



The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary

By Simon Winchester

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New York Times Bestseller

Simon Winchester's classic about the making of the Oxford English Dictionary—soon to be a major motion picture starring Sean Penn and Mel Gibson.

The making of the Oxford English Dictionary was one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken. As definitions were collected, the overseeing committee, led by Professor James Murray, was stunned to discover that one man, Dr. W. C. Minor, had submitted more than ten thousand. But their surprise would pale in comparison to what they were about to discover when the committee insisted on honoring him. For Dr. Minor, an American Civil War veteran, was also an inmate at an asylum for the criminally insane.

Masterfully researched and eloquently written, *The Professor and the Madman* is an extraordinary tale of madness, genius, and the incredible obsessions of two remarkable men that led to the making of the Oxford English Dictionary—and literary history.

“The linguistic detective story of the decade.... Winchester does a superb job of historical research.”—William Safire, *New York Times Magazine*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The compilation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 70 years in the making, was an intellectually heroic feat with a twist worthy of the greatest mystery fiction: one of its most valuable contributors was a criminally insane American physician, locked up in an English asylum for murder. British stage actor Simon Jones leads us through this uncommon meeting of minds (the other belonging to self-educated dictionary editor James Murray) at full gallop. Ultimately, it's hard to say which is more remarkable: the facts of this amazingly well-researched story, or the sound of author Simon Winchester's erudite prose. Jones's reading smoothly transports listeners to the 19th century, reminding us why so many brilliant people obsessively set out to catalogue the English language. This unabridged version contains an interview between Winchester and John Simpson, editor of the Oxford dictionary. (Running time: 6.5 hours, 6 cassettes) --Lou Schuler

From Publishers Weekly

The Oxford English Dictionary used 1,827,306 quotations to help define its 414,825 words. Tens of thousands of those used in the first edition came from the erudite, moneyed American Civil War veteran Dr. W.C. Minor—all from a cell at the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. Vanity Fair contributor Winchester (River at the Center of the World) has told his story in an imaginative if somewhat superficial work of historical journalism. Sketching Minor's childhood as a missionary's son and his travails as a young field surgeon, Winchester speculates on what may have triggered the prodigious paranoia that led Minor to seek respite in England in 1871 and, once there, to kill an innocent man. Pronounced insane and confined at Broadmoor with his collection of rare books, Minor happened upon a call for OED volunteers in the early 1880s. Here on more solid ground, Winchester enthusiastically chronicles Minor's subsequent correspondence with editor Dr. J.A.H. Murray, who, as Winchester shows, understood that Minor's endless scavenging for the first or best uses of words became his saving *raison d'être*, and looked out for the increasingly frail man's well-being. Winchester fills out the story with a well-researched mini-history of the OED, a wonderful demonstration of the lexicography of the word "art" and a sympathetic account of Victorian attitudes toward insanity. With his cheeky way with a tale ("It is a brave and foolhardy and desperate man who will perform an autopeotomy" he writes of Minor's self-mutilation), Winchester celebrates a gloomy life brightened by devotion to a quietly noble, nearly anonymous task. Photos not seen by PW. Agent, Peter Matson. BOMC selection.

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From School Library Journal

YA-This unusual and exciting account centers on two men involved in the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary-Professor James Murray, its editor, and Dr. William Chester Minor, a true Connecticut Yankee who was one of the resource's most prolific contributors. The most surprising aspect of this long and productive partnership was that Dr. Minor, probably a schizophrenic, was incarcerated in England's most notorious insane asylum during the whole of their working relationship. He was a scholar and medical doctor whose fragile mental condition was probably exacerbated by duty as a surgeon during the American Civil War. His imprisonment was not harsh and his devotion to the cause of the dictionary and his precise and prolific contributions probably helped him hold on to some sense of reality. Winchester's descriptions of Civil War battlefields and the search for definitions of words such as aardvark or elephant are intriguing and compelling. This is a fine tale for both word lovers and history buffs. The momentum of the beginning scenes of warfare and murder are followed, not disappointingly, by descriptions of the trials and tribulations of dictionary crafting. Readers will meet some extraordinary men and an unusual woman, and find

themselves well and truly ensconced in the late 19th century.

Susan H. Woodcock, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christi Ross:

Information is provisions for those to get better life, information these days can get by anyone at everywhere. The information can be a knowledge or any news even restricted. What people must be consider when those information which is within the former life are hard to be find than now could be taking seriously which one is suitable to believe or which one the particular resource are convinced. If you get the unstable resource then you obtain it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen within you if you take The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary as the daily resource information.

James Stewart:

The book with title The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary has lot of information that you can understand it. You can get a lot of help after read this book. That book exist new knowledge the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world currently. That is important to you to know how the improvement of the world. This book will bring you throughout new era of the internationalization. You can read the e-book in your smart phone, so you can read the idea anywhere you want.

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