



# **Gather at the River: Notes from the Post-Millennial South (Southern Literary Studies)**

*Hal Crowther*

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To read Hal Crowther is to find yourself agreeing with views on topics you never knew you cared so much about. In *Gather at the River*, Crowther extends the wide-angle vision of Southern life presented in his highly acclaimed collection *Cathedrals of Kudzu*. He cuts to the heart of recent political, religious, and cultural issues but pauses to appreciate the sweet things that the South has to offer, like music, baseball, great writers, and strong women.

Some of these essays invite debate. Crowther gives a balanced perspective on the tragedy of the Branch Davidians at Waco, shedding light on a different world of religiosity and revealing urban media prejudices for what they are. He describes the unique heroism of a fallen Marine in the Iraq war, a war fought by one class and promoted by another. And his solution to racial conflict -- interracial procreation -- will jump-start readers' sensibilities.

In other chapters, Crowther discusses the grim portrayal of the South in early film and the triumphs of Southern music. His literary essays include appreciations of William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Elizabeth Spencer, and Wendell Berry, and a biting lampoon of exhibitionist memoirs. Among the Southerners Crowther profiles with pride are the art historian and Museum of Modern Art curator Kirk Varnedoe; the great, cursed baseball player Shoeless Joe Jackson; the curmudgeonly realist H. L. Mencken; and the singer Dolly Parton, whose candid artifice inspires the author's litmus test for Southern authenticity.

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