



A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries, Vol. 2: 1785-1858

Julie Coleman

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The second volume of Julie Coleman's entertaining and revealing history of the recording and uses of slang and criminal cant takes the story from 1785 to 1858, and explores their manifestations in the United States of America and Australia. During this period glossaries of cant were thrown into the shade by dictionaries of slang, which now covered a broad spectrum of non-standard English, including the language of thieves. Julie Coleman shows how Francis Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue revolutionized the lexicography of the underworld. She explores the compilation and content of the earliest Australian and American slang glossaries, whose authors included the thrice-transported James Hardy Vaux and the legendary George Matsell, New York City's first chief of police, whose *The Secret Language of Crime: The Rogue's Lexicon* informed the script of Martin Scorsese's film *Gangs of New York*. Cant represented a tangible danger to life and property, but slang threatened to undermine good behaviour and social morality. Julie Coleman shows how and why they were at once repellent and seductive. Her fascinating account casts fresh light on language and life in some of the darker regions of Great Britain and the English-speaking world.

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