

## Take a look inside the world of rare book collecting.

**“The Man Who Loved Books Too Much: the True Story of a Thief, a Detective, and a World of Literary Obsession” by Allison Hoover Bartlett. Riverhead Books, 2009. \$24.95, 288 pages.**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines bibliomania as “a rage for collecting and possessing books.” This description could certainly apply to John Gilkey, a man who amassed an impressive collection of rare books over a four year period. Passionate book collectors are not uncommon, but what made Gilkey unusual was his method of obtaining his books. He stole over \$100,000 of rare books from dealers in California using stolen credit cards, and in his mind, he did nothing wrong. He did not steal the books for profit, but simply because he longed to own them. It didn’t seem fair to Gilkey that he could not afford the high price tag of the books he wanted when others could.

In the world of antiquarian booksellers, theft was not always publicized, and it could take months or even years before dealers were notified to be on the lookout for certain titles by which time thieves had already sold the stolen books and moved on. When Ken Sanders, a bookseller in Utah, took over as the security chair of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, he started looking for a better way to notify members of stolen titles, and he encouraged book dealers to let him know when something had been taken from them.

As more and more dealers started reporting thefts to him, Sanders noticed a pattern to many of those in California. A man would call a dealer, purchase a book by credit card, and pick it up soon after. It wouldn’t be until a month later when the cardholders saw their bills that anyone would realize a theft had occurred. It was infuriating to Sanders, and he was determined to catch the man who was defrauding so many of his fellow book dealers.

Originally written as an article for San Francisco Magazine, “The Man Who Loved Books Too Much” is a fascinating look into the obsessive world of book collecting. It is a compelling read that follows both sides of the story, Gilkey in his quest for more books, and Sanders in his pursuit of Gilkey. Bartlett tells the story of these men and how their lives intertwined with skill, and although she becomes a little more entangled in the story than she intended, she remains an excellent storyteller. This book should be an entertaining read for anyone who has ever felt the yearning of a collector’s need to possess.

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