



## Simon Winchester

**The Professor and the Madman**  
ISBN13: 9780060839789

**In *The Professor and the Madman* and *The Map that Changed the World*, you have written about men whose passion changed the world around them. Is this what draws you to the subject? How do you uncover new topics?**

Both stories seem to me present stories of figures who were essentially decent and honorable men whose contributions to the human condition — made in the face of staggering odds — are enormous, and yet who have since been generally forgotten. The stories of William Minor and William Smith are uplifting, inspiring and encouraging parables — they are stories that cry out to be told, and readers (or at least, those who have been kind enough to write to me) seem very much to like the notion that in my telling the tale, the wrongs of the past have been righted and the unsung heroes have at long last been given their due.

**Your style of writing is very easy to read, and reviewers continually praise the quality of your prose, saying that you are a good historian in part because you are such a good storyteller. Where did you first begin to write?**

I was trained as a scientist — a geologist — and wrote more or less nothing until I became a newspaper reporter in 1967, when I was 23. For the first seven years of my journalistic career I didn't think of ever trying to write more than what was required of me as a reporter: but with the encouragement of a wonderful editor in London, Charles Monteith — he was Philip Larkin's editor, and the discoverer of *Lord of the Flies* — I wrote my first book in 1974. Since then my fascination in the craft of writing has grown almost exponentially!

**What is it like to see *The Professor and the Madman* hit the *New York Times* bestseller list, and bestseller lists around the world? What was the immediate effect? Long term? What did you do to celebrate?**

It was a humbling and unforgettable happening — and for *The Professor and the Madman* to remain on the list for more than a year, more than any other nonfiction book from a British author in recent memory — made me exceptionally proud. I celebrated by buying a snazzy video camera, and a case of Billecart-Saumon Rose champagne, which I have long thought of as the classiest of all champagnes. I had a very large Cuban cigar also.