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The Oxford English Dictionary: Defining Moments

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Abstract

This paper reviews important events in the making of the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*. I trace the development of the *OED* from its conceptual stage to its current stage. By revisiting the controversies and uncertain moments that the *OED* project went through and by sketching the portraits of some of the key individuals involved in the project, I wish to highlight the fact that the *OED* itself is embedded in its social and historical context.

Many have strived to find words to

because in it he introduced the practice of citing the source of information (Willinsky, 1994). Being a translator himself, Joye's critical analysis of Tindale's work includes citations of words' meanings in the context of where and when they were used. This practice of citation, commonly used today in scholarly works, was new and even controversial at the time. The originators of the *OED*, however, followed Joye's insight and built upon his method for defining words, which is to base words' meanings on the context of actual usage, and to provide

What makes the *OED* unique to other dictionaries is that it includes cited entries from great authors such as William Shakespeare and John Milton. For example, compared to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* that was written in the same period as the *OED*, there are thousands more entries in the *OED*. For some words, there were so many sources that the *OED* appointed specific delegates to focus

"to suspect." In addition,

period in the life of a language.
(pp. 312-313)

According to Mugglestone (2005),
even the second edition of the