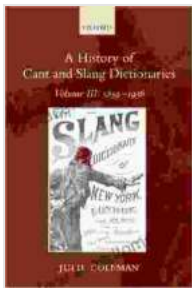


# History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries: Exploring the Hidden Language of the Streets

Language is a living, breathing entity, constantly evolving and adapting to the changing needs and perspectives of its speakers. This evolution is particularly evident in the realm of cant and slang, the non-standard vocabulary used by specific groups of people, often to communicate in secret or to express a shared sense of identity.



## A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries: Volume III:

**1859-1936** by Julie Coleman

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Cant and slang dictionaries have played a crucial role in documenting and preserving this hidden language, providing insights into the lives, culture, and values of the people who use it. In this article, we will explore the rich history of cant and slang dictionaries, from their humble beginnings to their modern-day applications.

## The Origins of Cant and Slang

The origins of cant and slang can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when marginalized groups such as thieves, beggars, and prostitutes developed their own secret languages to avoid detection and persecution. These early

forms of cant and slang were often based on existing words and phrases, but with modified meanings or pronunciations.

As society became more complex, so too did the use of cant and slang. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the rise of criminal underworld led to the development of specialized cant languages, known as "thieves' cant" or "peddlers' French." These languages were highly secretive, with words and phrases that were known only to initiates.

### **The First Cant and Slang Dictionaries**

The first known cant and slang dictionary was published in England in 1567, under the title "A Dictionarie of the Canting Crew." This dictionary, compiled by a former thief named Harman, provided a glossary of over 500 cant words and phrases, along with their standard English equivalents.

Over the next few centuries, a number of other cant and slang dictionaries were published, including Grose's "A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue" (1785) and Hotten's "A Dictionary of Slang and Cant" (1859). These dictionaries not only provided definitions of cant and slang words, but also included valuable historical and cultural context.

### **The Modern Era**

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the study of cant and slang has become increasingly popular, with scholars from a variety of disciplines recognizing the importance of these non-standard forms of language for understanding the social and cultural history of different groups.

This increased interest has led to the publication of a number of new cant and slang dictionaries, including "The Oxford Dictionary of Slang" (1998)

and "The Dictionary of American Slang" (2006). These dictionaries are essential resources for linguists, historians, and anyone interested in the evolution of language.

## **Types of Cant and Slang Dictionaries**

Cant and slang dictionaries can be divided into two main types: historical and contemporary.

**Historical dictionaries** focus on documenting the cant and slang of a particular period in history. These dictionaries are invaluable for scholars studying the language and culture of past eras.

**Contemporary dictionaries**, on the other hand, focus on the cant and slang that is currently in use. These dictionaries are essential for anyone who wants to stay up-to-date on the latest slang terms and expressions.

## **Uses of Cant and Slang Dictionaries**

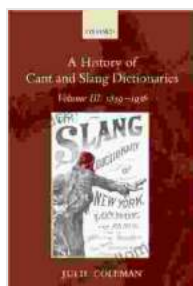
Cant and slang dictionaries have a wide range of uses, including:

- **Linguistic research:** Cant and slang dictionaries provide valuable data for linguists studying the evolution of language and the relationship between language and culture.
- **Historical research:** Cant and slang dictionaries can provide insights into the lives and culture of marginalized groups, as well as the development of criminal underworld.
- **Literary analysis:** Cant and slang dictionaries can help readers understand the use of non-standard language in literature, particularly in works that feature characters from marginalized backgrounds.

- **Everyday use:** Cant and slang dictionaries can be a fun and informative way to learn about the hidden language of different groups and to stay up-to-date on the latest slang terms.

Cant and slang dictionaries are essential tools for anyone interested in the evolution of language and the culture of marginalized groups. These dictionaries provide a unique window into the hidden world of non-standard vocabulary, revealing the creativity, resilience, and diversity of human expression.

Whether you are a linguist, historian, literary scholar, or simply someone who is fascinated by the hidden language of the streets, I encourage you to explore the rich and fascinating world of cant and slang dictionaries.



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