

W-36490

Proper English?

Readings in Language, History
and Cultural Identity

Tony Crowley

The Politics of Language Series

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 Macnabon, 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.

Tony Crowley is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Southampton, and has taught at the universities of Oxford and Rutgers. He has published widely in the area of language and cultural theory, including *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates* (1989).

The Politics of Language series is edited by Tony Crowley and Talbot J. Taylor.