Violence and Civility in Discourse: 
Uses of Mitigation by Rural Southern White Men

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Shortly before the climax of Harry Crews' (1990) novel Body, on the final day of the Mr. and Ms. Cosmos bodybuilding competition in Miami, the male members of the Turnipseed family gather in the parking lot of the Blue Flamingo Motel. The family has driven to Florida in a convoy of pick-up trucks, from their home in Waycross, Georgia. They have come in support of sister Shereel, a leading contender for the Ms. Cosmos title. Nail, Shereel’s fiancé, retrieves a bottle of ‘Jack Black’ from behind the seat of his Chevy pickup, and, in the passage that follows, shares the first swallows with Fonse, Shereel’s father.

Nail lifted [the bottle] toward Fonse. ‘Go ahead on,’ said Nail. ‘Press this to you face and you’ll feel better.’

‘Never take the first drink out of another man’s bottle,’ Fonse said.

‘Bad luck. But if you be good enough to take the newness off it, I believe I could stand me a taste.’

‘Well,’ Nail said, ‘since you put it just like that, I’ll bubble it a few times.’

‘Thought you might,’ Fonse said.

Nail turned the bottle up and the others watched his throat jerk once, twice, three times [...]. Nail’s throat jerked the fourth time before he brought the bottle down and stared thoughtfully at the neck of it. ‘Now that right there,’ Nail said slowly and softly as though divulging a secret, ‘is whiskey.’

Fonse said, ‘You gone let a old man squat out here in the heat of the day and die of thirst?’

‘No sir, I’m not,’ Nail said, and passed him the bottle. (208)
In several ways, the dialogue in this passage identifies its characters as rural Southern white men. Though there is only one dialect-re-spelling in this passage, ‘gone’ representing a Southern pronunciation of going to, the dialogue is markedly dialectal in other respects. The double-particled verb go ahead on is non-standard, as is the possessive pronoun form you in ‘you face.’ Fonse’s ‘if you be good enough’ deletes an auxiliary would or will, and stand me a taste exemplifies the ethical dative, a syntactic pattern most common in the South. That right there, in Nail’s next speech, is a non-standard demonstrative form, and a old man employs non-standard article morphology.¹

But it is not these clues alone that identify these two speakers with their region, class, and gender. It is also the elaborate indirection of the entire passage, a ritual in which almost nothing has its literal meaning. It is both speakers’ use of conditional syntactic structures (‘If you be good enough,’ ‘since you put it just like that’) and of evidential verbs (‘I believe I could stand me a taste’; ‘Thought you might’); it is Fonse’s veiled suggestion phrased as a question (‘You gone let a old man squat out here?’) and Nail’s use of a respectful address formula (‘No sir’) in his response. I will be concerned in this essay with linguistic features like these. I will show that the highly indirect, hedged, apparently deferential grammatical choices and address forms characteristic of the speech of rural Southern men like those represented in Crews’ novel have two functions. Not only can these forms serve as markers of respectful politeness, as they do in the passage quoted above, but they can also serve the opposite function: they can serve to mark belligerence. I will suggest that these two uses of indirectness are in fact closely related, and that their juxtaposition in rural Southern men’s speech may reflect the often-noted juxtaposition of violence and civility in traditional Southern culture.

Although Southern phonology and grammar have received extensive attention, very little has been written about discourse-level features of Southern white Americans’ speech. Heath 1983 describes children’s socialization for literacy in a working-class Carolina community, discussing parents’ attitudes towards narrative and parents’ and teachers’ questioning styles. Bauman 1986 deals with the functions of stories among rural men in Texas. Spears 1974 describes Southern greetings, and Ching 1987 comments on the use of ma’am and sir in the South. But most of the entries dealing with Southern whites’ discourse in the most current and complete bibliography of Southern American English (McMillan and Montgomery 1989) have to do with such things as the ‘rebel yell’ and picturesque uses of exaggeration rather than with topics of theoretical interest in discourse theory, such as politeness, cohesion, or discourse marking. Thus, another purpose of this essay is to suggest that linguists begin to fill out our understanding of Southern speech with more work on how it is used in discourse contexts.

THE REPRESENTATION OF SOUTHERN SPEECH IN BODY

In what follows, I look at three characteristics of the speech of the rural Southern men represented in Crews’ Body which can function both as markers of hedged deference and as hints of belligerence: terms of address such as sir, ma’am, and boy, conditional syntax, and evidential expressions such as I reckon and I don’t. Before I proceed, however, a few words are in order about my choice of data. Literary representations of speech are by no means always valid sources of information about how people actually talk, for several reasons. Authors of novels can get speech wrong, either because they are not good at capturing how people talk or because they are not trying to capture how people actually talk, and the literary value of a work of fiction is not dependent on how well its author re-creates real speech patterns. Good stories can represent speech poorly, and monotonous attempts to capture regional accents in dialect literature can result in shallow parody. This is not to say, however, that some novelists may not have good ears for how people like their
characters talk—in fact, many novelists probably have better ears than many linguists—and that in some cases they may want to represent this talk accurately. I think Harry Crews is such a novelist, and that *Body* is such a case.²

I would not want to rely, however, on my non-native intuition that Crews has a good ear for Southern discourse. How might it be possible to back up the claim that this novel represents Southern discourse style accurately when no one has yet described the characteristics of Southern discourse style? One technique would be to examine the accuracy of the author’s representation of speech features that have been well studied, on the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. The goal of such an examination would be to show that the speech of the characters in the novel has features which would occur in the speech of speakers from the same place and background, and that the novel’s characters use no linguistic features that real speakers from the same venue would not employ. Using this technique, it is possible to show that Crews’ representation of the speech of his characters in *Body* is accurate: the characters’ speech includes features characteristic of Southerners of their rural Georgia background, and none that would not be found there. There is not space here to lay out this analysis in detail; a summary will have to suffice.

A great deal of the nonstandardness in the characters’ represented speech consists of features found in many or most dialects of English: pronunciations like those represented by ‘Ay-rab’ or ‘Veet Nam’; morphological function shifts such as the adverbial use of adjective forms in ‘A man’d just have to search her good’; nonstandard preterit forms, as in ‘ever tree I seen had a light in it’; many negative concord patterns, such as the one in ‘I ain’t in no crisis’; deletions of subject pronouns and/or auxiliaries as in ‘Got a bad foot to this day.’

But on every level there are also forms that are more common in the South Midland or South than elsewhere, forms that, taken together, make it unlikely that Crews’ characters could be taken to be anything but Southerners.⁴ Southern phonology is represented in spellings such as ‘everbody,’ ‘cain’t,’ and ‘gone’ for going to. A stereotypically Southern morphological feature is the form you-all for the second-person subject and object pronoun; also frequent in the South is the use of singular noun forms after numerical quantifiers (‘Well, I did think to lose ten pound’). Southern nonstandard syntax is represented in negative concord patterns with preposed auxiliary (‘Ain’t none of us wantin’ to catch flies, Ma’) or across clauses (‘I ain’t told you you had to do nothing’), deletion of the copula in cases in which standard speech would have are (‘Turner, you a grown man’), deletion of subject relative pronoun (‘My family never messes with anybody don’t mess with them first’), the ethical dative in ‘I thought to have me a career’ or ‘if I could smoke me a Camel Ceeget,’ and existential it (‘And it ain’t nobody making a move to help’). The aspectual meaning expressed by completive done (‘Me and my knife done give up on need a long time ago’), the use of a- prefixing (‘We been upstairs a lookin’ at Motor’), and fixing to for immediate future (‘Hell, Daddy, one of us is fixing to git a suit of clothes for ten dollars and ninety-five cent’) are also most frequent in Southern speech. It seems, then, that Crews has a good ear for Southern phonology, morphology, and syntax, and that his representation of Southern discourse style is likely to be trustworthy.

**USES OF MITIGATION**

Having made the case that Crews’ Southern characters produce words and sentences that Southerners might in fact produce, I now go on to suggest that Crews’ rural white male characters also use words and sentences the way Southern men like them do. The aspects of language use on which I will focus can all be described as forms of mitigation: all are ways in which speakers often express linguistic politeness, to use Brown and Levinson’s (1987) term. These features do this by expressing (and creating) social distinctions and social solidarity or distance, and by making it
possible for speakers to avoid bald, direct language, thus giving hearers options for how to understand what has been said. I will show, however, that each of the features I discuss can also be used in precisely the opposite way, to mark an utterance as a threat. I will first discuss the use of several forms of address. I will then describe strategies for indirectness—for suggesting meanings without fully claiming responsibility for them. I will focus in particular on two strategies which seem characteristically Southern: elaborate uses of conditional syntax, and frequent expressions of hedging evidentiality.

Address forms. Crews’ Southern male characters make frequent use of terms of address that identify the intended addressee, at the same time making a claim about the speaker’s social relationship to the addressee. The address forms used by the men in the novel are son, old son, boy, bud, girl, child, sir, ma’am, and expressions formed of Mr., Miss, or Mizz with a person’s first name. The men employ address terms more often than the women, and they use a wider range of them.

The forms Mr. and Miss or Mizz combined with a first name seem always to mark deferential politeness. For example, when an outsider to the family asks the father for his daughter’s hand in marriage, he addresses him as ‘Mr. Alphonse, sir,’ and a man apologizes to his fiancée’s sister with the Mizz plus first name formula: ‘Lounge, my ass—scuse me Mizz Earnestine—but I already seen the lounge they got here.’ Sir and ma’am are also used deferentially, though somewhat more ritually. A younger person answering a yes/no question asked by an elder will, for example, invariably use sir or ma’am in the answer. Most of the men’s sir’s and ma’am’s occur in this context.

Men use the forms girl and child in addressing women. These terms can be seen as markers of friendly positive politeness. They function as terms of endearment, as when a man courts a young woman—‘Listen to me, girl, you special’—or a boy greets his sister—‘Come on in here, girl.’ But these address forms are also threats to face. Like other terms of endearment such as baby, they label their recipient as younger and smaller and hence subordinate.

It is even clearer that son, boy, and bud can have a dual function—both as forms of polite mitigation and as markers of belligerence. These forms can express jovial solidarity, as when an older man says ‘Where the hell did you find her, boy?’ to a younger man who has done him a favor, or when a man giving brotherly help to another says, ‘Come on up here, old son.’ But son can serve as a reminder of age and status differences. Alphonse, the novel’s paterfamilias, uses son in this way to remind the particularly explosive Nail of his place, on occasions when Nail talks himself into dangerous territory. When Nail begins to reminisce, for example, about traumatic experiences in Viet Nam, Alphonse stops him with ‘Now, son, don’t you start that talking about drinking,’ and when Nail fantasizes aloud about violent sex, Alphonse says, ‘I know the feeling, son.’ And son or bud can also mark clearly threatening belligerence. This happens, for example, when an angry Nail responds to the hotel receptionist’s request for identification with ‘Now you may think you want some of me, son, but you really don’t,’ or establishes his turf with a rival admirer of his fiancée with ‘Don’t feel bad, bud,’ or when another man lays claim to being Nail’s equal: “I come from the same part of the country you do, old son,” said Billy Bat, shifting on his heels. “I’ll talk any damn way I please.”

True parity in social rank seems not to exist among these men; interaction among potential equals involves constant negotiation for status. Their constant awareness of social rank, and the linguistic forms by which they express this awareness, are an important part of what makes Crews’ characters seem Southern. Address forms can express polite deference or solidarity by acknowledging subordinance or equality, or they can express hostility by claiming superordinance.
Conditional indirectness. Crews’ characters almost never express a proposition in such a way as to take full responsibility for it. So, for example, when a mother tells her husband to stand behind their daughter in a crisis, the father responds with ‘I never let a young'un of mine down yet,’ a general assertion rather than a specific commitment to help. People asking personal questions point out that they ‘don’t mean to pry’; a young man requests dessert by saying to his father ‘Wish you’d thought to tell [the bellboy] to bring back a little chocolate ice cream.’

Indirectness like this can have several effects. First, it mitigates speech acts. Indirectness can hedge the speaker’s bet; if it turns out that a claim was wrong, a request denied, or a commitment not met, the speaker is not automatically embarrassed. Thus, indirectness helps protect one’s own social position. Second, indirectness can express deference to one’s addressee. It allows the addressee to save face if forced to contradict or refuse. Indirectness is part of a politeness strategy based on acknowledgment of one’s own and one’s addressee’s needs for independence, distance, and respect. This is an appropriate strategy in the world of the rural male characters in Body, who are acutely, or, as one reviewer of the novel (Weldon 1990) put it, ‘murderously’ aware of their own and others’ social standing, both as it is externally defined (fathers, for example, command respect from their sons) and as it is negotiated in interaction. Third, indirectness can also be employed in the expression of belligerence. When he could, for example, say ‘Stop that or I’ll stab you,’ Nail says, ‘I ain’t met the sumbitch yet that didn’t understand my knife when it speaks.’

Crews’ characters are indirect in a variety of ways, but one of the most striking, because of its frequency, is the use of conditional syntax. Full if-then constructions as well as conditional clauses with implied if’s can be used to hedge assertions, as in these examples:

   And if he’s breathing, I shore cain’t tell it.

   If I ever seen a ruint gene, I’m lookin’ at it right now.

   They can be used to make hedged suggestions, as when Nail tells his future father-in-law that a wait is futile by saying ‘I wouldn’t look for’r m to show up if I were you,’ or conveys his opinion of the hotel’s registration form by telling the person filling it out, ‘I don’t know as I’d bother much with what I wrote down.’ Formulaic conditions such as if you a mind to, if you could be good enough, or I’d take it as a personal kindness often mitigate requests, and if you don’t mind my saying so or damned if I don’t think can hedge potentially threatening observations.

   Conditional sentences create distance between the speaker and the meaning, and they give the hearer the option, in theory, of denying the proposition expressed in the if clause and hence denying the rest. (A possible, albeit unlikely, response to if I were you I’d do x, for example, is Well, you’re not me.) In this way, conditional syntax mitigates threats and impositions. Its use reflects a heightened awareness of the need constantly to display and negotiate power and status in interaction, and is appropriate in a situation in which threat and imposition are always immanent, and always socially dangerous. A social world organized around solidarity rather than status might require less conditional grammar.

   Conditionals can also be used for the opposite purpose, though, to express warnings and threats. A man can warn another about his behavior with ‘You gone marry into the Turnipseed family, you gone have to learn not to be a asshole,’ or suggest ‘Now if I was you and I was standing in front of a man holding a ten-inch blade I’d shut the fuck up while he was trying to talk about blood.’ While many suggestions phrased with conditional syntax seem more polite than their direct counterparts—’I wouldn’t look for’m to show up if I were you’ is a softer way of breaking bad news than ‘Go away, he isn’t going to come’—would be, for example—these conditional sentences seem less polite than the bare forms.
would be. ‘Don’t act like such an asshole’ lacks the gravity of ‘You gone marry into the Turnipseed family, you gone have to learn not to be a asshole,’ and ‘Shut up’ or even ‘Shut the fuck up,’ though not conventionally polite, is a great deal less threatening than ‘Now if I was you and I was standing in front of a man holding a ten-inch blade I’d shut the fuck up ….’

**Evidentials.** The characters’ utterances often include predicates such as believe, reckon, think, guess, have the feeling, and so on: evidential predicates which express the speaker’s mode of knowledge (see Chafe and Nichols 1986). These occur in the first person in assertions:

You already said that oncet I believe.

I don’t think they our kind of people.

Might be catching for all I know.

I wouldn’t want to guess, but I have the feeling we’ll know soon enough.

and in the second person in questions:

You reckon we ought to get help?

What do you think made them grow them knots?

*Reckon* is the most common evidential predicate in questions, *don’t believe* in assertions.

Evidentials are required in many genres of discourse, and they are not, of course, exclusively Southern (although the verb reckon and the expression I don’t believe with a sentential complement seem marked). What is striking is their frequency and their specific function in these Southern characters’ speech.

In only two of the hundreds of utterances with evidential predicates in the novel do the evidentials express the speaker’s complete security in his knowledge: *One thing’s for sure, he can’t last much longer like he is,* and *Now I know that is right for a dead solid fact.* Evidentials are overwhelmingly in the negative (*I don’t believe, I don’t misdoubt, I don’t guess, I can’t say as, I don’t know as*), and/or conditional (*I wouldn’t know about, I’d say*), and when they are not, the semantics of the predicates expresses insecurity (*think, believe, have the feeling, strike someone as, expect, seem, make x to be, look to be*). In other words, the evidential predicates almost always have the effect of hedging assertions and allowing respondents to hedge theirs. Characters say what they believe to be true and describe how things seem to be rather than telling what they know and how things are.

Like conditionals, evidentials can leave space between speakers and the meaning of their utterances. By hedging assertions, evidentials protect speakers from the social embarrassment that would result if the assertion turned out to be false. They are also deferential. Speakers who hedge assertions avoid imposing their version of the world on others. Hedged assertions are not, literally, claims about how the world is, but only claims about how the speaker sees it.

Hedging like this has been seen as a linguistic correlate of powerlessness (Lakoff 1975; O’Barr and Atkins 1980): speakers who fail to assert authority of knowledge put themselves, it is thought, in an inferior position. Crews’ characters certainly appear powerless when they converse, in their conditional- and evidential-laden way, with characters from elsewhere; their impotence in the world beyond Waycross is in fact what causes the novel’s tragedy. When the Southerners talk among themselves, though, their hedging may be deferential but it is certainly not powerless. Polite evidentials protect speakers’ and hearers’ social personas. Furthermore, evidentials, like conditionals and polite
terms of address, can also be used in threats. A person can, for example, express contempt for another's request with 'You already said that once I believe.' Evidentials are often included in conditional threats, as in 'If I weren't a drinking man, I don't know as I'd have much to say about what somebody else could or couldn't do with whiskey,' or 'Somehow I think you'd have better sense than to say anything about this knife right here.'

DISCUSSION

Two questions are suggested by this illustration of the uses of terms of address, conditional syntax, and evidential predicates by the rural Southern males represented in Body. The first has to do with politeness and rudeness in general: Why is it that the same features that can express polite deference can also make hostile talk seem even more hostile than it otherwise would? The second has to do with Southern speech: Why is Southern men's discourse characterized by these linguistic features, and these uses of them? In what follows, I address these questions.

Why is a polite threat more threatening than an impolite one? Why is the indirect suggestion 'If I were you, I don't know as I'd ...' more ominous than the direct command 'Don't'? The answer has to do, I think, with the fact that linguistic choices always have two potential functions: to express meanings and to call attention to themselves. When speakers need to underscore that the display level of meaning is intended, they can do so by means of metalinguistic cues such as ironic turns of intonation, or, in writing, special conventions for punctuation such as (!), but such cues are not necessary, and hearers can respond to the form of a message rather than its content even if speakers didn't intend them to. By choosing forms conventionally associated with deferential politeness--hedging and allowing others to hedge, accomplishing speech acts indirectly, identifying role and status with terms of address--speakers thus accomplish two things: they express deferential politeness, and they display the fact that deferential politeness is required in the situation they are in.

Deferential negative politeness (as opposed to friendly expressions of positive solidarity) is called for in situations in which speakers need to protect their own and others' negative face, their need, in other words, to be treated as autonomous and not to be imposed on. (See Brown and Levinson 1987 for a full explanation of this theory of linguistic politeness, which is based on work by Erving Goffman.) Negative politeness is especially required, that is, when there are potential threats to negative face--when it is especially likely that people might offend or bother one another. This means that negative politeness can be used either to avoid offense or to display the fact that offense is likely--in other words, to threaten. This, I think, is why it is possible for 'If I was you, I don't know as I'd ...' to serve, depending on the context of its utterance, either as a deferential suggestion or as a warning of potential violence.

This strategy is available to any speaker of English. Why does it seem characteristically rural, Southern, and male? This question is more difficult to answer, and I will only hazard a still-tentative suggestion. The Southern men whose speech is represented in Crews' novel are rural 'crackers,' 'good ol' boys,' or 'rednecks,' members of a group of Southerners whose culture has been mythologized in the popular imagination, and unfortunately also often in the scholarly imagination. (Crews' novel both draws on and contributes to this process of myth-making, as do the non-fictional contemporary Southern men who use the myth as a resource for ways of talking and acting.) References to these people repeatedly refer to their tendency to be violent. McWhiney 1988, for example, attributes the violence of crackers to their Celtic heritage. Reviewing a book about hero figures in narrative about the South, Snyder (1989:395) describes one common type as 'a person of pride and individualism, but one with a tendency toward violence.' Since people routinely attribute a tendency
toward violence to people who seem foreign and culturally backward, the claim that rural Southern men are violent must be taken not as a description of rural Southern men but as a description of a widespread and persistent perception of them by others.

What is interesting about descriptions of Southern men, though, is that they often make reference not only to Southerners' tendency to violence but also to their linguistic politeness, often in fact mentioning the two traits together. In a popular-press book about the South, for example, Sharon McKern 1979 describes its culture as 'a tradition that routinely pairs civility and violence.' A nineteenth-century English tourist named Matilda Charlotte (Jesse) Fraser Houston, writing about a trip through Texas and the Gulf States, describes the use of polite address forms in confrontational discourse (qtd. in McWhiney 1988:163):

[E]ngaged in a dispute, however violent may be the discussion, the courtesy of the 'sir' is never omitted. On the contrary it is repeated at every third word, and mixed up as it is with oaths and denunciations, with which they always interlard their discourse, the effect is curious enough.

Some writers claim that the possibility of violence is precisely what gives rise to Southern civility. McWhiney (1988:170) quotes Benjamin F. Perry, a South Carolina planter writing in the mid-nineteenth century:

When a man knows that he is to be held accountable for his want of courtesy, he is not so apt to indulge in abuse. In this way duelling produces a greater courtesy in society and a higher refinement.

We have seen that civility can be used to display the potential for violence. Is it possible, as Benjamin Perry suggests, that the potential for violence encourages the expression of deferential politeness in a culture? The answer to this question will have to await more work on more general aspects of Southern culture and discourse style.

**CONCLUSION**

I have made several points in this essay. All of them are still tentative, and they suggest several potentially interesting lines of work. First, I have pointed out that 'Southern speech' does not stop with Southern grammar. As Tannen has shown (1981, 1984), regional speech stereotypes are often rooted in facts about discourse-level speech phenomena. I suspect that the stereotype non-Southerners evoke when they talk about a person's 'Southern drawl' or (in the words of a recently popular C&W song) 'slow Southern style' has to do more with how people use language than with their pronunciation or grammar: with how they negotiate whose turn it is to talk when, with how and when linguistic politeness is displayed, with how talk is made coherent and cohesive, and with all the other aspects of discourse style.

In this paper, I have tried to illuminate one small corner of the large, almost completely unexplored territory of Southern discourse style, making suggestions about one aspect (forms of mitigation) of the speech of one sub-group (rural men). There is a great deal more to be done. The examples of belligerent indirectness in *Body* come almost exclusively from talk by men to men; indirectness in the men’s talk to women tends to be truly deferential. This suggests that there may be differences not only in how Southern men and women talk but in how they are spoken to. This suggestion would be worth pursuing. To give just one example of another group of Southerners whose talk should be better understood, it would be interesting to see what accounts for the perception of Southern women as simultaneously charming and forcefully strong-willed.

I have also made the suggestion that literary texts can sometimes be a reliable source of insight into dialect, especially at the discourse level. I have proposed that though not all writers of fiction represent regionally marked speech accurately, or even care
to, some may have good ears. I have suggested a technique for testing whether a literary work represents discourse style well by extrapolating from the phonological and syntactic characteristics of Southern speech which have been well studied to features of discourse style which have not. I do not mean to suggest that literary discourse should supplant the results of good field work or that this source of data is even as good as recordings of real people talking. But there is a rich body of literature by Southerners, many known for their portrayals of the cadences of Southern speech, and linguists have much to gain by making use of it.

Linguistic politeness has been the focus of a great deal of research in recent years (see Brown and Levinson (1987:1-54) and Kasper 1990 for overviews), but there are still many questions to be asked about strategic uses of politeness markers and about cross-cultural variation in what counts as polite talk, and why. I have made the point that markers of politeness can always function as markers of the potential for its absence. Deference can show that a person wants not to impose on another, but deference can also show that a person is on the verge of imposing on another. The mechanism that is responsible for this is the mechanism that makes irony possible in general; it is the fact that every linguistic message, on every level, potentially conveys metamessages.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to my audience at SECOL, Spring 1991, for comments about a different paper that led to this paper. Valerie Balester, Kathleen Ferrara, Judith Mattson Bean, Delma McLeod-Porter, and Michael Montgomery read drafts and provided helpful suggestions.

2. Crews is the author of fifteen novels and collections of essays, most of which are set in the south. His novels are often peopled with characters from rural Bacon County, Georgia, Crews' own childhood home. Although the situations he depicts are often bizarre or grotesque (the New Orleans sexual underworld in The Knockout Artist, for example, or the world of professional bodybuilding in Body), the characters who inhabit them are not caricatures. They speak with real voices, the rural Southerners among them with the same voices Crews depicts in his autobiography (A Childhood).

3. Crews' non-standard spelling represents several things. Some is 'eye-dialect,' or partly phonetic spelling of standard pronunciations, as in 'innerduced' or 'likker' or 'TeeWee.' Other non-standard spellings are 'allegro forms' (Preston 1985) which represent standard casual pronunciation, such as 'told'm' or 'I'da told you.' Other non-standard spellings actually do represent non-standard pronunciation. It is these 'dialect re-spellings' that I am interested in.

4. Sources for claims about Southern speech are Feagin 1979, Wolfram 1981, Wolfram and Christian 1976, Wolfram and Fasold 1974, Pederson et al. 1972, and Michael Montgomery, personal communication. Some of the features which I will identify as exclusively Southern are of course found elsewhere in the speech of African-Americans. In the structural respects in question in this section, BEV is a Southern variety. Whether BEV and Southern white varieties are as similar on the discourse level is an open--and interesting--question.

5. Tannen (1986:101-17) describes the need for people to express both power and solidarity in social relations. The idea that linguistic choices can be influenced by considerations of power and solidarity can be traced to Brown and Gilman 1960.

6. Tannen 1981, 1984 makes the same point about another regional and cultural stereotype: New Yorkers, who are often perceived as fast, aggressive speakers, do not actually produce syllables and words any faster than other English speakers. What accounts for this perception of them is aspects of their 'conversational style': they tolerate only very brief pauses between turns in conversation, are not disturbed by overlapping speech by two or more speakers, and often create rapport with other speakers by asking rapid-fire personal questions.

7. A colleague from culturally and linguistically Southern East Texas suggests that 'for Southern men like Crews' characters indirectness is more likely to mark belligerence or aggression when talking amongst themselves. I've heard little real deference or civility--direct or indirect--except when they're talking to elderly folks or women' (Delma McLeod-Porter, personal communication).
REFERENCES


