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## Introduction

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## Introduction

As we go to press with the fifteenth installment of *The Yalobusha Review*, we here in Oxford, Mississippi, and at this University are grieving over the loss of resident genius, professor, and godfather of the creative writing program, Barry Hannah. The timing is also strange since, just three days after Barry's passing, the Oxford Conference for the Book will honor his work. This journal, like the entire literary world, has lost part of its family. Eight years ago, Barry wrote an introduction to *The Yalobusha Review*. It's lively, visceral, and insightful as one would expect, and he asserts his hopes for this journal in the process:

*I never understood why this review was named for the county just below us, which holds Water Valley and Enid Reservoir, but I'd guess it was for the remaining world-record White Crappie taken by some shocked cracker decades ago. And the expression on his / her / black / white, man / woman or child's face.*

*The last expression was the PC rot I hope the review eschews entirely. Writing should clear the head of this cancerous manure. I despise gender and queer theories, of course, also, as is well known. Few even from the best universities' grad schools know how to read any more, or teach any more either. Their writing is unmanly and unwomanly. Academic prose in America, copied directly from French philosophy, is at its all-time scandalous worst. There are but a handful of good plainspoken critics left, no Wilsons or Kazans. The Yalobusha, I pray, will help bring back hard-edged good speech. If it is simpering poems and stories of 'realistic' domestic strife again (oh no!) I would be too sad. But I have trust in my students and colleagues to make us shine.*

*Like you maybe, 9/11 really crashed me creatively for months. That and of course my endearing drug habit in eternal therapy. But good writing, with bigger sadness and different kinds of happiness, is quite possible after the wars. The First Amendment itself in the hands of the worthy artist is like owning his own god. I look for the writing to bring back joy, and I intend to join in the hunt for the killers of our joy in Our World. You know it is The Crusades again, with Science Fiction joined in.*

*Yet even atheists believe in freedom of speech as immense power, and we believers know the gospels as the freest speech ever. Where better to free-out, open-up, and make beautiful what we can ("Yes, Brighten the Corner Where You*

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*Live!”) than in the precincts of Faulkner, who wrote AS I LAY DYING (just about my own favorite novel ever) on a notebook, with a pencil, on the back of a wheelbarrow, in the power plant – when he wasn’t shoveling coal in. The power plant sits about 300 yards from The Yalobusha’s office. Faulkner wrote this classic in eight weeks, about half the time I give my writing students to come up with four brief stories of any thrill whatsoever. About two out of fifteen of my students are geniuses. To genius must be hugely added work, of course.*

*Writing is not considered ‘sexy’ as it used to be when I was in school in the sixties. You could get a date with a beautiful woman just by writing one obscure beatnik poem in the literary magazine. This I pursued but in those days of the cave, you were supposed to marry them. The Yalobusha as chick or hunk magnet must succeed, or it will be just like the rest of the rags. Yes, we must revive literary romance.*

Barry urged us, years before Justin Timberlake did, to bring sexy back, which is a reminder that the arts are a source of pleasure and a playground for desire. This issue celebrates great art, fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and conversation. Also, this issue of *The YR* celebrates two writers who lived among us, wrote among us, drank with us, taught us, and continue to influence us – Larry Brown and Barry Hannah. The final piece in this issue is a reprint of “Passion to Brilliance,” a nonfiction piece Barry wrote for *The YR* in 2006 following Larry Brown’s death. As much as the piece is about Larry, the piece is about an important relationship between geniuses – both of whom generously contributed to and supported this magazine.

So, dear reader, be forewarned and read with protection. Our intentions are clear: this chick / hunk magnet of a review wants to seduce you.

– Douglas Ray, *Senior Editor*

Oxford, Mississippi  
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