



The Lexicographer's Dilemma: The Evolution of 'Proper' English, from Shakespeare to South Park

Jack Lynch

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In its long history, the English language has had many lawmakers—those who have tried to regulate or otherwise organize the way we speak. *The Lexicographer's Dilemma* poses a pair of questions—what does proper English mean, and who gets to say what's right? Our ideas of correct or proper English have a history, and today's debates over the state of the language—whether about Ebonics in schools, the unique use of language in a South Park episode, or split infinitives in the *Times*—make sense only in historical context. As historian Jack Lynch has discovered, every rule has a human history, and the characters who populate his narrative are as interesting for their obsessions as for their erudition. Charting the evolution of English with wit and intelligence, he provides a rich historical perspective that makes us appreciate a new the hard-won standards we now enjoy.

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