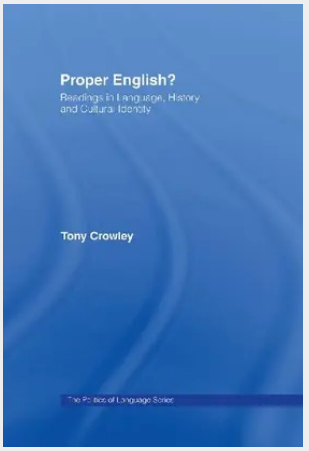
Crowley

Proper English

First published in 1991. Debates about the state and status of the English language are rarely debates about language alone. Closely linked to the question, what is proper English? is another, more significant social question: who are the proper English? The texts in this book have been selected to illustrate the process by which particular forms of English usage are erected and validated as correct and standard. At the same time, the texts demonstrate how a certain group of people, and certain sets of cultural practices are privileged as correct, standard and central. Covering a period of three hundred years, these writers, who include Locke, Swift, Webster, James, Newbolt and Marenbon, wrestle with questions of language change and decay, correct and incorrect usage, what to prescribe and proscribe. Reread in the light of recent debates about cultural identity - how is it constructed and maintained? what are its effects? - these texts clearly demonstrate the formative roles of race, class and gender in the construction of proper ‘Englishness'. Tony Crowley's introductory material breaks new ground in rescuing these texts from the academic backwater of the 'history of the language' and in reasserting the central role of language in history.

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