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**Louie Crew**

**In A Manner Of Speaking**

My heavy Oxbridge accent
—linch your molars and route
the sounds through the wisdom teeth—
gave away my mood.

At 29, I left Britain for the US, in 1966,
to teach at a sleepy Southern university
famous for its football team
more than for its scholarship.

Just before the end of my first class,
as I wrote the assignment on the board,
I switched to a heavy Southen dialect:
“If y’all have any questions,
you can meet me in my office
any morning between 9 and 11.”
I turned round. No one smiled.  
They glared, as if I had mocked them.  

Again at the board, I wrote:  
"Which dialect is mine by birthright?  
Raise your hands if British ___ (pause)  
or if Southern ___."  

Everyone mistook me for an alien.  

We talked long after the bell. One student said,  
"But Mr. Crew, I thought that nobody  
who could talk that purty, that convincingly  
would ever admit to bein from heahl!"  

Alabama became a state in 1819,  
43 years after the 13 colonies declared  
independence from Britain.  

To prepare for their first papers,  
my students telephoned dozens of stores  
to ask for routine information,  
first in British, then a few days later, in Suthun.  

They found that the speech of the colonizer  
uniformly privileged persons  
189 years after colonialism  
had allegedly left America.  

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