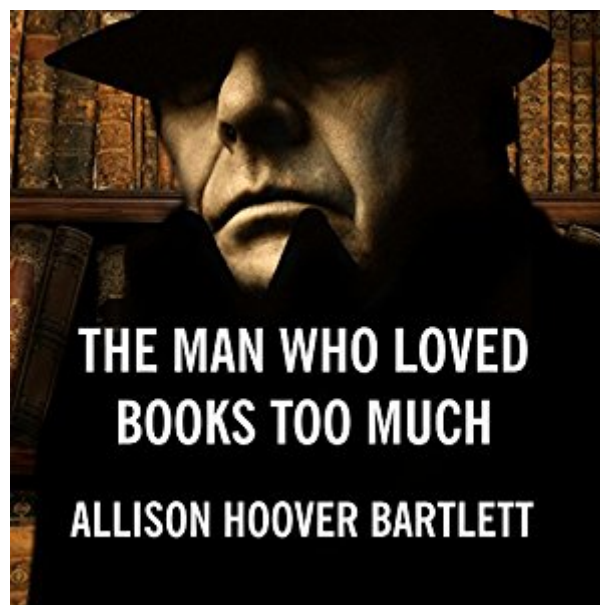




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The Man Who Loved Books Too Much: The True Story Of A Thief, A Detective, And A World Of Literary Obsession



Synopsis

In the tradition of *The Orchid Thief*, a compelling narrative set within the strange and genteel world of rare-book collecting: the true story of an infamous book thief, his victims, and the man determined to catch him. Rare-book theft is even more widespread than fine-art theft. Most thieves, of course, steal for profit. John Charles Gilkey steals purely for the love of books. In an attempt to understand him better, journalist Allison Hoover Bartlett plunged herself into the world of book lust and discovered just how dangerous it can be. Gilkey is an obsessed, unrepentant book thief who has stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of rare books from book fairs, stores, and libraries around the country. Ken Sanders is the self-appointed "bibliodick" (book dealer with a penchant for detective work) driven to catch him. Bartlett befriended both outlandish characters and found herself caught in the middle of efforts to recover hidden treasure. With a mixture of suspense, insight, and humor, she has woven this entertaining cat-and-mouse chase into a narrative that not only reveals exactly how Gilkey pulled off his dirtiest crimes, where he stashed the loot, and how Sanders ultimately caught him but also explores the romance of books, the lure to collect them, and the temptation to steal them. Immersing the reader in a rich, wide world of literary obsession, Bartlett looks at the history of book passion, collection, and theft through the ages, to examine the craving that makes some people willing to stop at nothing to possess the books they love. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Gilkey is a book thief. He loves antiquarian books and feels that he is entitled to them regardless of his ability to pay for them. His best scam was using credit card receipts acquired in his job at a high end department store to finance his book buying habit. Ken Sanderson was the person in charge of documenting thefts of books for the Antiquarian Booksellers Association. It was through the work of Sanderson that Gilkey was charged, jailed, and some of the stolen books recovered. Allison Hoover Bartlett was the journalist who tried to determine what made both men tick. This was not a bad read but it was not a great read. I felt that the author was too enamoured of the thief. I don't have any idea of who would want to read this book. It was a selection of my book club or I probably would not have read it.

This book is partially about the notorious book thief John Gilkey, and the bookseller who became obsessed with catching him, Ken Sanders, and partially about the rare book industry in general. Author Allison Bartlett manages to contact John and repeatedly interview him, exploring the mindset of someone who feels it's really not wrong to "acquire" books without paying for them, since he deserves them. Ken Sanders has spent years trying to defeat book thieves in general, and John in particular. He has become an amateur detective and is able to implement safeguards industry wide to prevent theft, as well as alert booksellers all over to the cons practiced by John. One of my favorite things is a book where I learn something "if it's new information that is presented in an engaging fashion, I am riveted" and this book is full of fascinating tidbits about the rare book industry. As a book lover who loves books for the stories and information within, it is engrossing to read about people who spend fortunes to acquire books that they will never read, or rarely even touch. This is the rare nonfiction book that reads like a detective story "and is just as hard to put down.

As a book-lover, I thought I was going to read a work about a clever bibliophile who lost himself in an obsession. Instead, this is a book about a cheap, petty, thief who steals anything that looks like it will be impressive. His method of theft is clumsy (using stolen credit card numbers), and his knowledge of books is minimal. He victimizes small bookstores for rather modest loot. There is nothing to interest an informed reader. A much better book is *The Map Thief*, whose protagonist knows the world of maps, printing, book selling and history as well as anyone in the field, and whose author demonstrates a substantial knowledge and interest of the subject, and a book that the reader actually can learn something from. But "The Man Who Loved Books Too Much" is so mis-titled it hurts anyone who is interested in books.

The Man Who Loved Books Too Much is a dual tale, focussing both on the world of rare book collecting and the bibliophiles who dominate it, and on the strange tale of a bibliomane, a man who loves books so much that he resorts to stealing them in order to create his dream of a world class collection. I enjoyed this book, though I grew impatient with the book thief's constant self-justifications and arrogance. I got the most pleasure out of the interviews with the owners of the rare book stores he preyed upon. It was also interesting to read of the efforts of the book store owners to track down the book thief and bring him to justice, though it was somewhat frustrating to see him get off time and again with light sentences. I'll keep The Man Who Loved Books in the section of my own library devoted to accounts of bibliophilia, a delightful disease I have "suffered" from for many years.

This is essentially a story about a petty, mostly unsuccessful, con man. Not sure why this author thinks he is deserving of a book. And it is hypocritical for her to criticize his morals when hers are fairly shaken herself. Not to mention the title....this is not a story about a man who loves books but instead a story about a man who loves status. There are many characters in this book who do love books, but the author almost passes them over. Overall, a very disappointing read.

I enjoyed all the talk about what makes someone love old books and treasure them, and it was intriguing to contemplate what would make someone love books so much that he would risk his freedom to obtain them....but I felt the ending was kind of anticlimactic, as if the author just wasn't sure how to end the story. Consequently when I was done I realized I'd enjoyed what I'd learned but I didn't have the sense of being pleased about the end result. The writing is well done, the information is well presented...I just wish there could have been some sort of more satisfying conclusion.

So, to be clear, the author began her quest to write about rare book thievery when a stolen book came into her possession, and, as she wrote the last sentence of the "afterword" the book still resided on her desk. Before I purchased this book (kindlelized), I read the poor reviews, but I could not/would not believe them. The book's main protagonist is a book thief who spends his life in and out of jail. He stores his books in his Mother's house, in his own house, and who knows where else. The secondary character is a book detective, but his story is relatively short.

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