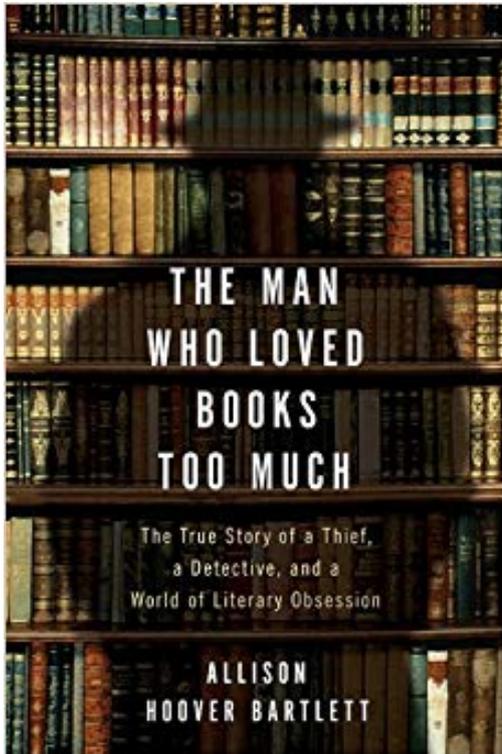


# The Man Who Loved Books Too Much: The True Story Of A Thief, A Detective And A World Of Literary Obsession *by* Allison Bartlett Hoover



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First edition. Great book story telling the true ventures of John Charles Gilkey, bookthief, and the bookseller who caught him, Ken Sanders. x , 274 pages. cloth-backed boards, dust jacket.. 8vo..



## Reviews of the **The Man Who Loved Books Too Much: The True Story Of A Thief, A Detective And A World Of Literary Obsession** *by* Allison Bartlett Hoover

Dog\_Uoll

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.

Camper

When I ordered this book, I thought it would be about Daniel Spiegelman, who in 1994 stole roughly \$1.8 million in priceless books and manuscripts from Columbia University's Butler Library. Although Spiegelman is briefly mentioned in *THE MAN WHO LOVED BOOKS TOO MUCH*, the book is about another notorious rare book thief, John Gilkey. Gilkey, unlike Spiegelman, has apparently never made national news headlines. But "John Gilkey" has become a household word among rare book dealers, particularly those who belong to the Antiquarian Bookseller's Association of America (ABAA).

This book is the end product of the author's extensive series of interviews with Ken Sanders (a rare book dealer and the "bibliodick" who caught Gilkey), other ABAA members, Gilkey's family, and Gilkey himself. Although the author in no way condones Gilkey's criminal behavior, she is relatively kind to him. She allows Gilkey to explain to readers for himself why he steals rare books, by simply reporting, more or less neutrally, on what he told her in their interviews. (Some of the interviews take place while Gilkey is in prison, some take place in downtown San Francisco after he is released from prison.)

To say that Gilkey "loves books" is perhaps an overstatement. He is fixated on the idea of owning a rare book collection, because of the enormous cachet that such a collection enjoys. A rare book collection, after all, tells the world that the owner is unquestionably a person of refinement and taste. Gilkey not only sees nothing wrong with "getting" rare books from book dealers, he hates spending his own money on books. He has schemes that make it easy for him to get rare books "free", and he likes the fact that rare books appreciate in value. Put simply, Gilkey steals rare books because he wants them, and because he can't afford to buy them.

This book provides an interesting look into the mind of an unusual, specialized kind of thief. It also offers insight into the rarified world of rare book collectors and dealers. It tells a story, is well researched, is well written, and includes just the right amount of detail, so that the reader doesn't lose interest. This rates 4.5 stars, rounded down to 4 stars because the subject matter is limited to the exploits of a single book thief.

As it turns out, there is a book written about Spiegelman (*The Book Thief: The True Crimes of Daniel Spiegelman*), which I now hope to be able to read.

Ddilonyne

I found this to be a fascinating, and very well written book. It gives you a very nice feeling for what it's like to be a rare book collector, as well as a rare book seller. There are lots of "insider" nuggets that only intrigued me to learn more about how to collect and appreciate rare books.

In addition, the story of Gilkey vs. Sanders is well documented and very well researched. I didn't get the impression that she was glorifying Gilkey at all! I was left with the impression that he's an unbalanced man with no concept of ownership rights. He exists in a fantasy world, where he is

entitled to all of his desires at no cost to himself.

Sanders, the dealer who ultimately helps bring Gilkey to justice, (at least for awhile), is presented as a complex man. He is definitely the hero of the book, but he has his own quirks and faults, and these are shown by the author as they occurred in her dealings with the man.

I suspect that those who hated the book are projecting their own frustrations with crime in the rare book trade. Too often the theft of a rare book is unappreciated by police/judges/juries, and the thieves walk away with little or no incentive to mend their ways. While Bartlett addresses this at length, I think booksellers may see any presentation of Gilkey as a betrayal.

As a book lover, I never really was interested in pursuing first editions. However, after reading this book, I'm eager to begin my own collection! I found a website for ABAA member bookstores and even bought my first "rare" book. (A first edition, first printing of "Some Kind of Hero" by James Kirkwood with an inscription by the author!) In my opinion, any book about books that can inspire the reader in this manner is not only good for the trade, but a damn good read in the bargain!

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