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**Hype Artists, Con Men, Pimps, and Dopesters:
The Personal Journalism of Harry Crews**

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Abstract

During the 1970s and 1980s, novelist Harry Crews was a prolific contributor of non-fiction articles for *Playboy*, *Esquire* and a number of other publications. This article is the first academic examination of his journalism. The study looks at his published material as well as his personal archives, which were made public for the first time in 2007. The author examined the content, style, and innovations associated with Crews' journalism and found that his use of a Southern, working-class point of view and his penchant for including self-examination and personal revelation in his writing make his work distinct among his literary-journalism contemporaries.

Keywords: Journalism, magazines, literary journalism, Harry Crews, Southern fiction

Introduction

*When I took a job, I always knew from the start I wasn't going to write about what they told me to write about. I was going to meet some people, get into some shit, and see where it took me.*¹

Following that creed as his literary strategy, Harry Crews crossed the border from fiction to journalism during the 1970s and 1980s. A celebrated writer of Southern fiction who by 1975 had seven novels to his credit and dozens of literary awards, Crews had developed a national reputation that brought him to the attention of magazine editors. At the time, a segment of the American magazine industry was infatuated with the form of reportage christened New Journalism,² now referred to as literary journalism. Writers of a certain stature, which Crews had attained, were given tremendous freedom to choose subjects, to write as long as they pleased, and to create a style of journalism that suited their own tendencies and preferences.³ When the offers began to come, Crews showed himself to be a more-than-willing participant. "Donn Pearce (author of *Cool Hand Luke* and an early mentor of Crews) told me, 'When somebody offers you a writing job, don't ask questions. Just take it.' So when a job came in, that's what I did. I took it."⁴

The assignments were varied and plentiful, coming from diverse publications from *Esquire* to *Playboy*, *Fame* to *Junk Food* to *Penthouse*. In each, Crews found a way to take

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whatever the assigning editor had in mind and spin the article in such a way that by the final draft, Crews himself had become the de facto subject of the piece. The approach had worked well for him in his fiction, where often the protagonist was a thinly veiled version of the author.⁵ Now, in the world of non-fiction, he developed a style of personal journalism that allowed him to tell stories in the first person that brought readers deeply into the subject at hand and revealed aspects of his own character, minus the effect of the corrective lens through which all fiction must flow. In addition, the characters that inhabited Crews' magazine articles came to resemble his fictional characters, often with odd or freakish characteristics, or "with a compulsive need to look for the edge and live on it."⁶

From 1967 to 1975, Crews published a novel every year, an almost unheard of rate of production for a writer of literary fiction. Starting in 1975, Crews turned his attention to journalism and non-fiction. After the novel *A Feast of Snakes*, published in 1976, he did not publish another major work of fiction until 1987. In the interim, he became a prolific contributor of essays, memoirs, and journalistic pieces to magazines and journals.⁷ His work in this area took the innovations of other pioneering journalists of that era and added a working class, Southern point of view. His journalism echoed his fiction in that he turned the telescope inward, in the process revealing aspects of himself through his subjects. This study focuses on some of the articles that place Crews and his work in that context, and examines how his persona and background allowed him to develop a reporting and writing style that was uniquely his own.

Methodology

This study is the first academic analysis of Crews' body of literary journalism. While primarily historical research, a phenomenological framework was used to examine how Crews' work contrasted his personal understanding of reality with social constructs under which he lived and worked.⁸ Crews' published non-fiction writing was analyzed, and a narrative element⁹ was used in order to examine how his personal history and background affected his development as a journalist. The author conducted interviews with Crews as well as with magazine editors who worked closely with him and who were able to observe and shed light on his methods and practices throughout the writing and editing process. In addition, the author examined Crews' body of non-fiction work to determine patterns and trends that demonstrate his development and significance as a journalist. Previously conducted interviews, correspondence, and other assorted documentation, much of it only recently available to researchers, were examined in order to allow a complete picture of Crews' journalistic strategies and outlook to emerge.

In the fall of 2006, Crews sold his literary papers to the University of Georgia, where they are currently maintained in the university's Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The collection includes corrected and uncorrected manuscripts of the Crews' articles, as well as correspondence with editors, sources, reviewers, agents, and others, from 1962 through 2005. An examination of some of the documents in this collection, as well as a

comprehensive examination of Crews' body of journalistic writing, adds to the understanding of his life and achievements.

Literature Review

An abundance of material exists that examines various aspects of the fiction writing of Harry Crews. The same cannot be said for Crews' non-fiction. Much of what has been written about Crews' journalism comes from the author himself, through his essays on writing and teaching,¹⁰ and through autobiographical asides that populate his essays and articles. *Blood and Grits* (1979) and *Florida Frenzy* (1982) are collections of Crews' essays and articles (*Florida Frenzy* also includes excerpts from novels) that provide an excellent sample of his style and subject matter. Following the publication of *Florida Frenzy*, Frank Shelton wrote an article titled "The Nonfiction of Harry Crews: A Review" for *Southern Literary Journal* that examines the two collections and the articles therein in relation to Crews' fiction. The fall 1998 issue of *The Southern Quarterly* was devoted to the work of Crews and contains a number of essays about him, along with a complete bibliography of his work. Those and other essays were collected in Erik Bledsoe's *Perspectives on Harry Crews* (2001). *Getting Naked With Harry Crews* (1999) is a collection of interviews with Crews conducted from 1972 through 1997. A number of the interviews touch on Crews' journalism. The website "A Large & Startling Figure: The Harry Crews Online Bibliography," run by Damon Sauve, a former student of Crews, is the most complete bibliographical reference available on Crews' work.

Harry Crews' name does not appear in the most widely read historical analyses of literary journalism, perhaps because much of his non-fiction work is of a personal nature and viewed in tandem with his more well-known fiction writing. However, journalism scholars have produced volumes that examine the work of his contemporaries and provide context by revealing editorial and publishing trends that gave rise to the genre prior to and during the time Crews was active as a journalist. Tom Wolfe, one of the writers associated with the genre in the era that led up to the work of Crews, christened the term "New Journalism" in 1973 as "intense and detailed reporting presented with techniques generally associated with novels and short stories."¹¹

Literary journalism, to use the current term, was, of course, not invented in the 1970s. Scholars trace the evolution of the genre from Daniel Defoe and James Boswell in the 18th century, through Mark Twain's sketches and Lincoln Steffens' newspaper narratives in the late 19th century, through the work of Stephen Crane and Ernest Hemingway in the early 20th century. John Hartsock's *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (2000) catalogues this progression and eventually charts the emergence of writers such as Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Joan Didion in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, Marc Weingarten's *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight: Wolfe, Thompson, Didion and the New Journalism Revolution* (2006) is devoted to that same era and the personalities who defined the growth of literary journalism. Weingarten writes that during those years, "a group of writers emerged, seemingly out of

nowhere —Tom Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin, Gay Talese, Hunter S. Thompson, Joan Didion, John Sack, Michael Herr—to impose order on all this American mayhem, each in his or her own distinctive manner (a few old hands, like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer, chipped in as well).¹² Norman Sims discussed the era in question in *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (2007) and concluded: “By the mid-1970s, time and the weight of controversy had smothered the New Journalism movement, although the ideal survived.”¹³ Academic research pertaining to literary journalism from the mid-1970s forward, when Crews practiced the craft, is less prevalent.

A Voice from the Dirty South

The writing and the character of Harry Eugene Crews are inexorably intertwined with his upbringing in a sharecropping family in a dirt-poor region of southwestern Georgia. Born on June 7, 1935, in Bacon County, Georgia, to Ray and Myrtice Crews, he has said that his childhood was “a kind of nightmare,” and the trials he was subjected to before the age of seven bear that out.¹⁴ Ray Crews died of a heart attack while two-year-old Harry slept next to him, and Myrtice soon married Pascal Crews, Ray’s brother and a “man prone to drinking and violence.”¹⁵ Harry suffered from infant paralysis as a child, which caused him to spend a year bedridden, during which time he was told he would never walk again.¹⁶ Less than a year after recovering from that ailment, Crews was playing a children’s game with cousins while hogs were being scalded in vats of boiling water and butchered. Crews fell into one of the vats, scalding his entire body, and leaving him bedridden for months once again.¹⁷ The marriage of Myrtice and Pascal eventually ended, and the family spent the remainder of Crews’ childhood relocating between the tenant farms of Bacon County and the immigrant slums of Jacksonville, Florida, where Myrtice worked at the Edward Cigar Factory.

In 1953 Crews became the first member of his family to graduate from high school, and he followed his older brother, Hoyet, into the Marines.¹⁸ The Korean War came to an end without Crews having served overseas, and soon after being discharged, he attended the University of Florida on the GI Bill. By this time, his goal of becoming a writer of fiction, which first had formed as a child on the farm leafing through the Sears Roebuck catalogue and making up stories of his own, had crystallized.¹⁹ He completed two years of studies, and in 1958 he embarked on an 18-month journey of discovery across the American West and Mexico, from which he emerged “purified and holy.”²⁰ Upon returning to Gainesville, Crews resumed his education, and for the first time he studied with Andrew Lytle, a writer and essayist of some renown who was a visiting professor at the University of Florida.²¹ Lytle became a mentor to Crews:

After one class, I knew that’s where I ought to be. That was the first glimmer, the first notion I had of how truly ignorant I was of what I was trying to do and how much I had to learn if I was ever to write.²²

In 1960 Crews graduated from the University of Florida and married Sally Ellis, whom he had met during his studies. The couple moved to Jacksonville, where Crews taught

junior high school English and the couple's first son, Patrick, was born.²³ Crews returned to the University of Florida a year later to earn a master's degree in English. His marriage to Sally ended, but the two reconciled and were married again in 1962 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where Crews had become an English instructor at the Junior College of Broward County. A second son, Byron, was born in 1963.²⁴ In 1964 Patrick drowned in a neighbor's pool, a tragedy that devastated the family and led to a second divorce. A guilt-ridden Crews was deeply haunted by the loss, saying years later: "Part of me insisted that I had brought him to the place of his death."²⁵

Through the 1960s Crews continued to write fiction with little success. Two of his short stories were published in literary journals (one by Lytle in the *Sewanee Review*, a journal of which he was editor at the time). Though bitter over the loss of his family, Crews remained consumed by writing but grew discouraged by constant failure: "I had written five novels and a roomful of short stories and I had made a hundred dollars."²⁶ In 1968 his first novel, *The Gospel Singer*, was published by William Morrow and received positive reviews that described him as a promising newcomer. The novel helped him secure a position as a creative writing instructor in the University of Florida's English Department, a position in which he would remain for 30 years.²⁷ From there, Crews published a novel a year, following *Gospel Singer* with *Naked in Garden Hills* (1969), *This Thing Don't Lead to Heaven* (1970), *Karate Is a Thing of the Spirit* (1971), *Car* (1972), *The Hawk Is Dying* (1973), and *The Gypsy's Curse* (1974). He garnered awards, including the National Institute for Arts and Letters Award for Fiction, and established himself as among the top American writers of literary fiction of his generation.²⁸ He became known as a leading voice in the Southern Gothic, Southern Grotesque, or Grit Lit genre of fiction, "a tradition noted for its emphasis on violence, strange behavior, and abnormal characters."²⁹ His fiction was deeply rooted in his "humble beginnings" in prewar South Georgia, and his "works are filled with the culture and experiences of rural poverty. In his writing, he marshals both his rural background and his upward climb to produce stories of destructive aspirations."³⁰

Playboy: Alaska and Beyond

Crews' journalism career began when the editorial staff at *Playboy* discovered his fiction. "I just read *The Gypsy's Curse*. This is a fan letter because it was so goddamn good."³¹ The correspondence from Laurence Gonzales, a junior editor at *Playboy* in 1974, was one of several salvos sent by the magazine's editorial staff that eventually led to the association between Crews and the highly successful men's publication. In the early 1970s *Playboy* was at the peak of its economic power, selling 6.5 million copies a month. Hugh Hefner's Playboy Enterprises had recently begun publishing the title *Oui*, had added international editions of *Playboy*, and was opening clubs and hotels throughout the U.S.³² "At the time, we had so much money, we didn't know what to do with it, literally," said Gonzales, who would be Crews' primary editor for the magazine through 1980, the time span in which Crews did the majority of his writing for the publication.³³ During that era *Playboy* readers could find the work of well-known fiction writers as well as journalistic writing and humor pieces, but the magazine was not yet publishing literary journalism. In 1974 the magazine had published

excerpts from Hunter Thompson's book *The Great Shark Hunt* and had attempted to attract the author Ken Kesey without success.³⁴ With a large editorial budget and an ambitious editorial staff that had the freedom to pursue ideas, experimentation with format and content ruled the day.

The editorial process at *Playboy* was approximately like this: A small group of editors who were also friends after work would retire to this beautiful art deco bar down the street called the Bow and Arrow, one of the last art deco bars in Chicago, and we would drink and talk about what we'd like to do. And we'd just come up with ideas we thought were cool, and essentially we could do anything we wanted, because we had so much money. And so we'd say, 'Let's think up something for Harry Crews to do, and we'd take it to Harry.'³⁵

Indeed, Crews' first published piece of journalism emerged through just that process. Crews commented: "One day, they called me from Chicago and asked me how I'd like to go to Alaska ... to cover the building of the pipeline. Well, I'd never been before, and it seemed like a long way to go from Florida, but I said, 'Sure, I'll go.' And that's the way it started."³⁶ The result of this first collaboration was "Going Down in Valdez," a 7,500-word chronicle of Crews' trip to the emerging boomtown at the terminus of the pipeline. The piece was published in *Playboy*'s February 1975 issue. Crews was given little direction, just a single contact name, and unlimited expenses.³⁷ He followed the technique famously employed by Thompson of using the process of reporting the story to provide the structure of the story itself.³⁸ Crews encounters "high rollers, promoters, hype artists, con men, pimps and dopesters" as he describes the rapid growth of the town and, through the characters he includes, reveals the disparate attitudes toward the pipeline and the influx of people from "the Outside," the term Alaskans used for tourists and carpetbaggers from the lower 48 states.³⁹ The final 1,500 words of the article describe a scene in which a 22-year-old prostitute named Micki receives a tattoo of a butterfly. Having revealed himself to be depressed and outraged over what he viewed as the impending destruction of the Alaskan wilderness, Crews uses Micki as a metaphor for the state: "If Alaska is not our young whore, what is she? ... If we scar her, leave her with pestilence and corrupted with infection, irrefutably marked with our own private design, who can blame us?"⁴⁰ The piece, which received only light editing,⁴¹ confirmed to *Playboy* editors that Crews had the necessary skills to report and structure a non-fiction piece and set them to the task of finding suitable topics for him to cover.⁴²

Crews' first foray into celebrity journalism ran in October of the same year with the publication of "Charles Bronson Ain't No Pussycat," a profile of the actor who at the time was at the height of his notoriety.⁴³ *Playboy* editors accurately saw Bronson, a brooding, taciturn figure who came from a background of disadvantage similar to that of Crews, as an excellent subject for the author's skills.⁴⁴ Crews traveled to Reubens, Idaho, to interview the actor, who was filming a Western titled *Breakheart Pass*. The opening of the piece has structural similarities to "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," the 1965 *Esquire* article by literary

journalism pioneer Gay Talese that is recognized as a classic of the genre.⁴⁵ Talese constructed his story around his inability to interview his subject, and Crews spends the first third of “Pussycat” describing Bronson from a distance and setting up the actor’s notorious distaste for speaking to the press—or anybody else for that matter. “From everything I’ve read, the second head from the left on Mt. Rushmore speaks more than Bronson,” a friend tells Crews on his way to the interview.⁴⁶ Crews builds tension leading up to the first exchange between writer and subject, which occurs more than 2,000 words into the article. Once the dialogue begins, Crews spends more time talking about himself than actually posing questions, an interviewing technique he displays throughout his non-fiction.

In the garrulous way I have that would make me the world’s worst interviewer if I ever tried to interview anybody, I went from talking about farming to talking about mules, about how I didn’t learn to drive a car until I was twenty-one, because we never owned a car. “I still don’t know much about cars, but I know a hell of a lot about mules.”

“So do I,” Bronson said. “They still had mules in the mines when I was a boy in Scooptown, Pennsylvania.”⁴⁷

Harry Crews (left) and actor Charles Bronson relax on the set of the film *Breakheart Pass* in 1975. Photo by Ken Bell

Crews uses his own background and attitudes to establish a rapport with Bronson and at the same time reveals as much about himself as he does about his subject. Both of these techniques are prevalent in Crews' subsequent non-fiction work, especially in his profile writing. Crews' admiration for Bronson is apparent throughout "Pussycat." Late in the piece he discloses what he finds as the strongest link between himself and Bronson: the long, bitter struggle for success they both endured. Crews wrote: "I knew from my own experience that when you wanted to do a thing, whether you were very good at it or only a journeyman craftsman, if you could not do it, it was kind of a death."⁴⁸ Though when the article was written, Bronson was one of the two or three most bankable American actors, Crews interprets him as marginalized by the Hollywood system, ignored for years, and now, at the height of his success, being dangerously overexposed, his career placed in jeopardy by a corrupt Hollywood system. In this way he creates a character that compares with those found in his fiction, where protagonists exist on the fringes of a society that has inevitably stacked the decks against them.

By the time Crews took the assignment to profile David Duke, grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, he had written multiple celebrity profiles and was prepared to take on a subject of a more controversial nature. "The Buttondown Terror of David Duke" was published in *Playboy's* February 1980 issue.⁴⁹ Duke was a 28-year-old white supremacist who was employing modern political tactics on behalf of the Klan, which at the time was enjoying a significant resurgence.⁵⁰ Crews spent a week with Duke, traveling around the country with him to television appearances, meetings, and Klan rallies, observing his methods and interpreting his rhetoric. Having been raised in the Deep South, Crews doesn't shy away from his background but uses it to demonstrate insight. "I was born and raised in South Georgia, where many of my kinsmen still live. Some were Klansmen, and I've heard Klan stories all my life."⁵¹ Indeed, a constant element of Crews' fiction is the matter-of-fact treatment of race relations in the Southern towns he depicts. In his novels, the word "nigger" is commonplace and unremarked upon. A class system between the races is apparent and adhered to, and rarely a thematic element in the plot.⁵² In the Duke piece, Crews manages to strike a balance between objective observation and measured disgust. He admits to liking Duke and some members of his entourage when they manage to break from their constant racial diatribes. Structurally, the article is built around scenes of Crews and Duke traveling to and from engagements and culminates with a 5,000-strong Klan rally in Rogers, Arkansas. The scenes work to create a characterization of Duke as a slick manipulator who, in his heart, truly believes his own rhetoric, a fact that Crews sees as making him all the more dangerous. In the final third of the article, Crews offers an analysis of the rhetoric, finding it a repackaged version of the Klan's original message: "What Duke ultimately had to offer was the same old sad bullshit I'd grown up on in Bacon County, Georgia."⁵³ Throughout, Crews applies an ominous tone, demonstrating through observed interaction how Duke's message resonates with the public across the country. Though he never allows his narrative to reach a level of shrill denunciation, he is clearly alarmed at what he finds, a point made strongly in correspondence with James Morgan, then articles editor for *Playboy*. "There is no doubt in my mind that (they) are dangerous at this particular time in the history of the country. And

Duke may be the most dangerous of the lot.”⁵⁴ “The Buttondown Terror of David Duke” and Crews’ analysis turned out to be prescient, as Duke later found a national platform to espouse his white supremacist ideals, running for president of the United States and governor of Louisiana and eventually being elected to the Louisiana State House of Representatives.⁵⁵

Crews continued to write sporadically for *Playboy* through the early 1990s. “Whenever I needed \$6,000, I’d give Hefner a call, and he’d send me some work,” he recalled.⁵⁶ Some of the pieces were of a more personal nature, with the author chronicling his own exploits and those of his associates. In “A Walk in the Country,” published in April 1975, he travels the Appalachian Trail with two friends in search of book material.⁵⁷ The September 1976 article “Carny” brings Crews back to a place where he worked during his youthful journey of self-discovery—the carnival.⁵⁸ Some of his later *Playboy* pieces took the form of personal essays, recounting incidents from his life and interpreting them retrospectively. His January 1985 article “Fathers, Sons, Blood” was the first time in print that he confronted the death of his son Patrick by drowning.⁵⁹ The article describes Patrick’s death and Crews’ discovery of the body and examines Crews’ views on fatherhood and his relationship with his younger son, Byron. The autobiographical tone and inward examination of “Fathers, Sons, Blood” is similar to the type of personal writing that would signify his work in *Esquire*.

Esquire: A Side of Grits

There isn’t much Harry Crews hasn’t done in the twenty-odd years since he left Georgia. In the last seven years he has written many books dealing variously with religion, snakes, karate, weight lifting and hawks. Nobody, not even Crews himself, is sure what will engage his attention next, but he has promised to tell the world about it in this space.⁶⁰

Publishing his work in the pages of *Playboy* had introduced the voice of Harry Crews to an entirely new readership and increased his visibility significantly. The appearance of his byline in *Esquire* brought his work to yet another segment of the American readership, one that expanded his reach considerably and led to many more opportunities.⁶¹ In 1976 Geoffrey Norman, the articles editor at *Playboy*, accepted a similar position at *Esquire* and brought Crews to the magazine shortly thereafter.⁶² The idea of a column, christened *Grits*, originated with Norman, who envisioned it as a way to get an entirely fresh voice into the magazine. *Grits*, he said, would “take us out of our neon lighted offices where people opine and into the world where things happen and people bleed.”⁶³

Crews was asked to develop the columns himself, with little input from the editors of the magazine, composing them around his own experiences and submitting them on a monthly basis. Through the 14 months he wrote the column, subjects were varied. They tended to alternate between present-day examinations of Crews’ existence as a professor and a writer, first-person reporting pieces about rural-flavored endeavors such as alligator

poaching or cockfighting, and more autobiographical sketches and recollections. “The Wonderful World of Winnebagos,” published in the August 1976 issue, finds Crews camping with a female friend in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia.⁶⁴ The pair is confronted by various incarnations of the American tourist, from golfers methodically driving golf balls from each scenic overlook in the park to uncontrolled children harassing wildlife. Crews reproduces his encounters through dialogue and anecdotal description to make his point about the complete disregard for nature he sees in the American tourist. “Building Men the Marine Corps Way” (September 1976) takes the form of reminiscence, using the beating death of a Marine recruit as an entry to examining his own experiences at Parris Island two decades before.⁶⁵ The column is entirely autobiographical; the reader learns of the astonishing cruelty that recruits were routinely subjected to, how it affected Crews and some of his fellow Marines. Two anecdotes dominate the article—one in which Crews takes a savage beating from a drill sergeant and earns the sergeant’s respect by not urinating on himself, and another in which Crews’ best friend in the platoon is taken to a psychological observation unit, humiliated, and ultimately discharged from the Marines.

The final *Grits* column was published in *Esquire*’s August 1977 issue under the title “Climbing the Tower.”⁶⁶ The piece was a favorite of the author, one that he said confused his editors and challenged readers. He wrote: “I wanted, as best I could, to take the reader through the process of what it is like for me as a writer when I feel myself start to slip out of my own skin and into the world and skin of somebody else.”⁶⁷ “Tower” follows Crews over the course of a visit to the University of Texas at Austin for a speaking engagement. The visit devolves into an obsession with the Texas Tower and the 1966 shooting spree of ex-Marine Charles Whitman. Crews makes a late night, drunken pilgrimage to the Tower, where he confronts his own inner demons and expresses the belief that everybody must fight the madness that overtook Whitman:

What I know is that all over the surface of the earth where humankind exists, men and women are resisting climbing the tower. All of us have our towers to climb. Some are worse than others, but to deny that you have your tower to climb and that you must resist it or succumb to the temptation to do it, to deny that is done at the peril of your heart and mind.⁶⁸

“Tower” allows Crews to lay bare his own frailties and shortcomings, a signature of his fiction that the *Grits* column gave him another, more direct avenue to examine. In fiction, he unveiled himself through allegory; journalism offered him the chance to remove the filter.

By the time “Tower” was published, Crews had discovered what all columnists eventually learn once they accept such a position: the constant struggle for material can be daunting. He told an interviewer later: “You gotta come up with something; then you got to get some kind of slant on the son-of-a-bitch so you can write about it. It was hard.”⁶⁹ The strain, combined with teaching and other projects, forced him to give up the column voluntarily. Another contributing factor to the dissolution of the column was a change in

ownership at *Esquire*. The magazine was sold to former *New York Magazine* editor and New Journalism pioneer Clay Felker in August 1977.⁷⁰ Felker redesigned the magazine in both design and content, changing the publication schedule from monthly to biweekly and eventually eliminating all the regular columns.⁷¹ Much of the writing Crews produced for the column eventually would become the basis for his 1978 autobiography *Childhood: A Sense of Place*, which explored the author's formative years through adolescence.⁷²

Crews wrote other, more topical long-form articles for *Esquire* during the time he was writing *Grits* and after the column was discontinued. During a three-month span in fall 1976, five articles ran with his byline in the magazine. To be featured so prominently in the foremost writers' publication of the era was a considerable feat and indicated his ascension to the pinnacle of magazine journalism of the day.⁷³ He authored profiles of subjects such as radio evangelist Garner Ted Armstrong, independent trucking advocate Mike Parkhurst, and actor Robert Blake, all outsiders in the mold of Crews' fictional protagonists. The Blake piece, titled "Television's Junkyard Dog," as with many of his profiles, finds Crews identifying deeply with his subject and including self-revelatory passages that work to describe both subject and author.⁷⁴ At the time Blake was the star of the successful television police drama *Baretta*, a veteran actor with a reputation for being difficult and unpredictable. Through his reporting, Crews found that he and Blake shared another characteristic: Both were raised by a violently abusive father figure. He structured the article around scenes on the set of *Baretta* counterbalanced by recollections from his own life. A comment from Blake about an incompetent director is followed by a passage about a supercilious New York book editor whom Crews had recently encountered. Blake's revelation concerning his drunken father leads to scenes involving Crews' stepfather. He wrote: "I kept thinking that what Blake was saying, I'd said before. That what he'd done, I'd done, too. And it all went as deep and intimate and mortal as blood and bone."⁷⁵ In a seemingly disconnected scene, Crews relates what he calls "the only revelation of his life," when he truly found his voice as a writer. As a barely published unknown, surrounded by failed manuscripts, he finally recognizes that he is ashamed of his origins, and therefore everything he had written to that point was inauthentic:

Once I realized that the way I saw the world and man's condition in it would always be exactly and inevitably shaped by everything which up to that moment had only shamed me, once I realized that, I was home free. Since that time I have found myself perpetually fascinating.⁷⁶

"Junkyard Dog" is a prime example of Crews' mastery of the art of personal journalism, exposing not only his subject but also himself in his presentation of the topic.⁷⁷ His association with *Esquire* came to an end as the 1970s drew to a close, but he remained active and present in magazines for years afterward.

A Writer for Hire

Once established in the industry, Crews was able to pick and choose assignments, most of which were unsolicited.⁷⁸ He also occasionally wrote pieces on speculation, to be peddled by his literary agent.⁷⁹ The magazines in which his byline appeared varied greatly in circulation level and content. Much of his work focused on topics in the vicinity of Gainesville and the University of Florida. He had a short association with *Sport* magazine in 1977 and '78, producing a pair of articles on Florida-based subjects. "Comeuppance at the Gatornationals" recounted a weekend at the Gainesville Speedway covering the annual Gainesville stop on the national drag racing circuit.⁸⁰ "Tip on a Live Jockey" was a profile of jockey Gene St. Leon reported from Miami's Calder Race Track.⁸¹ Both articles concentrate as much or more on the atmosphere and peripheral characters at each sporting event than on the subject at hand. Crews employed the same technique in his *Grits* column when the topic revolved around spectator sports.

An association with *Playgirl* magazine began in 1979, when the magazine contracted Crews to write one edition of a rotating column called "His Turn."⁸² Over the next three years he contributed essays and profiles to *Playgirl*. His final piece for the magazine, which ran in 1983, was a profile of Mary Steenburgen. The actress was filming the movie *Cross Creek* in Cross Creek, Florida, former home of *Cross Creek* author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Rawlings had donated the home to the University of Florida upon her death to be kept as a writers sanctuary, where Crews studied while a student at the university and returned to regularly throughout his career.⁸³

The pace of Crews' non-fiction output slowed considerably through the early 1980s. He had been a prolific writer of fiction, memoir, and non-fiction during the previous decade, but the 1980s saw a significant decrease in production that can be attributed partly to alcohol use and lifestyle.⁸⁴ Crews had viewed the writing of his memoir *Childhood: A Sense of Place*, published in 1978, as a kind of "spiritual purging." When it did not have the intended effect, he was driven further toward alcohol and drug abuse.⁸⁵ Increased notoriety from his magazine writing also led to many more appearances around the U.S. at universities and literary events.⁸⁶

In 1988 Crews formed an interesting relationship with rising pop star Madonna that would eventually lead to three articles, a book, and his first and only dramatic movie role. He accepted an assignment from *Fame Magazine* to accompany the pop singer to the highly publicized championship boxing match between Mike Tyson and Michael Spinks in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Hounded by paparazzi, Crews followed Madonna and her husband at the time, actor Sean Penn, through a night at ringside.⁸⁷ The subsequent article sees Crews veer further into the genre of celebrity journalism than in any of his previous writing, quoting the singer at length and extolling her virtues. Still, his reporting of the scene portrays the singer as harassed, hostile, and inconsiderate at best toward those around her. The article and three others were collected for a book titled *Madonna at Ringside*, released in 1991.⁸⁸ Madonna and Penn divorced shortly thereafter, and Crews maintained a friendship with Penn. In 1990

he wrote another cover story for *Fame* about the actor,⁸⁹ and Penn cast Crews in a small role in his directorial debut, *The Indian Runner*, in 1991.

By the mid-1980s, Crews was devoting more of his time to fiction. In 1987 he published his first novel in more than a decade, *All We Need of Hell*. The book would be the first of seven he would write during the next dozen years, a period of productivity that coincided with a newfound sobriety.⁹⁰ Non-fiction writing had begun to bring him less satisfaction than it had when he had first come to it a decade earlier. He expressed those sentiments at the time in a letter to a magazine editor: "I'm like an old whore these days, still getting plenty of work, but not enjoying it as much as I once did."⁹¹ By then, with the type of writing he had produced during the peak of his magazine career no longer in vogue, Crews gradually closed the chapter on his journalistic writing and turned his full attention back to fiction.

Conclusion

When the editors at *Playboy* conceived the idea of hiring Harry Crews to write non-fiction, they did so with the goal of discovering the next great literary journalist in the mold of Wolfe or Talese.⁹² In the process, they lit the wick on a journalism career that took some of the characteristics of those writers and added a much more personal, inward-looking element. Geoffrey Norman, his editor first at *Playboy* and then later at *Esquire*, recognized the fact that Crews offered something different than what had come before: "Harry was sort of a seat-of-the-pants journalist. He was reporting, almost always, entirely out of his direct, nearly tactile experience with the world.... In the case of Crews, it was always about the writer. The subject matter was interesting, but you were there for the writer."⁹³

Because of the personal nature of his writing style and his association with fiction, some critics accused Crews of being less than factual and not adhering to the standards of true journalism. In reviewing Crews' first collection of non-fiction, *Blood and Grits*, for *The New York Times*, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt wrote:

Mr. Crews reports: When good ole boys get together, they often enjoy telling each other "several interesting lies," and it occurred to me a number of times that he might be paying us the compliment of including us among his cronies.⁹⁴

Indeed, some of the situations and characters that appear in his articles would not seem at all out of place in a Harry Crews' novel. Odd characters and extreme behavior are at a premium, no matter in which genre Crews is writing. Some of these similarities can no doubt be attributed to the type and scope of assignments Crews selected, which skewed toward the offbeat and lent themselves to situations and characterizations ripe for the Crews' treatment. While he took pains in much of his writing, especially in his longer reporting pieces, to provide factual support, some of his personal essays give the feel of being true "to the essence of the experience," if not down to the exact detail.⁹⁵ Similar questions of

subjectivity arise in discussions surrounding the work of a number of Crews' contemporaries, from Thompson to Mailer to Capote. Literary journalism historian Norman Sims sees this as a core issue in the examination of writers of the genre immediately before and during Crews' era:

Questions about subjectivity in the New Journalism would tag along on this debate like ticks on a dog. New Journalists fought back against attack from old journalism, which had its own problems with objectivity during the Cold War and the Vietnam War.⁹⁶

Some critics also viewed Crews' tendency to identify with his profile subjects as blatant hero worship. Ted Morgan of *The New York Times* saw Crews' profile work as "genuflecting his idols." In his profiles Crews "managed to transform two actors (Charles Bronson and Robert Blake) into minor deities," Morgan wrote in a review of *Blood and Grits*.⁹⁷ Other reviewers looked past the exceedingly positive treatment afforded many of his subjects and viewed the pieces as another aspect of the writer's self-examination. Richard Fuller, writing in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, noted that "whether you are interviewing a trucker or Robert Blake ... you are examining Harry Crews, who might get bombed on vodka or mugged or maybe both, but who brings back not just an assignment, but a piece of felt existence."⁹⁸ An examination of his complete body of work gives the clear picture that Crews' work does not fall in line as part of the fawning Hollywood publicity chain. His subjects were generally out of the mainstream and were always viewed through his unique lens. Crews would find commonality in certain aspects of the Bronson or Blake persona, as he would with David Duke or Charles Whitman. Readers were treated to a perspective in which the character and makeup of the writer is present in every element of the story.

Crews acknowledged that he approached journalism much in the way he attacked a fictional topic. "If you look at the pieces I've done for magazines, they all have the elements of fiction," he said. "There's a place, there's a tale, there's dialogue, there are characters. It just all happens to be true."⁹⁹ Since he wrote exclusively in first person, Crews himself inevitably became one of those characters. Like Hunter Thompson,¹⁰⁰ Crews' own reporting methods were ever present, as were his habits. His drunken exploits find their way into many of the articles and become important plot points in a good number as well. During much of the time he was regularly writing for magazines, he was "drinking with both fists"¹⁰¹ and conducted much of his dealing with both editors and subjects around the bar. The result is a narrator whose flaws are openly revealed. The technique allows him to fit effortlessly into the chaos he attempts to portray through his reporting. His much-discussed penchant for creating freakish characters in his fiction writing also bleeds over into his non-fiction. Characters with physical deformities are front and center in many of his novels, as are those that engage in bizarre behavior.¹⁰² "If (the use of freaks) works at all in fiction, it works as kind of a metaphor," Crews said.¹⁰³ In fact, his first *Playboy* article opens with just such a metaphorical flourish—a legless man on a wheeled dolly with a "beatific look of ecstasy on his thin, pale face."¹⁰⁴ What emerges from Crews' overall approach is writing that showcases

his ability to seamlessly incorporate the fictional storytelling techniques he had honed through his career as a novelist.

Much of the scholarship related to literary journalism is concentrated on the work of writers who began their careers as fact-based newspaper reporters and later adapted the techniques of fiction to their work. Much rarer are those who established themselves as fiction writers and were able to incorporate factual reporting and adapt their styles to the standards of journalism.¹⁰⁵ Crews' evolution as a writer benefited from a certain section of the magazine industry that was populated with editors who were actively seeking literary talent for their pages. The market, his growing reputation, and an impulse within him to explore human experience from a new perspective combined to introduce an innovative voice to the American public. His non-fiction writing shares a common attribute with his novels—the exceptional ability to craft stories that illuminate higher literary truths. He revealed these truths through self-examination, through immersive reporting, and through the craft of storytelling. Crews opened his novel *The Gypsy's Curse* by quoting photographer Diane Arbus: "My favorite thing is to go where I've never been."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, his inclination toward exploration, both inward and outward, was the engine that drove his work. This review of his non-fiction writing shows a unique contribution to the field that should be studied along with some of the more celebrated literary journalists of the era.

Notes

- ¹ Harry Crews, interview by author, Gainesville, Florida, 22 September 2007.
- ² E.W. Johnson and Tom Wolfe, eds., *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
- ³ Marc Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight: Wolfe, Thompson, Didion and the New Journalism Revolution* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 8.
- ⁴ Harry Crews, interview by author, Gainesville, Florida, 23 May 2007. Pearce, in fact, was instrumental in getting Crews first novel, *The Gospel Singer*, published in 1968. The novel had been accepted by a publisher but had been languishing for more than a year. Pearce retrieved the manuscript and helped Crews find an alternate publisher. Pearce also wrote both fiction and non-fiction articles for *Playboy* during the 1970s.
- ⁵ In one Crews' novel, *Where Does One Go When There Is No Place To Go* (1995), characters from other Crews' novels kidnap a character named "Harry Crews." Another example is Crews' first novel, *The Gospel Singer* (1967), in which the protagonist is a singer who emerges from a small Southern town to achieve notoriety nationally, then returns to his hometown and finds himself unable to relate to his relatives and the townspeople. The protagonist in *The Hawk Is Dying* (1973) is a Gainesville, Florida, hawk trainer. Crews wrote the novel while living in Gainesville and immersing himself in hawk training.
- ⁶ Harry Crews, *Classic Crews* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 14.
- ⁷ Damon Sauve, "Keeping Up With Harry Crews," in *Perspectives on Harry Crews*, ed. Erik Bledsoe (Jackson, Miss.: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 197. Crews also published his critically acclaimed autobiography, *Childhood: A Sense of Place*, in 1978. Themes and episodes that appeared in *Childhood* also appear in some of his magazine article.
- ⁸ Stanley Baran and Dennis Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, 5th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 308–314.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 183.
- ¹⁰ Crews taught creative writing in the English Department at the University of Florida from 1968 through 1997.
- ¹¹ Thomas Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 3.
- ¹² Weingarten, *The Gang*, 6.
- ¹³ Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Press, 2007), 262.
- ¹⁴ Kay Bonetti, "An Interview with Harry Crews," in *Getting Naked With Harry Crews*, ed. Erik Bledsoe (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1999), 168.

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- ¹⁵ Erik Bledsoe, ed., *Getting Naked With Harry Crews: Interviews*, (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1999), 6.
- ¹⁶ Crews' use of "freaks" in his fiction, and indeed in his journalism, is often traced to this time in his life, when he said people would come from across Bacon County to stare at him and his condition.
- ¹⁷ Harry Crews, *A Childhood: Biography of a Place* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Crews writes: "In memory I stand there alone with the knowledge of death upon me, watching steam rising from my hands and clothes.... I still had not fallen, and I stood there participating in my own butchering" (page 118).
- ¹⁸ Crews wrote about his experiences at Parris Island in the article "Building Men the Marine Corps Way" in the September 1976 issue of *Esquire*.
- ¹⁹ Crews, *Childhood*, 64. Crews writes: "I first became fascinated with the Sears catalogue because all the people in its pages were perfect. Nearly everybody I knew had something missing, a finger cut off, a toe split, an ear half-chewed away, an eye clouded with blindness from a glancing fence staple. And if they didn't have something missing, they were carrying scars from barbed wire, knives or fishhooks. But the people in the catalogue had no such hurts."
- ²⁰ Skip Hulett and Rebecca Winfrey, Collection Finding Aid, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, 7.
- ²¹ Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 11.
- ²² William Walsh, *Speak So I Shall Know Thee: Interviews with Southern Writers* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1990).
- ²³ Hulett & Winfrey, *Collection Finding Aid*, 7.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Harry Crews, "Fathers, Sons, Blood," *Playboy*, January 1985, 111.
- ²⁶ Crews, *Classic Crews*, 11. Crews' story "The Unattached Smile" was published in *Sewanee Review* in 1963, and his story "A Long Wail" appeared in the *Georgia Review* the following year.
- ²⁷ Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 14.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 3.
- ³⁰ Gary L. Long, "Silences, Criticisms and Laments: The Political Implications of Harry Crews's Work," in *Perspectives on Harry Crews*, ed. Erik Bledsoe, (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 47.
- ³¹ Laurence Gonzales to Harry Crews, 3 May 1974, Box 5, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries. Gonzales was

introduced to the work of Crews by Geoffrey Norman, the articles editor at *Playboy* at the time. The two were instrumental in recruiting Crews to write for *Playboy*.

- ³² William E. Farrell, "Hefner Sees Bright Future for Playboy Empire Despite Critics," *The New York Times*, 11 March 1974, 45.
- ³³ Laurence Gonzales, telephone interview by author, Gainesville, Florida, 28 October 2007. Gonzales joined the staff of *Playboy* in 1972, not long after graduating from Northwestern. He stayed with the magazine for six years, eventually moving up the masthead to articles editor.
- ³⁴ Ibid. Gonzales was instrumental in bringing Thompson to the magazine.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Bonetti, "An Interview with Harry Crews," 168.
- ³⁷ Laurence Gonzales to Harry Crews, 10 September 1974, Box 5, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.
- ³⁸ William McKeen, *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 137, 147. McKeen chronicles how Thompson developed what would become his signature style of building his narrative around his own bizarre attempts to "get the story," first writing for *Playboy* an article titled "The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy" and, more famously, covering the Kentucky Derby for *Scanlon's* magazine for an article that was eventually titled "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved." Of the second article, McKeen writes: "The Derby ended up playing a minor, almost off-camera role in the story. In fact, Hunter wound up writing the story not only about trying to write the story, but also about trying to guide Ralph (Steadman's) illustrations."
- ³⁹ Harry Crews, "Going Down in Valdez," in *Blood and Grits* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 51.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. In an oft-told Crews anecdote, described in detail in "Valdez," Crews returned from Alaska with a tattoo of a hinge on his elbow. He recounts in the article that he awoke after a night of drinking with the tattoo and did not remember receiving it. A \$50 charge for the tattoo was included in his expense report to *Playboy*.
- ⁴¹ Gonzales, interview, 2007.
- ⁴² *Playboy* selected "Going Down in Valdez" as its best non-fiction piece of 1975. Joseph M. Flora and Amber Vogel, eds., *Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2006) 89–90.
- ⁴³ Harry Crews, "Charles Bronson Ain't No Pussycat," *Playboy*, October 1975, 118–120, 128, 218, 220–224. The article was published in the Crews' 1979 collection *Blood and Grits* under the title "The Knuckles of Saint Bronson." Crews was upset with both the new title and an illustration *Playboy* used that pictured Bronson's head on the body of a pit bull. He later wrote a letter to the actor apologizing for the illustration.

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- ⁴⁴ Gonzales, interview, 2007. Crews would maintain a relationship with Bronson throughout the years. Crews had a small part in the Sean Penn film *The Indian Runner*, in which Bronson also appeared.
- ⁴⁵ Gay Talese, "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," *Esquire*, April 1966.
- ⁴⁶ Harry Crews, "The Knuckles of St. Bronson," in *Blood and Grits*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 106.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, 111.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 125.
- ⁴⁹ Harry Crews, "The Buttondown Terror of David Duke," *Playboy*, February 1980, 102–104, 164, 197–198, 200.
- ⁵⁰ Karlyn Barker, "A Resurgence by the Klan: Symbol of Racism Exploits New Tensions," *The Washington Post*, 2 June 1980, A1–A2.
- ⁵¹ Crews, "The Buttondown Terror," 164.
- ⁵² Starting with his first novel, *The Gospel Singer* (1968), the discourse between poor whites and blacks in the Deep South was an undercurrent in Crews' fiction. In *The Gospel Singer*, for example, the character Willalee Bookatee Hull, an African-American accused of murder, contemplates the reaction of the townsfolk in Enigma, Georgia, where the novel is set: "The most frightening aspect of his crime was that everyone in Enigma had apparently forgotten his name. He had suddenly become 'the' nigger or 'that' nigger, but never Willalee Booker Hull" (p. 11). Scholars have noted this tendency in Crews' work: "Crews's narrators inevitably maintain dehumanizing social discourse about African Americans, but actual events commonly belie them." Jerrilyn McGregory, "Harry Crews's Home Place: An Excursion into Wiregrass Country and the Carnavalesque," in *Perspectives on Harry Crews*, ed. Erik Bledsoe (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 100. Author Larry Baker echoed these sentiments in 2007: "Here's an odd thing about Crews's fiction. Overall, black people are secondary figures. Racism is there, but it is not his focus. Crews has three characters in his fiction: region, race and class. The region is American South; the race is Southern white; the class ranges from poor to marginal middle class." Larry Baker, "If I Do My Job Right: Harry Crews and His Readers," *Georgia Review* 61, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 690.
- ⁵³ Crews, "The Buttondown Terror," 198.
- ⁵⁴ Harry Crews to James Morgan, 16 July 1979, Box 6, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries. In the letter, Crews goes on to compare Duke to Hitler: "There was a time when Hitler had no more than two thousand followers and he was laughed at and called a Boy Scout and scorned for his strange ways. Ten years later he owned Germany. A melodramatic observation perhaps. But we ought to remind ourselves from time to time that it is only the truth. It did happen."

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- ⁵⁵ Associated Press, "David Duke Pleads Guilty to Tax Charge and Fraud," 19 December 2002. Duke's high-water mark in national politics was the 1991 election for Louisiana governor, when he finished second to Edwin Edwards with 39 percent of the vote. In 2002 he was convicted of tax fraud and served time in prison.
- ⁵⁶ Harry Crews, interview by author, Gainesville, Florida, 10 October 2007.
- ⁵⁷ Harry Crews, "A Walk in the Country," in *Blood and Grits*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).
- ⁵⁸ Harry Crews, "Carny," in *Blood and Grits*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Crews has famously created numerous fictional characters characterized by some as "freaks." He acknowledges that he became enamored with freaks while working as a caller at the ten-in-one show at a carnival. During this time he had a "painful and wondrous moment of self-discovery" that influenced his outlook and writing from then on. This anecdote is discussed in "Carny."
- ⁵⁹ Harry Crews, "Fathers, Sons, Blood," *Playboy*, January 1985, 111.
- ⁶⁰ Geoffrey Norman, "Pages from the Life of a Georgia Innocent" (editor's note), *Esquire*, July 1976, 30. Crews wrote 14 installments of the *Grits* column between July 1976 and October 1977.
- ⁶¹ Crews, interview, 10 October 2007.
- ⁶² Barbara Nellis, telephone interview by author, Gainesville, Florida, 27 November 2007. Nellis was an assistant editor and associate editor at *Playboy* from 1970 until 2003.
- ⁶³ Geoffrey Norman to Harry Crews, 29 April 1976, Box 6, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.
- ⁶⁴ Crews, "The Wonderful World of Winnebagos," in *Blood and Grits*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).
- ⁶⁵ Harry Crews, "Building Men the Marine Corps Way," *Esquire*, September 1976, 22–24, 50.
- ⁶⁶ Harry Crews, "Climbing the Tower," in *Classic Crews* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 437.
- ⁶⁷ Crews, *Classic Crews*, Introduction, 16.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 442.
- ⁶⁹ Hank Nuwer, "The Writer Who Plays With Pain: Harry Crews," in *Getting Naked With Harry Crews*, ed. Erik Bledsoe (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1999), 211.
- ⁷⁰ Grace Lichtenstein, "Esquire Magazine Sold to Felker With the Help of British Publisher," *The New York Times*, 27 August 1977, 27.
- ⁷¹ Geoffrey Norman, telephone interview by author, Gainesville, Florida, 4 December 2007. Felker's tenure at *Esquire* lasted less than two years. After losing nearly five million

dollars annually, the magazine was sold to the 13-30 Corporation, a Tennessee publishing company that returned to monthly publication.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Damon Sauve, "A Large and Startling Figure: The Harry Crews Online Bibliography," Retrieved 7 January 2011 from <http://www.harrycrews.org/Nonfiction/Essays/index.html#Esquire>

⁷⁴ Harry Crews, "Television's Junkyard Dog," in *Blood and Grits*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 134.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 142.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 145.

⁷⁷ Walt Harrington, ed., *The Beholder's Eye: A Collection of America's Finest Personal Journalism* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), xxii. The Crews' article "A Day at the Dogfights," which first appeared in *Esquire* in 1979, is included in this collection.

⁷⁸ Crews, interview, 22 September 2007.

⁷⁹ Harry Crews to John Hawkins, 24 March 1979, Box 6, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

⁸⁰ Harry Crews, "Comeuppance at Gatornationals, in *Florida Frenzy* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1982), 77–85.

⁸¹ Harry Crews, "Tip on a Live Jockey," in *Florida Frenzy* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1982), 16–24.

⁸² Melody Sharp to Harry Crews, 8 February 1979, Box 6, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

⁸³ Harry Crews, "Mary Steenburgen: Born with a Gift," *Playgirl*, September 1983, 12–13.

⁸⁴ Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 18.

⁸⁵ An excerpt from *Childhood* first appeared in *Penthouse* in November 1978.

⁸⁶ Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 18.

⁸⁷ Harry Crews, "Madonna Goes the Distance," *Fame*, December 1988, 88–97.

⁸⁸ Harry Crews, *Madonna at Ringside* (Northridge, Calif.: Lord John Press, 1991).

⁸⁹ Harry Crews, "Sean Penn Lives to Tell," *Fame*, February 1990.

⁹⁰ Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 19.

⁹¹ Harry Crews to James Morgan, undated, Box 11, Harry Crews Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

⁹² Norman, interview, 2007.

⁹³ Ibid.

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- ⁹⁴ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Books of the Times," *The New York Times*, 6 February 1979, CJ8.
- ⁹⁵ Frank Shelton, "The Nonfiction of Harry Crews: A Review," *Southern Literary Journal* 16 (Spring 1984): 132.
- ⁹⁶ Sims, *True Stories*, 222.
- ⁹⁷ Ted Morgan, "Occasional Pieces," *The New York Times*, 25 March 1979, BR7.
- ⁹⁸ Richard Fuller, "Open Letter to a Good Old Boy," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 March 1979, 19H.
- ⁹⁹ Nuwer, "The Writer Who Plays With Pain," 210.
- ¹⁰⁰ Crews was an admirer of Thompson's work. The two met in San Francisco in the late 1960s, and Crews was aware of Thompson's style of journalism (Crews, interview, 22 September 2007). Thompson and Crews are also alike in that their drinking exploits and outrageous behavior, often exaggerated in the retelling, created a persona that often colored the public perception of them and their writing. Thompson often said that efforts to live up to his public persona negatively affected his writing. Crews also felt that his reputation overshadowed his work. "I mean, more people are more interested, it seems, in talking about what I'm supposed to have done and what I still do than they are interested in my books," he told an interviewer in 1997. Erik Bledsoe, "An Interview with Harry Crews," in *Perspectives on Harry Crews*, ed. Erik Bledsoe (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2001) 173.
- ¹⁰¹ Norman, interview, 2007.
- ¹⁰² Bledsoe, *Getting Naked*, 3.
- ¹⁰³ Bonetti, "An Interview with Harry Crews," 160.
- ¹⁰⁴ Crews, "Going Down In Valdez," 51.
- ¹⁰⁵ Of fiction writers turned journalists, Norman Mailer shares much in common with Crews. In 1967 Mailer wrote *Armies of the Night*, a chronicle of an anti-Vietnam demonstration in which he took part. He reported the event as a philosophical drama in which he examined his own actions and reactions toward the demonstration. Crews fiction and non-fiction are similar in that the action is always viewed through the prism of the protagonist or the writer.
- ¹⁰⁶ Harry Crews, *The Gypsy's Curse* (New York: Pocket, 1976), 1.