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"Nothing could stop it, nothing": The Burden of Postsouthern History in Barry Hannah's "Uncle High Lonesome"

Clare Chadd

- 1 Barry Hannah's "Uncle High Lonesome" (1996), a remarkable short story from *High Lonesome*, lends itself to analysis as a creative contemporary inflection of the "southern burden" paradigm most commonly associated with southern modernist writing. Like much of Hannah's fiction this story grapples directly with themes of inherited historical memory, haunting and trauma, phenomena the author stages as distinctly regional, suggesting that the burden of southern history endures in contemporary literary constructions of the South. Matthew Guinn among others argues that contemporary southern fiction after modernism has departed from the southern-burden trope as a modernist ideology. In this proposed shift, literary dramatizations of the South's historical legacy, bearing more heavily on its subjects than the "lighter" North's, is eschewed in favor of a postmodern dismantling of historicity (Guinn 162). However, Hannah's typically complicated attitude to both historicity and regionalism resists drawing rigid conceptual distinctions between modernist and postsouthern literary cultures. In Hannah's fiction, the burden of southern history and the problem of authenticity paradoxically coexist.
- 2 The following interpretations identify a series of moments which propose a dynamic relationship between modernist/postmodernist formulations of southern-burden. Reading Hannah's stories closely implies no simple historical rupture between southern and postsouthern, but rather a process, a sense of how the critical discourses of different historical moments can be mutually informative, even retrospectively. Hannah's postsouthern writing offers a window on a series of important ideas about "inherited" burden as a form of (white) cultural guilt, ideas that extend beyond considerations of American regional culture. While distinctions between modern and

postmodern, southern and postsouthern are hardly ones on which critics agree, Hannah's contemporary dramatization of what might be called "postsouthern burden" certainly encourages our critical reengagement with these terms, suggesting the persistence of the regional after the so-called "postsouthern turn" in contemporary southern fiction (Bone, *Perspectives* xiv).

- 3 The title of this paper derives from Comer Vann Woodward's influential *The Burden of Southern History* (1960). Written in the face of growing nationalization and globalization, his study makes a case for continued regional exceptionalism after modernism, due to the defeated and dispossessed South's radical distinction from its national counterpart. In fact, Woodward's study had simply attached this new lexis of historical burden to pre-existing (Agrarian) formulations of the historically preoccupied South in the 1920s and 1930s, ideas which contributed greatly to the so-called Southern Renaissance. Indeed, one of the most memorable modernist literary encapsulations of the southern-burden trope comes from Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), when Gavin Stevens reproaches Temple Drake's declaration of the death of her past with "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (85).
- 4 Benjamin Widiss summarizes Faulkner's writing as having a "perennial preoccupation with inheritance, guilt, and other determinations bequeathed by the past," and he attributes Faulkner's strong literary influence to "the continuing project of bringing literature to bear on the haunting burden of historical violence and dispossession" (149)—a project that resonates far beyond contemplations of the South. Allen Tate had already prefigured this sense of the dependency of regional identity on narrative when he acknowledged "The Southern legend ... of defeat and heroic frustration was taken over by a dozen or so first-rate writers and converted into a universal myth" (592). Ideas about the sudden gothic resurfacing of past traumas that refuse to be buried are certainly rife within Hannah's stories, further protracting a sense that southernness is a quality used and created by writers who convert it into an accepted mythology. If southern burden was from its earliest conceptions beholden to narrative and performance, then this does not detract from its centrality to constructions of the South. As Woodward argues, the mythology of a distinctive South endures in both regional and national imaginaries despite the contingency of the regional-national distinction.
- 5 Hannah's "Uncle High Lonesome" both dramatizes and revises aspects of Agrarian and modernist narratives about the "fallen" white South, its inhabitants burdened by guilt from past sins. The story is a compelling dramatization of the theme of historical determinism subsuming individual possibilities for agency in an environment where defeat and the passive acceptance of fate seem inevitable, captured (in my title) by another *High Lonesome* character, Tiger Bandini, who describes southern history as a case of "Nothing could stop it, nothing" ("The Agony of T. Bandini" 136). In a dramatic enactment of this phenomenon, the title figure of "Uncle High Lonesome," Uncle Peter Howard, is intermittently struck by what the narrator, Howard's nephew, calls "the high lonesomes"—compulsive bouts of depressed alcoholism that result from an unpunished historical crime (murder), eventually culminating in the man's death: "he seemed to be intent on destroying himself in episode after episode when, as he would only say afterwards, the high lonesomes struck him" (226). Robert Brinkmeyer explores the association of mobility with freedom in America's national imaginary (14-15), a mythology from which the South, as a region of imagined stasis and backwardness has

been excluded. In parallel, Uncle Peter's shameful past carves a path of self-destruction that proves finally impossible to deflect: "he seemed unable to reroute the high lonesomes that came on him" (226). The high lonesomes, therefore, serve as a fitting trope for the difficulty of dealing with historical guilt and trauma, portrayed as a distinct cultural problem that endures in the South.

- 6 The contemporary merit of Woodward's southern-burden model had, however, come under radical scrutiny by the late twentieth century. New postregional criticism from Fred Hobson, Scott Romine and Martyn Bone questioned the very idea of regional authenticity or "southernness" in its various forms, emphasizing its contingency on texts, mediation and performance. Towards the end of Hannah's career, globalization and the rise of a media-driven culture was also affecting regional studies beyond the South. Consider for example William Handley and Nathaniel Lewis' study *True West* (2004), a critical exploration of the elusive "authentic" West whose title closely anticipates Romine's *The Real South* (2008). If regionalism in general, and southern burden in particular, were always in a sense performative, i.e. underpinned by mythological discourses as much as real events, then authenticity and performativity cannot be conceived of in neat binary opposition. These are the tensions at the heart of Hannah's metafictional writing—his are stories about the *telling* of the South—from which its remarkable energy and critical value derives.
- 7 Recent years have witnessed a further series of challenges to conceptualizations of the South, after the "transnational turn" (Jay 1) into the so-named "new" southern studies in 2001. In 2010 for example, Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino responded to the question, "Has the time come to declare the end of southern history?" with a collection of essays provocatively entitled, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*. Similarly, Martyn Bone, Brian Ward and William Link's *Creating and Consuming the American South* (2015) more radically questions the survival of southern burden as part of a now outdated southern distinctiveness paradigm, in the context of rigorous contemporary disputes over what "southern" can mean when the South is embedded in a broader global framework, encompassing a plurality of hybrid souths within the region. In this culture, can the South be conceived of as distinct enough to deserve continued critical attention using terms like "southern burden," without subscribing to essentialism as Jon Smith and Leigh Anne Duck (among others) have argued?
- 8 Aside from the encroachments of late-twentieth-century postregional criticism on the very concept of "southern," amplified by more recent apprehensions of an increasingly globalized and hybridized South, Woodward's paradigm was also being challenged in the wake of the increasing historical distance from the singular formative event of black and white regional history alike, the Civil War. Because the South's "burden" was thought to derive from the effects of the so-called Lost Cause, the temporal elapse from this definitive event seemed to be annulling the efficacy of southern burden as a means of understanding contemporary regional identity. As Jefferson Humphries puts it, most modern southerners "may lack the powerful sense of southern history that came from [their] elders from temporal proximity to the Civil War, and that was so essential for their strong sense of southern identity" (ix). While Humphries replaces the immediate influence of the Civil War with that of civil rights, this idea that the South's historical burdens simply diminish in the absence of temporal proximity to events makes for a reductive interpretation of Woodward's view of memory as a complicated i.e. nonlinear process, which does not necessarily diminish in intensity with the passing of time.

- 9 Houston Baker pointed to the nonlinear intensity of memory in 2001, when he declared with Dana Nelson, "I live in a haunted place" (31). Again, this refutes Humphries' proposition of the South's diminishing burden with the demise of living memory. Surely the legacy of slavery and racism is far more problematical, entrenched and indeed, far more current than such a model allows. Arguably, had the legacy of the Old South and the Lost Cause simply died out with first-hand experience, then the rise of civil rights in the region would have occurred long before it did. Similarly, it seems unlikely that the South—or western cultures in general—should forget the cultural implications of the early civil rights movements even as its immediate bystanders diminish, because in many ways the problems, divisions and injustices these movements sought to abolish more than half a century ago remain unresolved today.
- 10 Brinkmeyer rightly chastises Humphries for ignoring the vanguard of new southern writers including Barry Hannah, Frederick Barthelme or Josephine Humphreys (Brinkmeyer 373)—despite Humphries' claim to bring the field into a more up-to-date dialogue with a post-Rubin generation. Guinn's more recent study of contemporary southern fiction, however, concurs that the literary period "after southern modernism" (Guinn's title) has produced very little on the Civil War and its attendant mythology of historical haunting, because contemporary writers have no living access to what Lewis Simpson called the "resource of memory" (qtd. in Guinn 162). According to Guinn, the trend of historical retrospection Widiss discerned as a central preoccupation of Faulkner's writing was becoming increasingly scarce in southern fiction after modernism, recalling Simpson's infamous declaration of "The closure of history in a postsouthern America" (268).
- 11 The concern with the supposed decline of historical burden, regionalism, and therefore "the South" is not only psychological, which is to say concerned with southern identity, but also aesthetic, regarding the political status and cultural merit of contemporary southern art. For some, the weakening of first-hand memory of the South's determinative historical events generated nostalgia for a prior time when "southern" had meaning as a cultural collective, and could be discerned, moreover, in regional literature. Echoing Richard Gray's characterization of Faulkner and his contemporaries' writing as "the literature of memory," Lewis Simpson writes of the "southern aesthetic of memory" (67-71) developed by the modernists, which he believed was being menaced with the inevitable onset of time:

The literary imagination cannot remedy the fact that the southern writer born in the 1960s has had to find out about Gettysburg from a textbook rather than from the memory of an uncle. ... At best by the 1960s personal links with the memory of the Civil War had become insubstantial. (251-252)
- 12 Words and phrases like "cannot remedy," "at best" and "insubstantial" convey a distinctively nostalgic sense, not only of a regional identity but also a literary culture in a state of decline in the face of cultural amnesia. Simpson's pessimistic diagnosis reveals how the perceived waning of historical-burden literature signaled a concomitant decline in its value. As Simpson put it bluntly: "The epiphany of the southern literary artist will not be repeated. The Southern Renaissance will not come again" (268-269). Likewise, Fred Hobson compares Hannah's generation of writers to the lost Southern Renaissance and declares it "Lacking the tragic sense, devoid of Faulkner's high seriousness and social consciousness" (34), and exhibiting "a relative want of *power*" (10). For Hobson or Simpson, the supposed deterioration of historical

memory after southern modernism had impacted unfavorably on postsouthern art, which was left both historically detached and aesthetically depleted.

- 13 In recent years, critics have corroborated that Faulknerian themes of deterministic historical inheritance have begun to fade from contemporary southern writing. Several new southern writers have self-consciously shunned Faulkner's influence by placing their fictional settings at a decisive distance from the South, to the extent that Brinkmeyer identifies "The diminishment of place ... in the [post-modernist] literary imagination" (26). This is evinced in those who have "gone West" including Doris Betts, Cormac McCarthy, Madison Smartt Bell, Richard Ford, Rick Bass, Barbara Kingsolver, Chris Offutt, Frederick Barthelme, and Clyde Edgerton (Brinkmeyer 2). Hannah's fiction however (excepting the "Western" *Never Die*) is placed decisively in the South. It frequently explores themes of cultural stasis and entrapment, typically dramatized in formal patterns of temporal circularity or in odd transpositions of youth and age. This is not to suggest that to be designated "southern," fiction must choose the South as its fictional locale. Hannah's texts, in keeping with late twentieth century postregionalism, upset simple demarcations of the regional anyway. But it is certainly worth acknowledging the author's choice to continue placing his stories firmly in America's southern states at a time when postsouthern writing is supposed to be self-consciously sidestepping the concepts of history and region.
- 14 As much as the conspicuously postmodern dimensions of Hannah's writing appear dedicated to undermining the concepts of historicity, authentic cultural memory and even chronological time itself, the southern-burden trope, and an attendant imagined southernness, are by no means abandoned in his writing. Guinn argues that southern writers after modernism choose to symbolize history as an "open field," as a "triumphant reply" to claustrophobic modernist images like Faulkner's of the burdened South (Guinn 176). While Faulkner and the modernists asserted the past is not past, Guinn argues Hannah and his contemporaries ask, "but what is the past?" (179). These words echo David Noble's characterization of Hannah's unique style: "not only is there no conventional narrative flow, there is no regard for *time*, much less chronology" (Noble 43). However, rather than testifying to Hannah's shunning of the southern-burden model, the antilinear temporal reworkings in Hannah's narratives suggest in fact that his fictional characters, like Faulkner's, feel the palpable presence of the past. They are often haunted by memories of private fall-from-grace moments to which they return compulsively, in a manner strongly redolent of the "peculiarly heightened consciousness" and habitual "backward glance" that Tate identified as characteristic of southern modernist literature (Tate 292). This is caught by the retrospective narrator of Hannah's short story "A Creature in the Bay of St. Louis," who declares of a pivotal moment in his past, "I would return and return to it the rest of my life" (51). Explicit textual parallels suggest this story shares a narrator with "Uncle High Lonesome" and therefore offers a conceptual foil; indeed, the narrator's promised regressive return is fulfilled by the circular aesthetic of Hannah's collection at large, which returns in its last story's last scene to this formative adolescent memory of coming-of-age in the old Bay St. Louis.
- 15 Hannah's male protagonists often fall from grace in ways related to their inheritance or memory of the Civil War. The War is central to constructions of white southern masculinity in much of Hannah's work, as Ruth Weston, Melanie Benson Taylor, Thomas Bjerre, James Potts, and Martyn Bone have pointed out. However, by focusing

on those Hannah stories in which the Civil War is not a direct concern, we can better appreciate how the South's social and military history continues to bear on contemporary formulations of southernness, even where direct proximity to the War has vanished, contrary to the contentions of Humphries, Simpson and Hobson. This is evinced in Hannah's *Boomerang* (1989), whose narrator proclaims that with "All the generations of ... dead guys behind us ... there's barely room for the living down here" (137-138). One of *Boomerang*'s core themes, the sense of past actions returning to haunt or reward, is symbolized by its title, and it is illustrated similarly in the creative titles of several Hannah works: "Return to Return," "Dragged Fighting from His Tomb," *Never Die* (1991), or *Bats Out of Hell* (1993). The eponymous protagonist of Hannah's short novel *Ray* (1980) perfectly encapsulates the stubborn perseverance of southern memory in the declarations "I live in so many centuries. Everybody is still alive" (41), and "There is no forgetting with me" (51). Directly evoking those of Faulkner's Gavin Stevens ("The past is never dead"), Ray's words speak to Hannah's attitude towards southern history in much of his writing, implying not the amnesiac lack of historical consciousness in the so-called post-South, but its crippling abundance.

- 16 Although some have questioned the force of history (or memory) and region in contemporary southern writing, several recent critics have championed the persistence of the past in keeping with Woodward's model. Much recent scholarship continues to engage with and reformulate Woodward's ideas, extending their relevance to current discussions of regional identity politics in the twenty-first century. This is caught by the title of Angie Maxwell, Todd Shields and Jeannie Whayne's *The Ongoing Burden of Southern History* (2012), a study in which ongoing burden is figured both as a political consideration and ethical imperative. This recalls Maxwell's acknowledgment of Woodward's "private goal" as a self-professed "activist historian": namely, to expand the definition of southern identity and "refocus southern whites on elements of their identity that did not rely solely on the maintenance of white supremacy and segregation" (Maxwell, "Introduction" 79). Larry Griffin's "Southern Distinctiveness, Yet Again, or, Why America Still Needs the South" (2000) constitutes a similar attempt to rework Woodward's model in accordance with twenty-first century discourses that problematize modernist conceptions of southern distinctiveness framed in regional historicist terms. While Griffin points out the obvious political tensions inherent in proposing that *all* southerners are burdened by historical guilt, he argues for the continued usefulness of Woodward's model of southern historical haunting. This model accounts for the South's turbulent political history while providing a framework for thinking about how "southern" burden might have broader resonance in both national and global cultures.
- 17 Here, ideas about historical haunting directly recall contemporary explorations of the historical transference of guilt or trauma at the heart of much psychoanalytic and literary theory, which incorporates thinking about second-generation trauma and the inheritance of historical burdens not experienced first-hand. Cathy Caruth, for instance, explores the relationship of trauma, history and representation, and argues that while immediate traumatic memory remains unspeakable or beyond representation, "belated" representations of collective historical trauma have the capacity to transform past ethical failings (Caruth calls this "the failure to have seen at the time") with the "imperative of a speaking that awakens others" (18). If contemporary representations of historical traumas help commemorate those traumas in ways that hopefully prevent their repetition in the future, then in the context of the

South's past ethical failings, new formulations of the South's ongoing burden can exist as an insurance against silence and forgetting.

- 18 This concept of the ethics of historical memory is key to interpreting "Uncle High Lonesome" because Uncle Peter's high lonesomes are the manifestation of guilt from a past crime that has not been atoned for. As a young man, he killed another man but was never punished for it. As the story unfolds, we learn that this formative historical event was the result of hurt pride following a lost game of poker and fight with a stranger in a bar. Having been publicly humiliated in both respects, Uncle Peter returned in a rage to kill the man who "shamed [him] real bad" (220), astonishingly proceeding to escape (capital) punishment, because in this small town in the deep South, it is the "out-of-towner" victim who "was sentenced to remain dead," while homegrown killer "Peter was let go" (230). The story suggests he was spared because he acted according to a locally accepted code of southern honor that was operative "back in the '20s" (230).
- 19 Discussing issues of southern masculine identity and the ways in which "Hannah's [male] characters are driven by inherited ideas about honor, shame, and vengeance" (46), Ruth Weston draws on the work of historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, who argued that shame and honor

cannot be understood apart from ... [each] other. [A southerner] was expected to have a healthy sense of shame, that is, a sense of his own honor. Shamelessness signified a disregard for both honor and disgrace. When shame was imposed by others, honor was stripped away. (viii, qtd. in Weston 46)
- 20 These arguments certainly appear to corroborate the events in Hannah's story, when we consider Uncle Peter's vengeance was the result of a humiliation. Further, having reacted violently to the initial humiliation as a young man, the older man's high lonesomes represent a retrospective acceptance that his youthful *reaction* was disgraceful. Subsequently, Uncle Peter's self-imposed shame in the form of the high lonesomes signals a redoubling of "southern" shame, and as such, a paradoxical recuperation of lost (old) honor from a kind of defeat.
- 21 Perhaps because of this paradox, Uncle Peter is described recurrently by his nephew as exhibiting "a savage grace" (214), unlike the man's own rather innocent brother, the narrator's father. Compared to Uncle Peter, "the man who could do things" (214), the narrator repeatedly describes his father as well-meaning but "childlike" (222), "an infant at a number of tasks" (216), and a man who "didn't know how to do things. He had no grace" (222). Persistently, the father's naïve ineptitude is offset against his brother's mature wisdom and proficiency at masculine "tasks," and it is the narrator's uncle rather than father who facilitates the boy's passage into adulthood: "He taught me to fish, to hunt, to handle dogs, and horses" (218). This seeming incongruity, in that Uncle Peter, a murderer, should be the one not only who acts as a role model for the narrator, but who is described as living in a condition of prelapsarian *grace*, can be better understood, then, when placed in the context of the inherited "primal honor code" Weston describes above (Weston 46). Here, individual masculinities and personal histories are subsumed in a mythologized ideal of heroic southernness, where "innocence" and "grace" are not coterminous concepts.
- 22 In this vision of southern masculinity, there is the sense that proper coming of age, and even a paradoxical state of attendant grace, is inherent in the fall, as part of the South's unique historical legacy. If southern masculinity has its origins in sinfulness, then perhaps it is unsurprising that Hannah's narrator should profess he has inherited

his uncle's sin (not his father's) in his own white male coming of age. Uncle Peter provides the proper textual father in this story, which interrogates the ways oedipal narratives have gone awry in the South. Here then, the sense of the uncle as ersatz father in "Uncle High Lonesome" transposes onto a much more generalized concept of inherited burden, of the sins of historical fathers visited on future generations of southern sons. This theme circulates widely in Hannah's broader canon and finds its most obvious expression in *High Lonesome's* lead story, "Get Some Young." Thus, Hannah continues to engage with established mythologies about southern masculinity and historical determinism, adapting ideas about inherited sinfulness and shame such as we would find (for example) in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942).

- 23 In the effort to understand his high lonesome uncle by telling the man's sorry tale, "Uncle High Lonesome" is written from the perspective of a middle-aged author who has gained posthumous insight into his uncle's dark past: "When he was dead I discovered that he was also a killer and not a valiant one" (214). It is the unearthing of this gothic family legend which drives the narrator's storytelling. As in "A Creature in the Bay," the narrative is structured around revisiting the formative scenes of its narrator's childhood and adolescence, to try to comprehend his uncle's more extreme loss of innocence. In telling the story, the nostalgic adult narrator attempts to make retrospective sense of this beloved but elusive figure from the past, performing a backward excavation of his family history in the light of the recent revelation of "the whole truth of where he [Uncle Peter] had come from, ... That night [of the murder]. From there" (217). The narrator seeks recourse to this explanatory point of historical origin, posited as a singular, fall-from-grace moment that he imagines would aid a better understanding of the shame at the core of his uncle's and then, strangely but seemingly inevitably, his own life. It is this search which motivates his storytelling.
- 24 However, if in excavating his uncle's history we accept the narrator is performing a version of the modernists' backward glance, then his method becomes distinctly postmodern when that search becomes tricky and ultimately futile. The more the narrator attempts to approach the focal point of his story, the mysterious Uncle Peter, the more this focal point becomes a vanishing point of historical reference that remains unknowable or unexplainable. Much of the narrator's retrospective narrative preserves the innocent perspective of his child-self (acting as a surrogate for the naïve reader), even while it purports to be written by the adult self. Because the narrative operates simultaneously on both levels, many of the problems of interpreting the story generate from the formal interplay between these dual perspectives competing in a single narrative voice. Typically of Hannah, it is in these interpretative challenges—what Weston called the "unsettling shifts, gaps, and disavowals of [the stories'] own truths" (47)—that his texts' remarkable subtleties reside.
- 25 In performing his storied excavation of his uncle's history via a series of remembered scenes and images, Hannah's narrator foregrounds some distinctly postmodern ideas about reality, textuality, and performance. Due to the proliferation of conflicting images, and the sustained incomprehensibility of certain memories of the past, the narrator fails to piece together some coherent, explanatory narrative wrought from the illuminating knowledge of the posthumously-unearthed "truth" about Uncle Peter's history. Instead, the story's title figure is described only in a series of isolated "scenes" or "episodes" (226; 218), and in keeping with this lexis of performance, he inhabits various theatrical guises, which prove noticeably incompatible with one another. For

example, we learn sometimes Uncle Peter would resemble "the criminal writer Jean Genet, merry and Byzantine in the darks of his eyes" (214); sometimes he would "survey" the land in a manner redolent of "Napoleon" (218), or "he could also look, with his ears out, a bit common, like a Russian in the gate of the last Cold War mob; thick in the shoulders [and] with a belligerence like Krushchev's [sic]" (214). He dresses dramatically and performs a set of chameleon costume-changes, for example wearing polo boots, a necktie and fedora and later, "dressing up ... for [his nephew's] puppet shows" (226), and finally, the language of Hollywood accompanies many descriptions of the man: "his face was spreading and reddening, almost as in a fiend movie" (219). After each high lonesome episode, the melodrama of Peter's appearance is temporarily quietened but the contrivance remains, as he dresses plainly in the style of an ashen-faced, humble deacon (221). At the end, we are told incongruously that he "now looked somewhat like Versace, the Italian designer" (227), and "in the last curious scene when I recall him whole" (226) the narrator imagines his uncle "was enduring a sea change" (227), his reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* intensifying this sense of the man's volatility or foreignness.

- 26 These descriptive recollections produce no single, coherent picture of the man, a character whom the narrator describes, ironically, as having come from a bygone era when "You got what you saw more ... and there was a plainer language, then" (222). On one hand, Uncle Peter, a performer, is presented as a spectacle to behold, a proliferating succession of wildly mismatched and protean images that combine in their diversity to render him a fundamentally impenetrable signifier. On the other hand, his various attempts to reinvent himself in the image of other men (Genet, Khrushchev, Versace)—who he can imitate or be "like," but never truly *be*—prove ultimately unsuccessful, and his true self prevails: "He remained the same, and [it] killed him" (226). The suggestion is that Uncle Peter cannot escape his crime, which has shaped his history irrevocably; the violent visitation of the past on the present results ultimately in his own death, as if in rightful reparation for the stranger's life he took. The ability to perform different roles only provides temporary escape, therefore, because this "modern" character possesses a real, tangible link to the historical trauma which defines him. Indeed, it was Uncle Peter's enactment of what Hannah elsewhere calls a "true old-timey" honor code ("The Ice Storm" 190) which catalyzed the murder, precisely that which has caused the man to assume these different personae subsequently. Where Uncle Peter's theatrical mutability signals an attempt to release himself from a distinctly regional sense of shame, therefore, the character resists neat categorization as either "modern" (southern) or "postmodern" (postsouthern).
- 27 Equally problematically, even the simple notion previously posited, that Uncle Peter's heroic masculinity results (paradoxically) from his shameful past, is offset against the narrator's early charge that his uncle was *not* a "valiant" killer (214). This begins to trouble any easy application of an old honor-code paradigm to Hannah's story, even while it implies such a code is still operative in the South. On close inspection, sudden declarations of hermeneutical uncertainty frequently invade the narrative, with the adult narrative voice cutting through the childish perspective which dominates much of the story and ultimately corroborating, rather than alleviating, the child's sense of interpretative ignorance. These include: "I did not know there were women involved in the [high lonesome] benders, but there were" (221); "I ... could not decide what the man, my uncle, *wanted* from this episode" (218), and, most significantly, "I don't know if the dead man in his past urged him towards the final DT's and heart attack, *nor will I*

ever know how much this crime dictated his life" (226, my emphasis). Self-reflexive attempts to draw out our collusion in reading for putative authenticity (where perhaps there is none) pepper the narrative ("You could see him—couldn't you?" [228]), betraying the narrator's continued incomprehension and powerlessness to know this phantom from the past. This belies the implicit objective behind the narrator's act of storytelling, to get to "the whole truth" (217) of Uncle Peter's shadowy history and determine the extent to which he was burdened by it, to know "how much this crime dictated his life."

- 28 In parallel to the narrator's retrospective mining of his own coming-of-age memories, each "high lonesome" episodes compulsively repeats the trauma of Uncle Peter's pivotal loss-of-innocence when he killed the man. Notably, both pursuits have a temporally regressive element characteristic of Southern Renaissance fiction—Tate called it "a literature conscious of the past in the present" (qtd. in Young ix)—whose characters (and authors) are compelled to revisit the past. Here, it is worth pausing briefly on some marked similarities between Hannah's writing and other contemporary works of southern fiction which return to the past in order, paradoxically, to move forward.
- 29 Hannah's writing foreshadows fellow Mississippian Jesmyn Ward's more recent dramatization of a similar theme in *Men We Raped: A Memoir* (2013). Narrated in reverse-time, Ward's is an etiological inquest into the seeming pathology of the impoverished Mississippi and its wasting of young black lives in an "epidemic" (Ward 8) of relentless violence. It is an attempt to comprehend the present (and imagine a tacit alternative future) by reflecting on the past, writing about it to break the silence and learn, perhaps, from the articulated trauma. However, because the trauma Ward describes is one that has its origins in the antebellum South (and before that, in global colonialism); Ward's title comes from escaped-slave-turned-abolitionist Harriet Tubman's own Civil War memoir, the suggestion is that cultural trauma extends beyond generations and is in some ways timeless.
- 30 Both texts are also perceptibly reminiscent of Kentuckian Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985), which reworks distinctly modernist ground in its exploration of how we make sense of the present (or not) by gaining an understanding of the past. Alison Johnson and Lisa Hinrichsen have each interpreted Mason's novel according to the historical transference of trauma. Mason's protagonist, Sam Hughes, believes the "stress of the Vietnam War ... was her inheritance" (Mason 89) because the War killed her father, even though this event transpired before her own birth. Like Uncle Peter's nephew-narrator, Sam seeks posthumous recourse to her father's history, a similarly parasitical attempt to write herself into an all-male war narrative from which she has been excluded. The novel culminates in a performative act of historical appropriation, with Sam finding "her" name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC. Richard Gray interprets this climax as a successful act of historical recuperation that places Sam "on the threshold of knowing the past—and starting ... to accept [it]" (*Southern Aberrations* 365). Elsewhere Gray argues that in this moment Sam becomes "inscribed in history," having "come into reality, out of hyperreality" ("Afterword" 223-224). Yet for others including Hinrichsen (246) and Kenneth Millard (53), the strong sense of textual duplicity inherent in this putative epiphany reveals the character's imaginative inclusion in American history is a reflection on a misreading where texts continue to occlude reality, thus resisting any simple historical resolution.

- 31 In "Uncle High Lonesome," the re-examination of the past creates a tension between the (imagined) "truth" of Uncle Peter's dark past, and the narrator's naïve recollections of the man he adored. The story cannot be understood as a contemporary recycling of a traditional southern modernist trope, what Guinn terms "the familiar formula of understanding the present through the past" (162). That is to say, while the mature narrator's newly gained knowledge has called for a revisiting of the past, the act of historical revival (as with Ward and Mason) does not encourage resolution in the familiar modernist way. Nevertheless, the *compulsion* to revisit the putative historical origin remains, in a manner that retains a distinct echo of Guinn's southern modernist formula and suggests that contemporary southern history might not be such an "open field" (Guinn's term) after all.
- 32 Uncle Peter's historical fall, the speculative origin of the high lonesomes, offers an interpretative lens through which other losses-of-innocence in the narrative are filtered, augmenting the dramatic sense of ongoing historical burden. Persistently, the trauma of the uncle's shame impinges on his nephew's childhood, imbuing a series of the narrator's remembered boyhood experiences with an incongruent heaviness. Crucially, none of these episodes in themselves denote the boy-narrator's lost innocence, but in each the biblical language of original sin resounds, with childish innocence replaced with sinfulness and shame at the exact moment at which Uncle Peter's watchful gaze is acknowledged (225; 226; 227). Mediated by the high lonesome uncle, each otherwise benign episode evokes the man's more violent historical fall, in a succinct dramatization of the past intruding on the present.
- 33 "[T]he last curious scene" (226) the narrator recalls of his uncle extends this sense of postsouthern burden. The scene occurs at Bay St. Louis Beach, after the narrator (who has just turned thirteen) falls prey to a stinging verbal assault by a "street-mouthed" New Orleans girl (of similar age), who screams "Hey Cracker, eat me!" at him as he plays in the water (228). Observing the encounter, Uncle Peter flies into a disproportionate rage, instilling an epiphany of sorts in the boy-narrator who suddenly "understood there was a huge tragedy in my uncle, regardless of anything" (229). Then, the mature adult-narrator offers a retrospective explanation for the man's odd behavior, interpreting it as an instance of historical foresight: "Could it be ... That he saw my fate coming to me in my teens as his had, when he killed the man?" (229-230). It is no coincidence that the story's narrator, Peter Howard Jr. or "Little Pete," is the namesake of his double: symbolically, the elder's shameful inheritance is conferred to its successor, as if to suggest the boy's own fall-from-grace has already been predetermined, his own fate coming to him just like his uncle's. When the narrator himself pronounces the New Orleans youth "Already deep into sin, weathered like a slut at a bingo table, from a neighborhood that smelled like whisky on a hot bus exhaust" (229), a moment of transference occurs, with Uncle Peter's darkened perception of the girl's sinfulness transposed onto his now-grown nephew. Thus, southern historical entrapment is dramatized in Hannah's creative deployment of the gothic convention of textual doppelgängers.
- 34 The concept of the passive inheritance of second-generational guilt is best dramatized in the climax of "Uncle High Lonesome." It ends with an extraordinary confession from its narrator, corroborating the sense of oedipal predictability above, who professes to have inherited a strong and tangibly felt guilt for Uncle Peter's crime, as if he himself committed the murder: "For years now I have dreamed I killed somebody. The body has

been hidden, but certain people know I am guilty...and I know, deep within" (230). Then, and equally mysteriously, Uncle Peter's shameful legacy is bequeathed in turn to the narrator's own nephew: "My nephew was nodding the whole while I was telling him this. He has dreamed this very thing, for years" (230). Many Hannah stories may be read as articulations of original sin, and indeed, quite fittingly "Uncle High Lonesome" comes full circle when the certainty of historical recurrence is realized in its closing lines, these nephews apparently fated to inherit guilt from a prior generation's crime. Providing a neat analogy for the shame of both the antebellum and pre-civil rights South for subsequent generations, white male coming-of-age in Hannah's fictional family is therefore microcosmic of the South's public mythology; its present inhabitants bound inescapably to repeat or inherit the shame of the past, even if they are not related to it directly.

- 35 Caruth's work on historical transference pertains again to discussion here, in line with a body of contemporary scholarship on the passing-down of trauma onto subsequent generations. Marita Grimwood, for example, explains her broad conception of the term "second generation" (a term gaining purchase in America following Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust* [1979]) to encompass "the consciousness of later generations and communities" (3), not necessarily ancestrally related but including children, grandchildren, and those living in close proximity to Holocaust survivors, who "tend to address the issue of growing up with the profound sense that their [predecessors'] experiences are inescapable and somehow their own" (8). While thinking about the inherited trauma of the violence experienced by Holocaust survivors most aptly applies to the victims of racism in the South, the notion of second-generation bequeathing of "inescapable" historical burdens might also be applied to Hannah's white characters, who expressly dramatize the second-hand inheritance of historical guilt. Indeed, I want to argue that these ideas within contemporary trauma and memory studies are in keeping with the modernists' understanding that the burdens of the past can never be quelled. The ending of "Uncle High Lonesome" confirms that history does not simply "die" with its living memories. It is kept alive by historical transference and by the stories and mythologies (familial and cultural) that have been borne from its events.
- 36 If we accept that historical trauma need not always be experienced personally for its pressures to be felt, then the sort of amnesiac historical rupture some have identified after southern modernism is a misconception. The postsouthern protagonists discussed in this paper feel the weight of the past as much as their elders, although their direct experiences are not the same, because the South's historical narratives—from both sides of the racial divide—are not easy to escape or reroute. Further, because historical memory is often indistinguishable from story in narratives such as these, the burden of history retains its usefulness as a formula for thinking about certain kinds of cultural identity, even in a contemporary moment which questions the very notion of authentic cultural history or identity as distinct from its representations. Hannah's postsouthern aesthetic seems bent, therefore, on muddling oppositional distinctions between the "haunted" modernist South, and the "amnesiac" postmodernist one, in ways that complicate some of the more straightforward arguments of this paper's opening pages.
- 37 Within this self-consciously "southern" paradigm of historical entrapment, indeed a further twist is added in Hannah's story, a distinction between old and new ideas about how the burden of history functions in contemporary formulations of southernness. This is based on a concept of performativity that appears almost uniformly in Hannah's

fiction, gaining significant traction in this last collection. Here, the author's vision of postsouthern-burden reveals its true complexity. When we compare Uncle Peter's historical burden to his nephew's, it becomes clear that if the older generation's guilt is real (insofar as Uncle Peter's guilt comes from an actual crime he committed), then the younger generation's is only imagined or dreamed, removed from what we might term the authentic historical event; twice-removed in the case of the Uncle Peter's great-nephew. While he was never physically imprisoned, Uncle Peter exists in a state of literal and figurative stasis, quite unable to leave his hometown and, psychologically, to forget "the dead man in his past" (226). Meanwhile, his nephews' final confessions of their own felt culpability may seem authentic enough "(I know, deep within)", but of course we know that neither one actually has committed the historical crime of murder outside the fantasy realm. The second-generation's guilt has become increasingly detached from its origin, the scene of actual historical guilt. Nevertheless, they seem to gain a historical agency, committing the crime by proxy as it were, because of the performative freedom this detachment from the actual crime has afforded. Occurring only at the level of performance, it is the narrator's creative *enactment* of southern burden which recovers a sense of agency which at first would seem incongruous, given its basis in previously established ideas about historical determinism and the passive acceptance of fate.

38 It is this performative aspect of postsouthern burden which lends Hannah's fiction its distinct currency amid debates about the contemporary efficacy of regional studies. In parallel to the nephews' professed burden as a creative adaptation of the past, we can appreciate the performative aspect of Hannah's own creative modification of modernist southern burden. The narrator's guilt may be purely textual in Hannah's story. But, while it is freed from the (authentic?) guilt of the uncle which is truly debilitating and imprisoning, the concept of southern burden remains, regardless. Like Sam Hughes' questionable epiphany at the end of *In Country*, Hannah's narrator's guilt is phony, but it is felt authentically enough. Playing with our expectations and with the modernists' formula in this way, Hannah's new take on a familiar trope defies us to distinguish, finally or fully, between what is authentic and what is purely performative. This suggests that the concepts of authenticity (southern) and performativity (postmodern) have always been as essentially symbiotic as "Uncle High Lonesome" suggests, though it is perhaps only more recently that the critical language to articulate this phenomenon has emerged.

39 This vital sense of freedom inherent in the capacity to perform distinguishes Uncle Peter's original historical burden from its subsequent "copies," and it can explain Hannah's visible sidestepping of traditional oedipal narratives by way of uncles and nephews (not fathers and sons). The narrator has inherited something from his namesake, but it is not his guilt so much as his dedication to performance. This is implicit in such narrative revelations as "I was not the same person ... after that afternoon" (225), or "These were my teen years when I was altogether a different person" (226). The relative mutability of these two male characters is a seemingly minor detail in the story, but here it proves crucial to its author's creative inflection of the modernists' theme. Unlike his nephew, Uncle Peter cannot escape historical burden because he cannot invest the roles he plays with the semblance of authenticity. Thus, Hannah explores the potential for individual human agency to reside, however ironically, in the mutability of historical fact, in performance, and in the phony image.

- 40 In "Uncle High Lonesome," this is captured succinctly in a scene where the narrator recalls his uncle being oddly captivated by the puppet-show plays, inspired by the children's TV show *Howdy Doody*, he would perform as a boy. The scene's unique significance is revealed when we recall that its memory continues to trouble our adult narrator long after Uncle Peter has died: "I still don't know what the hell went on with him and the puppets, the way he watched them, then me" (226). Like the fishing episode (224), the scene is described in a curiously biblical language of enraptured witness, with childish innocence replaced with sinfulness and shame:

The puppets seemed to worry him ... He looked at me as if I were magic, operating these little people and speaking for them. He had the stare of an intense confused infant. When I'd raise my eyes to him, he'd look a bit ashamed, as if he'd been seduced into thinking these toys were living creatures. He watched my mouth when I spoke in a falsetto for them (226).

- 41 When we frame this scene in terms of Hannah's exposition of the relative agency in performance available to uncle and nephew, we can appreciate how the special appeal of these shows lies in the child's successful execution of a persuasive performance, symbolized by his ability to conjure these inanimate toys to life. While our narrator gains masculine power from a convincingly enacted performance (momentarily, the roles are reversed and the adult becomes the "infant"), history excludes his uncle from such possibility; as a man from an older world he remains unable to carry off a truly cogent performance. This is captured concisely in the narrator's declaration that, watching the puppets, "You'd have thought he [Uncle Peter] was staring into a world he never even considered possible, somewhere on another planet, something he'd missed out on and was very anxious about" (226).
- 42 This level of alienated (high lonesome?) detachment from authentic history, achieved by the postsouthern generation, can be further explained by recalling how Hannah's second-generation characters have inherited a mythology of southern experience in place of the experience itself. Creatively appropriating elements of southern regional discourse in a manner that in this sense is entirely textual, phony or contrived, they are simply staging a stereotypical aspect of what Lassiter and Crespino called "the myth of southern exceptionalism" (their title). Within Hannah's imaginative reworking of the southern backward glance is the possibility that newer generations' experiences are merely the textual echoes of their forerunners, coming only from stories or texts rather than real events. Indeed, the narrator's story is reliant upon the family legend he has only become privy to as an adult, meaning not only is his story parasitic upon the lifeblood of a previous generation's authentic historical experience, but it is also underwritten by story or text. Storytelling therefore becomes an acquisitive act, appropriating the secondary tale of another man's fallenness, gleaned from the partial accounts of other family members in the absence of any direct account from the man himself. This reduces the narrator's own story to a mediation on a mediation, rather than what we might term "the real thing"; which by this point has become a distinctly elusive concept.
- 43 This notion of the vicarious appropriation of stories is evinced variously in Hannah's writing, most memorably in "Evening of the Yarp: A Report by Roonswent Dover," and "A Creature in the Bay." Both are told by young narrators who have grown up in a community of (tall) tale-telling, and both confess their desire to become a similarly storied figure, "to have a story like that about me" ("Creature" 48). Each narrator triumphs in gaining his longed-for story, but not without feeding off and exaggerating

the elders' (possibly) more authentic tales. This is echoed by the narrator of "Two Gone Over," who in an effort to recover a sense of masculinity compromised by an effeminizing sexual encounter with a Tallahasseean girl half his age, confesses: "I tried to attach a profound narrative to myself" based on his own uncle, a Second World War pilot described as an "athletic monument of a man" (173). Words like "narrative" and "monument" imply the narrator's dependence not on any real sense of his uncle, but rather on the terms of the retrospective mythology that has superseded him—much as the South itself has become a myth or commoditized image which in many respects bears little resemblance to the reality. Matthew Shipe indicts this phenomenon of the South's often-romanticized view of its own history via the words of Hannah's narrator Homer in *Hey Jack!* (1987), who, in an apposite metaphor suggests that "the South has been pickled in the juice of its own image" (20, qtd. in Shipe 109). It is narrative and images that are vital in each case, evoking the sense that masculinity in the South is anxiously contingent not simply upon the actions of men in the past—heroic or sinful, real or mythologized—but on the subsequent stories that have been bred from them. In a paradoxical way, each generation's performative appropriation of the tales of his forebears proves oddly enabling in terms of his own white southern masculinity.

- 44 In "Uncle High Lonesome," the narrator's imaginative but essentially ersatz appropriation of Uncle Peter's real history, the "true" story, is epitomized in the scene in which the nephew describes his imagined account of "That night" (217), with Uncle Peter awaiting his fate in the cells having killed the man. A change in lexis marks a visible turn in the narrative, whose retrospective voice is brought sharply into present tense, conveying a sense of urgency and panic with a visible lack of punctuation amid a rapid succession of thoughts and images. The episode is described as if it were the narrator's own first-hand experience, or as if Uncle Peter's authentic historical voice were being ventriloquized through his conduit nephew:

the chair legs he ground in your face all over you, and the crashing truth of your sorriness in gambling and drink so loud in your head they might be practicing the trapdoor for the noose over and over right outside the door. That night. From there. (217)

- 45 Something complex and intriguing occurs here, regarding the symbiotic relationship between authenticity and performance. The narrator's insistent use of "you" and "your" establishes a bond between performer and audience, the implied "you," as if to suggest that if we readers are seduced into believing the performance (as Uncle Peter with the puppets), it is paradoxically authenticated, no matter that of course we know this purportedly first-hand historical account is entirely speculative and constructed. At the meta level, the boy's puppeteering anticipates the grown-narrator's performance of the story itself. As the implied author of the story he intends his audience, "you" readers, be similarly persuaded of the authenticity of his tale. The significance of the puppets, then, is in dramatizing how a performance depends on the belief of a consuming audience (a trope deployed widely in recent southern studies), to testify both to its historical authenticity (which is created not inherent), and aesthetic worth.
- 46 Hannah's writing is not simply postregional in the way Hobson's 1991 study implies. It retains a keen interest in southern history while suggesting history (and region) is a kind of myth, or performance; it is from this tension that its "power" (Hobson's word) derives. On one hand, the stand-out language of the scene above, with its direct address and emphasis on sensory descriptions, evokes a tangible sense of immediacy, perhaps

to legitimize the younger generation's claim to have inherited a genuine sense of guilt from its elders' crimes. Ostensibly, this neatly corroborates the notion of the inherited burden of cultural guilt in the white South, derived from a dark and violent past both personal and public. On the other hand, we have seen how obstinately Hannah blurs distinctions between modernist and postmodernist formulations of southern-burden, thereby forcing us to question whether there ever was a time when the South was not "postmodern" in the ways that we conceive of that term today. Hannah's metafictional stories demand that we question the extent that the mediated or "secondary" nature of contemporary historical experience is simply a postmodern concept, and to what extent it has always inhabited writing from the metafictional or "storied" South. Of course this is not to reduce the realities of southern history (including slavery and segregation) to mere narrative or text, but rather (as Woodward similarly intended) to expand the boundaries of our thinking about southern-burden beyond discussions of the waning of authentic historical memory, regional distinction, or of historicity per se.

- 47 Michael Kreyling was one of the first to indict modern southern literary studies in favor of a "new" southern studies which critically rejects a "South" that functions outside its discursive constructions. In the provocatively-named *The South That Wasn't There* (2010), Kreyling seeks to trouble rigid distinctions between "history" and "memory," ultimately positing that the "future" of "southern memory" resides in "simulacra" or the forms of its textual mediations (194). Kreyling's title formulation denotes his interest in "place/time narratives" in postsouthern writing "when the author has (as yet) no firsthand experience of being there: no ground literally" (121). These words expressly evoke contemporary thinking about historical transference as dramatized in Hannah's postsouthern narratives, and they also offer an apt summary of what Uncle Peter's nephew-narrator is doing in the scene above, as with his story more broadly.
- 48 In "Uncle High Lonesome," it is crucial that the sense of historical transference discussed, where the cultural memory of guilt is felt from a "groundless" position, is achieved only at the level of the aesthetic performance. The memory described is not the narrator's own, however urgent or paradoxically grounded or first-hand it appears to be. On first impression, this move from the real to the textual appears to invoke Simpson's earlier argument, for a supposedly fading sense of authentic historical memory in the South impacting detrimentally on post-1960s regional and literary culture, which can mine only "textbooks" rather than direct memorial accounts for its reference. However, applying Kreyling's above theory of the fluidity between "grounded" (real) and imagined (mythologized) forms of historical memory suggests that Hannah's stories cannot simply dramatize a sense of historical reality being replaced by textuality. Instead, his texts posit that "southern" is and has always been inextricable from its forms of historical adaptation and performance, with imagination and myths not only blurring but actively constituting the concepts of regional and historical authenticity in literature about the South.
- 49 Here we should note Woodward's own acknowledgement, amplified in significant additions to his original text in 1968 and 1993, that southern history and identity never were intended to be understood as foundational or essential concepts in his formulation of southern-burden, but rather, as a complex and sometimes paradoxical set of (evolving) interactions between stories and lived experience. If we conceive of cultural identity as a dynamic synthesis of diverse and hybrid components, real and

imagined, then Woodward's theory can be brought into accordance with contemporary (and post-structuralist) explorations of what constitutes regional authenticity in a postregional moment. Reading Hannah in this way suggests that these arguments within the new southern studies need not simply break with "traditional" understandings of the burden of (post)southern history.

50 Once more, the trickiness of distinguishing "real history" from memory in Hannah's fiction (both here and elsewhere) problematizes Simpson's charge that waning first-hand memory would incrementally lessen the impact of historical events on contemporary southern literature, because one generation's historical memory cannot be accessed any more authentically than any other's. As such, in "Uncle High Lonesome," we readers also become complicit in the guilt: not of the actual crime (Uncle Peter's), but in having been seduced by its storied account as presented by our narrator (the "puppeteer"). By drawing the reading audience into complicity in this way, more subtly, the metafictional *author's* true guilt is revealed to have stemmed from the recognition of his own "crime" of storytelling, a feat that has been indistinguishable from lying from its very first instance in "A Creature in the Bay," where "I even worked in the lie more" (51). Here then is the narrator's imagined crime—and indeed, the corruption of all writing from the metafictional perspective (Hutcheon 49)—and it stems from the narrator's self-reflexive cognizance of his story's inability to represent truthfully or mimetically.

51 This metafictional acknowledgement of authorial guilt sheds subtle light on some of the complexities of the story's curious ending, enriching our interpretation of the narrator's final strange confession of inherited culpability. As a foil for Hannah's authorial self-reflexivity about his own writing (or telling) about the South, this characteristically metafictional aspect of the story is integral to its value. It offers a vital means of mitigating a major contemporary tension between "traditional" and the so-called new southern studies, because it reconceptualizes the South as something that is simultaneously both material *and* discursive. Such writing is informed by a palpable sense that regional history continues to burden contemporary subjects in mysterious ways, even while it is self-reflexive about acknowledging how "southern-burden" is a mythology and a performance. This is the sophisticated duality of Hannah's writing: when a story which appears to present an apparently straightforward disquisition on southern historical haunting reveals that the inherited burden, at the metafictional level, is that of the storyteller-liar's acknowledgement of his act of false performance; as well as the performativity of southern burden itself.

52 This reading of "Uncle High Lonesome" conspicuously subverts oppositional notions of being and performance, with both freedom and authenticity resting in simulation or performance rather than in some metaphysical idea of the real. This is caught by the sense of fluidity established between dreams and reality at the story's close, between real historical events, memories and stories which Hannah's writing persistently blurs. By attaching this concept of performance to the idea of southern-burden in the late twentieth century, Hannah reveals his postmodern reworking of an established modernist trope. This is the world Uncle Peter never considered possible, one where the narrator's postmodern staging of historical burden happens at a crucial historical distance. It is precisely this imagined detachment, this removal from more rigid understandings of southern-burden, which enables performative appropriations of

historical discourses which can be vitally liberating. And this is even more remarkable when the appropriated narratives appear to articulate oppression and entrapment.

- 53 Hannah's writing challenges ideas about the South and authentic southern history based on a stable set of binaries between real and imagined, authentic and performative, old and new, modern and postmodern. As metafictional texts, his stories are profoundly self-conscious about the staged or simulated nature of southern-burden as one particular element of a southernness that is as constructed as it is authentic. I have argued that in Hannah's texts, subjective agency can be recovered in the postmodern moment through regenerative acts of performance, staging one's historical entrapment as part of a self-consciously imagined regionalism. And this, paradoxically, is only made possible in the absence of more rigid notions of authentic history and place. Hannah's stories posit that there may be more creative freedom inherent in a post-South that is less beholden to foundational ideas about its own regional identity and historical discourses, comprised of textual constructions such as the "backward-looking" South or "the burden of southern history"—which are simultaneously both dramatized and challenged in Hannah's extraordinary writing.

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ABSTRACTS

This paper considers Barry Hannah's short story "Uncle High Lonesome" (1996) as a postsouthern reworking of the modernist "southern burden" paradigm. Close readings of Hannah's work reveal conspicuously "southern" narratives of historical haunting, trauma and guilt, implying that the burden of history remains a useful means of understanding late twentieth century regional fiction. This paper argues for Hannah's unique currency in ongoing critical debates, both in the new southern studies and in southern literary studies more broadly, about the future of "South" and the concept of inherited historical memory in a post-regional and post-historical culture. In proposing that Hannah's story is tenaciously southern even while it highlights the ways in which the South is mediated and performed, this paper argues that the story offers a creative response to the notion that the regional and the postmodern exist in simple opposition.

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Keywords: Authenticity, burden, history, South, southern, post-South, postsouthern, regional, postregional, postmodern