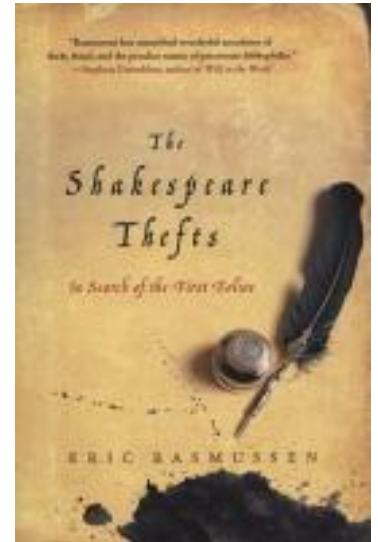


“The Shakespeare Thefts: in Search of the First Folios” by Eric Rasmussen. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. \$24.00, 212 pages.

In 2008, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. was approached by a man who wanted to have his copy of the First Folio authenticated. Raymond Rickett Scott, a British citizen, who claimed to have procured this copy in Cuba from one of Fidel Castro’s bodyguards, caused a bit of a sensation with this request. Even at the Folger, it’s not every day that someone just shows up out of the blue with a previously unknown copy of the First Folio.

The printing of Shakespeare’s First Folio in 1623 gave birth to somewhere between 750 and 1,000 copies of one of the most coveted rare books in the world. Now, almost 400 years later, only 232 copies are known to remain; and Shakespearean scholars, bibliophiles and collectors around the globe yearn to possess, examine, or simply be in the presence of a copy of this seminal work.

Eric Rasmussen, a noted Shakespearean scholar and a team of First Folio hunters have spent more than a decade traveling the world tracking down as many of these 232 copies as possible. Their goal was to create a definitive record of every existing First Folio, detailing page measurements, binding elements, and every single identifying watermark, tear, stain and bit of marginalia on each and every page.



The scholarly result of all that work is “The Shakespeare First Folios: a Descriptive Catalog,” an incredibly detailed and thoroughly exhaustive creation that is of invaluable assistance to scholars, book dealers, and researchers. The more entertaining result of all that work is “The Shakespeare Thefts,” a collection of accounts regarding the long history of deception, greed, obsession, and thievery that have surrounded the First Folio for centuries.

Rasmussen covers a fascinating history filled with compelling tales, from the eccentricities of First Folio owners to the numerous thefts to the copy unintentionally stolen by the Pope, “The Shakespeare Thefts” is sure to interest not just serious Shakespeare scholars but anyone with a taste for history and literature.

And that previously undiscovered copy presented at the Folger? Stolen. From Durham University in England in 1998, and identified by its unique measurements and a missing triangular piece of paper as distinctive as a fingerprint.

Rebekah Scott is a reference librarian at May Memorial Public Library. Visit us on the web at www.alamancelibraries.org.