

"You gone have to learn to talk right" Linguistic Deference and Regional Dialect in Harry Crews's *Body*

In a survey of uses of nonstandard language in English literature, N. F. Blake (1981) suggests that dialect can be represented by manipulating spelling, vocabulary, or syntax, of which, Blake says, "the former is the most important" (15). The assumption that regional and social variation has primarily to do with differences in pronunciation, and secondarily with differences in lexicon and grammar, underlies most scholarship on literary representations of regionally and socially marked speech. Literary dialectologists have focused almost exclusively on phonological, lexical, morphological, and syntactic features of nonstandard varieties, with by far the most emphasis on the spelling strategies by which dialect pronunciation is indicated. Raymond Chapman (1989), for example, echoes many students of dialect in literature in saying that "once a system of orthography has been established in a language, it is not difficult to give some impression of dialect in writing" (165), suggesting that literary dialect consists primarily of respellings that represent marked phonology. Chapman also approvingly cites Stubbs's description of dialect as "an amalgam of syntax and lexis" (Stubbs 1980, 125) — a somewhat different way of defining the field, but a common one, too. Leech and Short's (1981) textbook focuses on pronunciation, syntax, and lexis; and Burkett's (1978) bibliography,

Bernstein, Cynthia Goldin. 1994. The Text and Beyond: Essays in Literary Linguistics. U. of Alabama P.

American English Dialects in Literature, lists works dealing with only these aspects of nonstandardness. To give one recent example of such a study, Toolan's (1990) list of features of "low-prestige non-standard speech" in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* includes five grammatical items and two respellings.

But literary fiction also often represents features of dialect that have to do with discourse structure and style. To mark narrators and characters as speaking in dialect, writers may, in addition to or instead of respellings or nonstandard lexis or syntax, use such things as nonstandard or regionally marked patterns of cohesion, forms of reference and address, strategies of politeness, and discourse markers. Features such as these are often more responsible for the regional and social speech stereotypes on which writers draw than are differences in pronunciation or grammar, and their representation in fiction may convey as much about character, setting, and culture as do traditionally studied dialect respellings and nonstandard grammatical usages. Yet despite much work by literary theorists on the pragmatics of literature (e.g., Booth's [1961] *Rhetoric of Fiction*) and by stylisticians on linguistic pragmatics as represented in literature (e.g., Hickey's [1989] collection, *The Pragmatics of Style*), we have not yet paid much attention to the pragmatic aspects of dialect.

In this chapter I want to show how attention to discourse-level aspects of regional variation can enrich the analysis of literary uses of dialect.¹ I will do so by examining the representation of the speech of lower-class, rural white Southern Americans in Harry Crews's 1990 novel *Body*. I will show that Crews represents class and region in his characters' speech with elements on all levels. He manipulates spelling to represent nonstandardness both in conventional ways and in ways that capture specifically regional pronunciations, and his characters employ nonstandard and specifically Southern morphology and syntax. Most interesting, though, are the representations of discourse-level aspects of Southern white folk speech in Crews's novel. Whether or not *Body* turns out to be a work of lasting literary merit, describing the range of strategies its author uses to represent regional speech patterns will, I hope,

encourage other literary dialectologists to broaden their focus from the traditional concern with nonstandard spelling and grammar to a wider conception of literary dialect.

I begin with a passage that exemplifies some of the features I will discuss. *Body's* central character is Shereel, a young woman from Waycross, Georgia, who is a contender for the Ms. Cosmos title at a bodybuilding competition in Miami. Members of her family — parents, sister, two brothers, and fiancé — travel to Miami for the occasion, where, provincial and uneducated, they are pathetically, hilariously, and menacingly out of place. The day before the contest, they meet Billy Bat, a bodybuilder from Tennessee who shares their Cracker values and ways of talking and becomes smitten with sister Earline. From Billy, they learn how the competition will proceed.

"I know more'n you think I know, and I can at least tell you how the Cosmos works," said Billy Bat, "if you'll just slow down with that bottle. Ain't no use me talking to a drunk."

Nail passed the bottle carefully to Fonse, looked off for a moment at the horizon, and then back to Billy Bat. "You gone marry into the Turnipseed family, you gone have to learn not to be a asshole. You gone have to learn to talk right for starters."

"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."

"We may have to go into that another time," said Nail.

"We can talk about it any time you want," Billy Bat said.

"Didn't say nothing about talking, said we'd go into it."

"Any time, any place," Billy Bat said.

Alphonse, who had been following the talk with his good ear, put his elbow into Nail's ribs hard, and wheezed a laugh before he slapped his own knees with both hands. "Damn if I don't believe I like this boy." (209–10)

Apart from the conventional eye-dialect spelling "more'n" (which represents the sound of casual speech in any variety of English and thus indicates nonstandardness but not region), there

is only one respelling in this passage, "gone" representing the Southern /gɔn/ future-tense marker. There is a characteristically Southern form of negative concord in "Ain't no use me talking to a drunk." Subject pronouns are deleted in "Didn't say nothing about talking, said we'd go into it," and "a asshole" employs nonstandard article morphology.

It is not just these features that give these characters' speech its regional flavor, though. A large part of what makes the dialogue seem Southern is its elaborate indirect formality. The conversation is a series of careful, hedged, ritualistic suggestions and threats, phrased in conditional structures ("if you'll just slow down with that bottle"; "[If] You gone marry into the Turnipseed family you gone have to learn not to be a asshole") and evidential constructions such as *I don't believe* ("Damn if I don't believe I like this boy"). Nail's indirect "We may have to go into that another time" and "Didn't say nothing about talking" and Bat's tactical use of the address form "old son" to remind Nail of their relative status also contribute to the ritually menacing tone of the exchange. Though none of these features is exclusively Southern, their juxtaposition and frequency in talk like this are typical of the speech of people like these characters. In one way or another — though never systematically — elaborate displays of linguistic civility, sometimes double-edged as in the passage above, have often been noted among rural Southern men and women.

Perhaps one reason for the lack of attention to literary representations of discourse-level features of dialect is that research about regional, ethnic, or social-class variation in discourse structure and style is fairly recent and still, for most groups, fairly sparse. By "discourse structure" I mean the grammar of units larger than sentences and the closely related issue of cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976), as well as discourse-marking strategies (Schiffrin 1987) by which speakers show, as they produce talk or writing, how it is to be interpreted. "Discourse style" consists of typical choices for expressing linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) in

general and for performing specific speech acts: requesting, persuading, narrating, and so on. Scholarship about the discourse style of African Americans has the longest tradition, beginning with work by Abrahams (1962, 1976) and Kochman (1972) on such speech events as signifying, hoorawing, and styling out. Kochman (1981) describes African Americans' speech styles in aggressive talk, boasting, flirting, and handling accusations and personal information; Labov (1972a) compares lower- and middle-class blacks' expository style and (1972b) discusses teenage boys' personal narratives; Erikson (1984) describes the structure of boys' conversations; and Gumperz (1982, 187–203) analyzes African-American political oratory. Tannen (1981, 1984) shows how the interactional style of New York Jews is characterized in such features as the tendency to tolerate only very brief pauses in conversation and to ask rapid-fire personal questions to demonstrate friendly solidarity. Reissman (1988) talks about Puerto Rican women's narratives, and Johnstone (1990a, 1990b) describes how white Midwesterners construct and use stories, contrasting this population with the urban Northeasterners studied by Polanyi (1985) and others. Bernstein's (1970) work has to do with discourse "elaboration" and "restriction" as correlated with social class in Britain, and Dines (1980) uses the quantitative research methodology developed by students of phonological variation in her analysis of the discourse marker *and stuff like that* in Australian working-class speech. About discourse-level features of Southern white Americans' speech, almost nothing has been written, with the exception of some studies of Southern oratory (Braden 1983; Ross 1989, 138–233) and Heath's (1983) work on language socialization in a working-class Carolina community. This omission occurs despite the fact that longstanding stereotypes about "Southern charm," the "soft" quality of Southern talk, and the indirectness and slowness of Southern speech suggest that Southerners do use speech in ways others find marked, and despite decades of descriptions of Southern phonology, vocabulary, and grammar far too numerous to catalogue. (McMillan and Montgomery [1989] list many of these.)

I turn now to a discussion of how Harry Crews represents the speech of the lower-class white Southerners he depicts in *Body*. Crews has written fifteen published novels and collections of essays, most set in the South. His novels are often peopled with characters from rural Bacon County, Georgia, Crews's own childhood home. The worlds Crews creates can be bizarre or grotesque (the New Orleans sexual underworld in *The Knockout Artist*, for example, or the world of professional bodybuilding in *Body*), but 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*). To capture these voices, Crews uses all the resources of written English.

Although, as suggested by the excerpt quoted above, Crews manipulates standard spelling less frequently than do some other "dialect" writers, he does so in the same ways. Crews's nonstandard spelling represents several things. Some is "eye-dialect," or partly phonetic spelling of standard speech, as in items like "celbrate," "famby," "forgit," "I should of known," "innerduced," "innersted," "likker," "ruther," or "Tee Vee." Other nonstandard spellings are "allegro forms" (Preston 1985) that represent casual speech forms common to all American dialects. These include contractions such as "told'm," "how's 'at?", "Mr. Bill'n me," and "a lotta." Allegro forms can also represent deletion of unstressed syllables, as in "'bout," "'cause," "'fraid," "prechate," or "zactly," or consonant cluster simplification: "a course," "lemme," or "les" (let's), as well as the common pronunciation of "ing" as /ɪn/ in spellings like "blowin'," "cuttin'," "stayin'," or "wantin'." Other nonstandard spellings actually do represent nonstandard pronunciation. These include a number of individual words — "agin," "Ay-rab," "bidness" (for business), "ceegret," "Cuber/Cuburns," "ever" (every), "everbody," "everday/ever day," "everone," "feeandsay," "git/gitting," "Jane Fonder," "looka here," "neked," "oncet," "purty/purtiest," "ruint," "shore" (sure), "sumbitch," "summers" (somewhere[s]), "surp" (syrup), "swaller," "this-away," "to-backer," "twicet," and "Veet Nam" — as well as several nonstandard contracted forms: "it'as" or "ittas" for "it was," "cain't," and "that'n" for

"that one." Most of these respellings represent Southern pronunciations.²

Despite the fact that the novel's rural characters are just educated enough to sound uneducated, Crews employs only one malapropism, *cataronic* for *catatonic*. The dialect vocabulary in the novel includes words and phrases that are nonexistent or infrequent in standard English, as well as standard words with different semantic ranges, different phonological structure, different subcategorization patterns, or different register usage than in other varieties. Southern lexical items include *to ail* (as in "what ails them"), *to light on* (to land on), *menfolk*, *to misdoubt*, *sight* (in "a sight better"), *yonder*, and *youngun*. *If you a mind to*, *cash money*, *to show manners*, *to keep a civil tongue*, *a God's wonder*, *just to be doing* (just for the fun of it), *this day and time* (this day and age), and *x and them* (for a group of associated people) represent nonstandard collocations. Some of these can be attested as Southern forms; others are attested in Southern as well as other varieties of English. Others are not attested in the literature of Southern dialectology and may be Crews's creations.

Standard English words with different phonological structure are *amongst*, *fitting* (fit, as in "fitting to eat"), *hereabouts*, *howsomever*, *near 'bouts*, *somewheres*, *where 'bouts*, and *yeller* (yellow); words with different semantic ranges are *behind* (after), *figure* (seem), *look for* (expect), *old* (familiar; also an intensifier), *rank* (unsophisticated), *sorry* (despicable, pathetic), *study* (be concerned with), and *visit* (chat); and words that take different complementation structures than in standard American English include *to come by* + *p.p.* ("Come by up here"), *to hush* + *v-ing* ("Hush talking like that"), *to talk* and *to be wrong* + *on* ("We'll talk more on it later"; "You wrong on that"), *on account of* with a sentential complement ("on account of I ain't had nothing to eat"), and *to set* as an intransitive verb ("a place to set down"). Finally, lexical items that appear in standard English only in elevated, somewhat archaic-sounding registers of speech appear in *Body* in casual talk, as with *at times* (sometimes), *as you will* (as you like, want), *commence* (start), *mean* (intend, plan), or *one day*. Conversely, *daddy* and *mama* or *ma*, which in other varieties of American English are intimate terms

used only by children, are used here for address and for reference by adults, in public as well as private situations.

Almost all the nonstandard word-forms in Crews's novel are attested in nonstandard speech. Two have been described as characteristically Southern: the use of *you-all* as the second-person plural pronoun (subject and object), and indefinite article *a* with vowel-initial nouns, as in "a air hose," "a asshole," or "a old man." Other nonstandard morphology includes various function shifts. Standard English adjective forms are used adverbially as in "You always did put things *nice*," a prepositional phrase is used adverbially ("I'm *by God* in control"), and standard adjectives are used nominally as in "Strange is just something I think we gone have to get used to hereabouts." Crews's Southern characters usually use singular noun forms after numbers, as in "a girl who can still blush when she's twenty *year* old" or "Well, I did think to lose ten *pound*." Marked pronoun forms include the nonstandard second-person possessive form *you* ("in front of me and you sister") and the reflexive forms *yoursself*, *bissself*, *oursself*, and *theirselves*, the nonstandard demonstrative forms *them* and *this* [right] *here*, and the use of the relative pronoun *that* with human antecedents.

Nonstandard verbal morphology includes the use of *ain't* for the negation of *be*, in the first and third person singular ("I ain't in no crisis"; "It ain't something you fall into or out of just to be doing"; "He ain't our kind of people is he?") and in the third person plural ("Ain't none of us wantin' to catch flies"), and for the negation of *have* in the first, second, and third person singular ("I ain't told you"; "You ain't got a degree in Problems of Living, either"; "She ain't forgot us") and in the first person plural ("Well, we ain't see her, have we?"). There are also many nonstandard participial forms ("we ain't *see* her"; "She ain't *forgot* us"; "Everybody here is so *eat* up with the desire to win") and nonstandard preterit forms (all of which are standard past participle forms) as in "I *known* this'd happen," "ever tree I *seen* had a light in it," or "with the name his mama *given* him." *Be* and *do* have nonstandard inflections in the third person: "People *is* a whole lot funnier than you think"; "My family *don't* mess with anyone *don't*

mess with them first"; and "But I pointed out to him it *weren't* necessary."

Crews's representations of nonstandard syntax include several features that are sometimes described as exclusively Southern, as well as features characteristic of many nonstandard varieties and features that occur even in standard casual speech. The Southern forms are negative concord with preposed auxiliary verbs, as in "Ain't none of us wantin' to catch flies, Ma," negative concord across clauses, as in "I ain't told you you had to do nothing," deletion of the copula form *are* in equational sentences ("They all some knotty, ain't they?"), and existential *it* as in "It was a time when you known that" or "it ain't nobody making a move to help."

Two kinds of verbal meaning expressed in *Body* that are characteristically Southern are completive *done* ("Me and my knife done give up on need a long time ago"; "I believe this trip is done ruint you disposition") and *a-* prefixed verbs, as in "can we go in a bathing then?" or "light as the wind a blowin'." Other nonstandard syntactic and semantic patterns are found in other varieties of American English as well as Southern speech, but they are also forms that people like Crews's characters would be likely to use.

Having shown that Crews's Southern characters produce words and sentences that rural white Southerners might in fact produce, I turn to an aspect of the literary representation of dialect that has not systematically been examined before. In what follows, I suggest that Crews's characters also *use* words and sentences the way Southerners like them do. The aspects of language use on which I focus have to do with expressing social distinctions and avoiding social imposition. I first discuss the use of terms of address that reflect and define social status in discourse. I then describe strategies for indirectness — for suggesting meanings without fully claiming responsibility for them. I focus in particular on two strategies that seem characteristically Southern: elaborate uses of conditional syntax and frequent expressions of hedging evidentiality.

Terms of address. Crews's Southern characters frequently use terms of address that identify the intended addressee while at the

same time expressing the speaker's social relationship to the addressee. The address forms used in the novel are *son*, *old son*, *boy*, *bud*, *girl*, *child*, *Sister Woman*, *honey*, *you old honey*, *you old thing*, *sir*, *ma'am*, and expressions formed of *Mr.*, *Miss*, or *Mizz* with a person's first name.

The men in the novel use address terms more often than do the women, and they use a wider range of them. Terms used by men can suggest that the speaker has higher status, either in general or in the interaction at hand, as when the father uses *son* in talk to his sons and other young men or when a motel guest says *son* to the bellhop. Social superiority of the addressee is indicated with *sir* and title plus first name; in the book's most extreme example of social rank marking, a young man says, "Mr. Alphonse, *sir*, I have come to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage." Crews is also faithful to Southern tradition in having younger people invariably answer older people's yes/no questions with "Yes, *sir*, I did," "No *sir*, I'm not," or "No, *ma'am*."

Parity in social rank seems not to exist among these men; interaction among potential equals involves constant negotiation for status. Forms of address can serve as provocations, as when a man addresses a rival as *bud*, or they can be more subtle assertions of equal footing, as when an outsider trying to become part of the family addresses the young men in the family as *old son*. *Girl*, *child*, and *Sister Woman* are used by men to sisters and girlfriends. By identifying individuals with categories, these terms label women as social inferiors, though they are also terms of endearment.

Just as the men's *son* picks out a social inferior and *old son* makes a claim to equality, so the women use *honey* for inferiors (such as the bellhop), and *old honey* or *old thing* to create parity — though in the women's case parity is tinged with endearment, and in the men's case parity is tinged with animosity. The women do not use *boy*, *child*, or *brother* for men. Like the men, the women use *sir* and *ma'am* to elders.

For terms of address as for the grammatical markings of Southernness discussed above, Crews's ear seems to be good, at least according to the anecdotal evidence about Southern discourse style, all that is currently available. Their constant awareness of

social rank and the linguistic forms by which they express this awareness are an important part of what makes Crews's characters seem Southern.

Conditional indirectness. Crews's 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 youngun 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, "Wisht you'd thought to tell [the bellboy] to bring back a little chocolate ice cream."

Indirectness like this has two effects. First, it mitigates speech acts. Indirectness hedges 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 expresses 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" (Brown and Levinson 1987) based on acknowledgment of one's own and one's addressee's need for independence, distance, and respect. It is the obviously appropriate strategy in the world of the Southern characters in *Body*, who are acutely or, as one reviewer of the novel put it, "murderously" aware of their own and others' social status at every moment (Weldon 1990).

Crews's characters are indirect in a variety of ways, but one of the most striking, because of its frequency, is the use of conditional syntax. Assertions can be phrased in *if-then* form ("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"; "I'd think that whiskey'd be a trifle hot"), as can suggestions ("There'll be trouble if you can't learn to keep a civil tongue about my family"; "You gone marry into the Turnipseed family, you gone have to learn not to be a asshole"). The *if I were you* format, sometimes with the *if* clause elided, is especially favored for orders and threats,³ as when a man remarks to a rival, "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," or in this conversation between a man and his fiancée, who is threatening to castrate him:

"If you don't look out, you gone shake me dickless, tremble us right on into a trick of shit we neither one'll ever git out of. That ain't the sort of knife you can hold and tremble."

"It's something to think about then, isn't it? You thinking, Nail? You thinking about it? Because if I was you, I'd think."

"That's what you would do if you was me, is it?"

"That's what I'd do. I'd rethink the whole thing." (113)

Formulaic conditional structures such as *if you a mind to*, *if you could be good enough*, or *I'd take it as a personal kindness if* 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 syntax is deferential. 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. In this way, conditional syntax can mitigate potential social impositions. Its use reflects a heightened awareness of social distinctions and is appropriate in a situation in which threat and imposition are always immanent, and always socially dangerous.

Evidentials. The characters' utterances often include predicates such as *believe*, *reckon*, *think*, *guess*, *have the feeling*, and so on: "evidential" predicates that express the speaker's mode of knowledge (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* is nonstandard in American English, and the expression *I don't believe* with a sentential complement is uncommon). What is striking is their frequency and their specific function in these Southern characters' speech.

In only two of the hundreds of utterances in the novel that include evidential predicates do the evidentials express speakers' complete security in their knowledge: "*One thing's for sure*, he cain'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 uncertainty (*think*, *believe*, *have the feeling*, *strike someone as*, *expect*, *seem*, *make x to be*, *look to be*). In other words, with the two exceptions mentioned above, the evidential predicates invariably 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 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 has long 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's characters certainly appear powerless when they converse, in their conditional- and evidential-laden way, with characters from elsewhere. When the Southerners talk among themselves, though, their hedging may be deferential, but it is certainly not powerless. Evidentials protect speakers' and hearers' social personas.

Harry Crews gets Southern speech right on all levels. This accuracy is crucial to how his novel works. If Crews's Southern characters' speech were marked only by nonstandard vocabulary, word-formation patterns, syntax, and semantics, the characters would seem Southern only in an unauthentic, parodic way. Crews uses these characters to portray the grotesque results of rural isolation and ignorance. But they are not just caricatures; they come across as thinking, feeling, endearing people, strongly rooted in place. This is in large measure because they *use* talk in a believable way.

The sociolinguistic stereotypes that novelists strive to evoke by having characters speak in dialect have as much to do with how people in different social groups use language as with the sounds and structures they produce. Nonlinguists speak vaguely about regional "drawls" or "twangs" and are only rarely aware of grammatical differences among regional dialects (and then their knowledge is often faulty: Northerners in the United States, for example, might be able to identify *y'all* as a Southern speech feature, but they are likely to think it has exclusively singular reference). Stereotypes of regional discourse styles, on the other hand, though not much more factual, are much more readily available. Northeasterners, to others, "talk fast" and seem pushy, aggressive, overly direct, or even rude; Midwesterners seem matter-of-fact in speech; Southerners seem slow, quiet, indirect, and genteel. (One such description of just the group of Southerners Crews depicts is that of novelist Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: "The Cracker speech is soft as velvet, low as the rush of running branch water" [quoted in Burkett 1978, 60].) It should not be surprising to find that novelists with good ears for dialect make use of discourse-level aspects of regional speech; one might in fact suppose that a novelist would have more to gain by doing so than by getting the sounds and sentence structures right.

A regional or social dialect is not simply a set of nonstandard words and rules for pronunciation and grammar. It is also a set of strategies and norms for language use, rooted in local culture. The study of dialect in literature could be enriched by more systematic work on the dialectology of discourse.

Notes

1. Students in my fall 1990 seminar in linguistics and literature got me started thinking about this issue, and a helpful audience at the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics Spring 1991 meeting encouraged me to continue with it. Kathleen Ferrara and Judith Bean commented on an earlier draft, and Jeutonne Brewer provided bibliographic help. I am grateful to all.

2. Sources for claims about Southern speech, here and elsewhere, are Feagin (1979), Wolfram (1981), Wolfram and Christian (1976), Wolfram and Fasold (1974), and Pederson et al. (1972). Some of the features I identify as Southern are of course found elsewhere in the United States, in the speech of African Americans. With respect to phonology, morphology, and syntax, African American Vernacular English is very similar to Southern white varieties. Crews's characters in *Body* are "Crackers" from southern Georgia, members of a group that moved to the Lower South from the mountains farther north and west (McWhiney 1988). Their speech — if it is an accurate representation of the speech of nonfictional Crackers — can be expected to include linguistic features from the South Midland area as well as Lower Southern features. I use "Southern" broadly, to include both.

3. I examine the mechanism by which indirectness can be threatening, with reference to the male characters in *Body*, in a 1992 *SECOL Review* article. Parts of the current study are adapted from that essay.

References

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1962. "Playing the Dozens." *Journal of American Folklore* 75:209–18.
- . *Talking Black*. 1976. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury.
- Bernstein, Basil. 1970. *Class, Codes and Control Vol. 1: Theoretical Studies towards a Sociology of Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Blake, N. F. 1981. *Non-Standard Language in English Literature*. London: Deutsch.
- Booth, Wayne C. 1961. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- Braden, Waldo W. 1983. *The Oral Tradition in the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP.

- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Burkett, Eva M. 1978. *American English Dialects in Literature*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow.
- Chafe, Wallace, and Johanna Nichols. 1986. *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Chapman, Raymond. 1989. "The Reader as Listener: Dialect and Relationships in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*." In *The Pragmatics of Style*, ed. Leo Hickey, 159–78. New York: Routledge.
- Crews, Harry. 1978. *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place*. New York: Harper.
- . 1988. *The Knockout Artist*. New York: Harper.
- . 1990. *Body*. New York: Poseidon.
- Dines, Elizabeth. 1980. "Variation in Discourse — 'And Stuff like That.'" *Language in Society* 9:13–31.
- Erikson, Frederick. 1984. "Rhetoric, Anecdote, and Rhapsody: Coherence Strategies in a Conversation among Black American Adolescents." In *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse*, ed. Deborah Tannen, 81–154. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Feagin, Crawford. 1979. *Variation and Change in Alabama English*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP.
- Gumperz, John J. 1982. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Halliday, M. A. K., and Ruqaiya Hasan. 1976. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. 1983. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Hickey, Leo, ed. 1989. *The Pragmatics of Style*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnstone, Barbara. 1990a. *Stories, Community, and Place: Narratives from Middle America*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- . 1990b. "Variation in Discourse: Midwestern Narrative Style." *American Speech* 63:195–214.
- . 1992. "Violence and Civility in Discourse: Uses of Mitigation by Rural Southern Men." *The SECOL Review* 16:1–19.
- Kochman, Thomas, ed. 1972. *Rappin' and Stylin' Out*. Urbana: U of Illinois P.
- . 1981. *Black and White Styles in Conflict*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- Labov, William. 1972a. "The Logic of Nonstandard English." In *Language in the Inner City*, 201–40. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P.

- . 1972b. "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax." In *Language in the Inner City*, 354–96. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P.
- Lakoff, Robin. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper.
- Leech, Geoffrey N., and Michael H. Short. 1981. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Longman.
- McMillan, James B., and Michael B. Montgomery. 1989. *Annotated Bibliography of Southern American English*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P.
- McWhiney, Grady. 1988. *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*. University: U of Alabama P.
- O'Barr, William M., and Bowman K. Atkins. 1980. "'Women's Language' or 'Powerless Language'?" In *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman, 93–110. New York: Praeger.
- Pederson, Lee, Raven I. McDavid, Jr., Charles W. Foster, and Charles E. Billiard, eds. 1972. *A Manual for Dialect Research in the Southern States*. University: U of Alabama P.
- Polanyi, Livia. 1985. *Telling the American Story: A Structural and Cultural Analysis of Conversational Storytelling*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Preston, Dennis R. 1985. "The Li'l Abner Syndrome: Written Representations of Speech." *American Speech* 60:328–37.
- Reissman, Catherine Kohler. 1988. "Worlds of Difference: Contrasting Experience in Marriage and Narrative Style." In *Gender and Discourse: The Power of Talk*, ed. Alexandra Dundas Todd and Sue Fisher, 151–73. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Ross, Stephen M. 1989. *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner*. Athens: U of Georgia P.
- Schiffrin, Deborah. 1987. *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Stubbs, Michael. 1980. *Language and Literacy*. New York: Routledge.
- Tannen, Deborah. 1981. "New York Jewish Conversational Style." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 30:133–49.
- . 1984. *Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Toolan, Michael J. 1990. *The Stylistics of Fiction: A Literary-Linguistic Approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Weldon, Fay. 1990. "A Single Shining Muscle of a Girl." Review of *Body*, by Harry Crews. *The New York Times Book Review* 9 Sept., 14.
- Wolfram, Walt. 1981. "Varieties of American English." In *Language in the USA*, ed. Charles A. Ferguson and Shirley Brice Heath, 44–68. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

- Wolfram, Walt, and Donna Christian. 1976. *Appalachian English*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Wolfram, Walt, and Ralph W. Fasold. 1974. *The Study of Social Dialects in American English*. New York: Prentice-Hall.