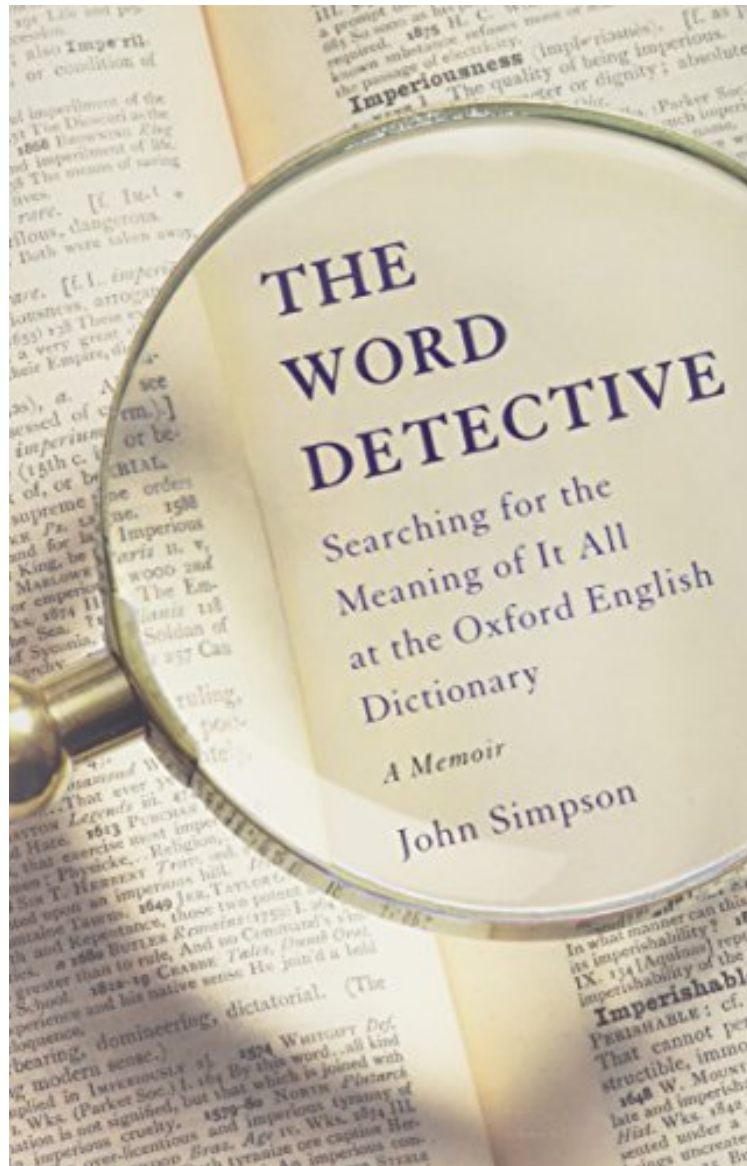


(Free pdf) The Word Detective: Searching for the Meaning of It All at the Oxford English Dictionary

# The Word Detective: Searching for the Meaning of It All at the Oxford English Dictionary

John Simpson

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#365700 in Books Simpson J A 2016-10-25 2016-10-25 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.50 x 1.25 x 6.50l, .0 #File Name: 0465060692384 pages The Word Detective Searching for the Meaning of It All at the Oxford English Dictionary | File size: 31.Mb

**John Simpson : The Word Detective: Searching for the Meaning of It All at the Oxford English Dictionary** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Word Detective: Searching for the Meaning of It All at the Oxford English Dictionary:

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. A Career And A Life Devoted To WordsBy John D. CofieldThe Oxford English Dictionary is one of those towering achievements of scholarship that leaves us all in awe: twenty massive volumes in the original edition, plus supplements; a century's worth of painstaking research that is ongoing and (we trust) never ending. If you've read Simon Winchester's *The Professor And The Madman* and *The Meaning Of It All* you already have a good notion of the enormity of the task the first editors undertook in the OED. Now in *The Word Detective* John Simpson, recently retired Chief Editor, has given us an idea of the even greater enormity of maintaining, updating, and in a sense recreating the OED in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In 1976 Simpson was in his early twenties, recently married and recently graduated with an English degree from the University of York. He applied for an advertised position at the OED more or less at random, was rejected for it, but then soon afterwards offered another post as a lexicographer. He and his wife Hilary (a notable scholar and author in her own right) moved to Oxford and a career was born. Simpson joined the OED at a fortuitous time: the dictionary and the entire world was on the verge of the computer age. Much of Simpson's career from the late 1970s to 2013 was taken up with finding ways to update and enhance the original OED's Victorian era style so that it would fit in with the modern world without sacrificing the scholarship and rigor which made it so valuable. Simpson describes the process of moving from filling out paper index cards to typing on early word processors to assisting in making the entire dictionary available online in an engaging and amusing manner. At the same time Simpson and his wife faced the challenges of making a life together as newlyweds and then of raising two daughters, the younger of whom was born with profound disabilities. *The Word Detective* is a fascinating and very human chronicle of what might seem (wrongly) to be a very dreary and antiquated career. I finished the book with even more appreciation of the vast amount of work Simpson, his colleagues, and his many predecessors have put into the OED. I especially enjoyed the histories of specific words and terms like "niche" and "cham" which Simpson sprinkles through the text. The work of a lexicographer can be thankless and overwhelming at times, but I could understand what drew Simpson to the job and then kept him there for more than thirty five years. Had I applied to the OED in similar circumstances I might well have stayed there myself (for one thing I'm left-handed, which Simpson considers a definite advantage in dictionary work!).

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. For aficionados of the English language and/or the Oxford English DictionaryBy R. M. PetersonJohn Simpson worked on the Oxford English Dictionary for over thirty-five years. Freshly graduated from university, he began researching and writing entries for the Supplement to the First Edition of the OED. He progressed to editor of the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs, then senior editor of the OED, then co-editor of the Second Edition of the OED ("OED2"), and finally, until his retirement in 2013, the chief editor of the OED3 -- which is still in progress. *THE WORD DETECTIVE* is Simpson's memoir of his career with the OED; at the same time, it provides a window on the OED, the practice of lexicography, and the English language. Simpson is a good and lively writer. He interjects both humor and occasional diversions into his account. The book is neither stodgy nor pedantic, and it proceeds in an admirably relaxed fashion. Simpson tends to be a tad verbose and he occasionally explains things in a roundabout discursive manner, but those are not major shortcomings. One of the charms of the book are the many sidebars in which Simpson focuses on a word or phrase he has used in the text proper and provides a brief (one or two pages) history or etymology of that term. These sidebars are almost invariably intriguing ("intrigue" is the very first such sidebar). The text itself contains a few lengthier, equally interesting, discussions of particular phrases or words -- such as "the thin red line", "gay", and the ancient word, which censors, for having sexual intercourse (either transitive or intransitive). Interspersed in the account of the OED and lexicographical matters are brief passages relating to Simpson's personal life. Simpson handles this aspect of the book quite adroitly, better than in most memoirs focused on the writer's professional life. And in one respect, the personal adds a poignant counterpoint to the book, for Simpson's younger daughter is profoundly disabled, unable to communicate via language. For those whose interest in the English language is keener than ordinary, there are plenty of interesting factoids in the book. For example: "It's often the shortest words that have the most complex history (can, do, set, make, pull, put, red, to, out). There are thirty-eight words which have forty or more main meanings in English: 66 percent of these entered English in the Anglo-Saxon period, and all of them are monosyllables in their basic form; of the remaining 34 percent, only the noun 'quarter' is not monosyllabic." Also quite interesting to me, personally, was the account of the development of the OED itself, including the thinking (and technology) that led to the OED2 and now the on-line and dynamic OED3. Finally, I was impressed with the diligence and thoroughness of the research and scholarship that goes into the OED. It's gratifying to know that such diligence and thoroughness are not altogether pass.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A book about a dictionary. Wow? YES!By Mark PfennigstagOK. It's about the Oxford English Dictionary. So -- stuffy, right? NOT!The author is a past (retired) editor of the most recent update of the OED. He describes in every-day conversational language -- not pretentious scholarly Oxford-ish magniloquence --- how he evolved the OED into a modern phenomenon from its 19th century form, brought it into the 20th century by putting the 20 volume work onto searchable CD, then into the 21st by putting it on-line. The text reveals an often witty and occasionally gently ascerbic author. If you are a word- or language-freak (the big word is 'lexicographer') you'll be entertained and edified. It's a good follow-up to Simon Winchester's *"The Meaning of Everything"* and *"The Professor and the Madman."*

Can you drink a glass of balderdash? What do you call the part of a dog's back it can't scratch? And if, serendipitously, you find yourself in Serendip, then where exactly are you? The answers to all of these questions and a great many more can be found in the pages of the Oxford English Dictionary, the definitive record of the English language. And there is no better guide to the dictionary's many wonderments than the former chief editor of the OED, John Simpson. Simpson spent almost four decades of his life immersed in the intricacies of our language, and guides us through its history with charmingly laconic wit. In *The Word Detective*, an intensely personal memoir and a joyful celebration of English, he weaves a story of how words come into being (and sometimes disappear), how culture shapes the language we use, and how technology has transformed not only the way we speak and write but also how words are made. Throughout, he enlivens his narrative with lively excavations and investigations of individual words from deadline to online and back to 101 (yes, it's a word) all the while reminding us that the seemingly mundane words (can you name the four different meanings of ma?) are often the most interesting ones. But Simpson also reminds us of the limitations of language: spending his days in the OED's house of words, his family at home is forced to confront the challenges of wordlessness. A brilliant and deeply humane expedition through the world of words, *The Word Detective* will delight and inspire any lover of language.

Booklist, starred review Simpson's memoir features entertaining, culturally revealing stories of many curious words, phrases, and roots.... Although scholars and librarians will be particularly interested in the OED history, all readers can enjoy Simpson's sincere and lively memoir. Publishers Weekly Simpson gracefully weaves into his memoir little definitions of words, providing examples of the work of a lexicographer.... Simpson's vibrant and inspiring memoir gives us a glimpse into life as detective in the realm of words. Kirkus s Simpson makes his literary debut with a delightful chronicle of his 40-year career among fellow lexicographers as the dictionary went through the long, painstaking processes of updating, revising, and digitizing its gargantuan number of entries. Unassuming, sly, and often very funny.... A captivating celebration of a life among words. Roanoke Times This easily read and enjoyable memoir could be a chapbook for employees and volunteers who want to accomplish the new in the face of opposition by the guardians of the old. Baltimore Sun, word blog You Don't Say A genial memoir. Wall Street Journal