Professor And The Madman Essay, Research Paper

In The Professor and the Madman, the author, Simon Winchester, does an excellent job of paralleling the history of the making of the Oxford English Dictionary with a touching story of friendship between the dictionary?s editor, Professor Murray, and a notable contributor to the dictionary, Dr. Minor. Simon Winchester provides an interesting background as to how the Oxford English Dictionary, one of the world?s greatest books, came to existence. He includes a genealogy of the lives of the two main characters, Dr. Minor, who is in a mental institution for killing a man, and Professor Murray, a dedicated editor to the Oxford English Dictionary. Winchester also includes a brief history of the lack of dictionaries in the 1800?s. As for Winchester?s style, he colors the novel with a sympathetic touch to the tragic story. He illustrates Dr. Minor as a ? sensitive and intelligent man, a graduate of Yale, and well read and curious? (Winchester 113). Interspersed in the story are definitions such as: lunatic, murderer, elephant and others. These definitions usually occur at the beginning of a new chapter and add emphasis to the themes of the factual tale.

The Professor and the Madman is a story based on fact about murder, madness, and the construction of the Oxford English Dictionary. It is a tale about the companionship of two men, who were both actively involved in the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary. Dr. Minor serves as a surgeon in the Civil war, where he endures horrific sights. Dr. Minor?s experiences in the war are believed to be the leading cause of his madness. As a result of Minor?s insanity he kills a man during a delusional state, which lands him a place in a mental institution. It is during Minor?s stay in the Broadmoar Criminal Lunatic Asylum in which he begins writing thousands of definitions to contribute to the dictionary. After several volumes of the dictionary had been completed, Professor Murray meets with Minor, the man who had contributed so much of his time to the prolific cause. The two men play a large role in the making of the biggest dictionary in their time period. Newer editions of the Oxford English Dictionary still exist today and in the words of Simon Winchester, ?The [Oxford English Dictionary] was the heroic creation of a legion of interested and enthusiastic men and women of wide general knowledge and interest; and it lives on today, just as lives the language which it rightly claims to be a portrait? (Winchester 221).