

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

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A New York Times Notable Book Now a Major Motion Picture

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 making of the OED 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 the linguistic detective story of the decade." (William Safire, New York Times Magazine)

This P.S. edition features an extra 16 pages of insights into the book, including author interviews, recommended reading, and more.

When the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary put out a call during the late 19th century pleading for "men of letters" to provide help with their mammoth undertaking, hundreds of responses came forth. Some helpers, like Dr. W.C. Minor, provided literally thousands of entries to the editors. But Minor, an American expatriate in England and a Civil War veteran, was actually a certified lunatic who turned in his dictionary entries from the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. Simon Winchester has produced a mesmerizing coda to the deeply troubled Minor's life, a life that in one sense began with the senseless murder of an innocent British brewery worker that the deluded Minor believed was an assassin sent by one of his numerous "enemies."

Winchester also paints a rich portrait of the OED's leading light, Professor James Murray, who spent more than 40 years of his life on a project he would not see completed in his lifetime. Winchester traces the origins of the drive to create a "Big Dictionary" down through Murray and far back into the past; the result is a fascinating compact history of the English language (albeit admittedly more interesting to linguistics enthusiasts than historians or true crime buffs). That Murray and Minor, whose lives took such wildly disparate turns yet were united in their fierce love of language, were able to view one another as peers and foster a warm friendship is just one of the delicately turned subplots of this compelling book. --Tjames Madison

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, masterfully researched and eloquently written, 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 compilation of the OED began in 1857, it was one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken. As definitions were collected, the overseeing committee, led by Professor James Murray, discovered that one man, Dr. W. C.

Minor, had submitted more than ten thousand. When the committee insisted on honoring him, a shocking truth came to light: Dr. Minor, an American Civil War veteran, was also an inmate at an asylum for the criminally insane.

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Other Books

Inventing English, A history of English from the age of Beowulf to the rap of Eminem, "written with real authority, enthusiasm and love for our unruly and exquisite language" (The Washington Post). Many have written about the evolution of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, but only Seth Lerer situates these developments within the larger history of English, America, and literature. This edition of his "remarkable linguistic investigation" (Booklist) features a new chapter on the influence of biblical translation and an epilogue on the relationship of English speech to writing. A unique blend of historical and personal narrative, both "erudite and accessible" (The Globe and Mail), Inventing English is the surprising tale of a language that is as dynamic as the people to whom it belongs. "Lerer is not just a scholar; he's also a fan of English—his passion is evident on every page of this examination of how our language came to sound—and look—as it does and how words came to have their current meanings...the book percolates with creative energy and will please anyone intrigued by how our richly variegated language came to be."—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ . The Great Vowel Shift and the Changing Character of English Baugh , Albert C ., and Thomas Cable . A History of the English Language . 5th ed . Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2004. Crotch, W.J.B. The Prologues and Epilogues of ..."