to teach impartially. No matter what storytellers do, they have to select what it is they are going to tell.

That selection is partial, by definition. The teller makes decisions about what is important to present and what is not (Tannen, 2007, p. 37). Those decisions are based on complex beliefs. By choosing what to say, the teller inherently chooses what not to say. What to choose is the result of an ethical process. It expresses what tellers believe about themselves, about their audience, about existence and about the material they are presenting. It cannot be based on some kind of objective view that is not deeply rooted in the storyteller (Ankersmit, 2004, pp. 24-25; Scheub, 1998, p. 3; Tannen, 2007, p. 37; White, 1997, pp. 392-396).

Some might be uncomfortable with this position that historical telling has a change-oriented motive, but Ankersmit (2004) suggests that ethics themselves are an important aspect of understanding history. He writes:

In the first place, just as a construction line in geometry, after having deliberately been made into a part of the geometrical problem itself, may well help us to solve it, so ethical and political standards, because of their natural affinity with the historian's subject matter, may often prove to be a help rather than an obstacle to a better understanding of the past. I would not even hesitate to say that all real progress that has been made in the history of historical writing in the course of the centuries, somehow or somewhere had its origins in the ethical or political standards that were, either knowingly or unwittingly, adopted by the great and influential historians of the past. (p. 25)

Ankersmit goes on to say that though ethical and political standards have been sources of advancement in the discipline, they also have been sources of the worst examples of historical work. Ankersmit describes the resultant task in this manner:

so, in order to preserve this best and discard the worst, it will be necessary (as we have argued) to develop a philosophical microscope that will enable us to see what exactly goes on where the

finest ramifications of historical discourse and of ethical and political discourse meet, and where they get entangled with each other. (p. 25)

Ankersmit is optimistic that the discipline, with the aid of time, will prove a match for this challenge, and reaches the conclusion that “we may safely assign to history the most important and responsible task of telling apart recommendable from objectionable moral and political values” (p. 25).

When I was invited to a position as a storyteller and storytelling consultant with the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and Overmountain Victory Trail Association, I was concerned about the ethics of telling a story about war. I had a potential problem. At the time I resolved this problem by saying to myself and to others, “It is always ethical to tell an accurate story about what happened in history.” While that idea provided the personal leeway to accept the position, I would come to realize that this statement is simplistic in more than one way and certainly could not guide me through the complex situation in which I found myself. Whether I liked it or not, I would not be able to tell historical stories as if there was only one version of history, only one perspective, and I just had to find it. Instead, I had the responsibility of interpreting history according to my own ethical standards. To complicate matters further, different performance situations changed what was ethical or not. This thesis is a story of one who approached the history of Kings Mountain with a significant element of dread and ethical concern, but who ended up valuing the history of Kings Mountain greatly for its potential to share something about reality, history, and, ultimately, about the present. It was not necessarily a smooth ride between those points.

Even if storytellers could boil down the complexities of past and present into a few facts or events, they would still have to turn historical event into present story. The problem for a storyteller, in a much more immediate sense than for a historian, is that a bored audience is a failure. After all the interpreting and critical thinking, a teller has got to give an engrossing performance. By analogy with

White's precepts, a performed story about an event is not the same as the historical event. Audience members may want to feel like they have in some way experienced the historical event itself, when in fact they are experiencing only the story performance. When standing up in front of an audience of 30 eleventh graders, a teller has a quintessentially different role than a historian such as Draper who writes a 600-page tome based on a historical event. Historiographical stories still have to transmute the historical record through a historical interpretation into performance – an altogether different experience. The storyteller has to make history interesting and impactful. A sharp historiographical critique helps the storyteller in this process because it allows the teller to see where the audience might be blindsided, might be shown something different from what it thought it knew about the past and consequently about the present. That surprise is rarely boring.

In this thesis I have attempted to express the benefits of an understanding of one's own beliefs and of historiography in navigating ethical and craft dilemmas related to historical storytelling. Employing autoethnography as a methodology allowed me to include my own perspective and personal narrative in order to reveal some of the challenges that contributed to my creation and performance of a story. This is an interdisciplinary topic and many different avenues of research could be pursued in relation to it. The outcome of this thesis is not to point ahead to possibilities for future research in relationship to narrative, historiography, ethics, counter-narrative, or Revolutionary War history. The purpose of this thesis is to suggest the importance of awareness on the part of storytellers who are presented with, or who seek, the role of historical storyteller. That awareness is to explore one's foundational beliefs, one's cultural and audience contexts, and how these beliefs and contexts impact historical interpretation and story creation.

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