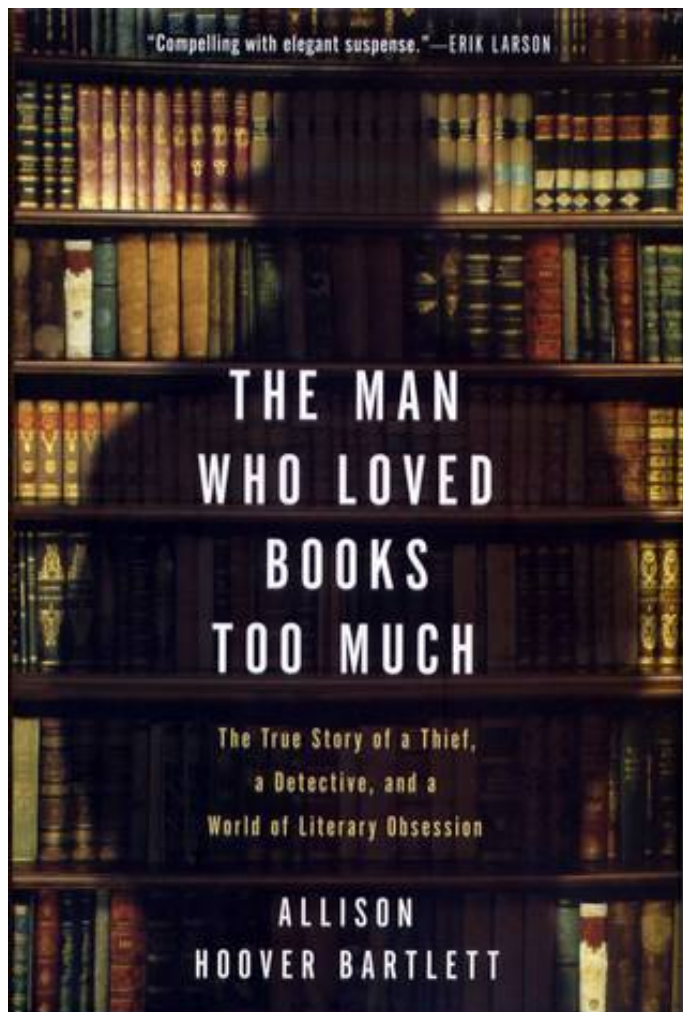

Allison Hoover Bartlett

The Man Who Loved Books Too Much: The True Story of a Thief, a Detective, and a World of Literary Obsession



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Description

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.

Insightful reviews

e.c.h.a: OK...jadi begini ceritanya kenapa buku ini hanya cocok mendapatkan bintang 2 dari saya.

Saat pertama memegang buku ini, jujur saya berharap lebih untuk buku ini. Ingin tahu seberapa besar tokoh-tokoh di buku ini mencintai buku. Tapi kok setelah membacanya, yang ada saya menangkap mereka semua ini tidak cinta buku yah? Atau....mereka mengartikan "cinta" terhadap buku dalam pandangan yang berbeda dengan saya yah?

Saya melihat mereka semua seperti ter-obsesi, hanya mencari keuntungan dari sebuah buku-buku langka. Yah..setidaknya dari sini saya jadi paham kalau buku bisa jadi "aset" juga.

Ada sisi baik dari buku ini buat saya yaitu buku ini memberikan banyak informasi mengenai dunia literatur yang notabene belum saya pahami sangat fasih. Saya dapat ilmu dari buku ini, pengetahuan yang tak ternilai di mata saya.

Saya setuju dengan salah satu pernyataan di buku ini, bahwa seseorang mengoleksi buku

karena **membeli kenangan** bukan cerita dalam buku itu. Yup, saya mengalami ini, mengoleksi beberapa buku hanya karena saya mempunyai kenangan indah terhadap buku tersebut.

Kenangan itu lha yang membuat sebuah buku menjadi mahal..bukan ceritanya tetapi kisah yang mengiringi buku itu...

Bill: Fascinating book about the true story of John Gilkey who over a period of years stole many valuable books, mainly from rare book dealers, usually using stolen credit card numbers. In some ways he was quite ingenious, but the most amazing thing is he really felt no guilt at all. In fact he really deserved these books as far as he was concerned and actually felt the book dealers were to blame for him not being able to afford them. Quite a reprehensible character...in my opinion anybody who steals books should be shot...and at the end of the book he is out of prison and stealing books again. He didn't seem to realize, or care for that matter, that most book dealers, rare or otherwise, barely manage to make ends meet. You only have to look at the huge number of used book dealers who have gone out of business in the last 10 or 20 years. It's very sad. Everybody on Goodreads should read this book as it gives many insights into the rare book business.

M. D. Hudson: This is a true crime book about a rare book thief, John Charles Gilkey, and because said book thief is a third-rate sociopath with tedious narcissistic tendencies, a middling intellect and a shopper's curiosity of the most banal sort, the tale is very, very boring at the heart of it. To be sure, Allison Hoover Bartlett commits a lot of cliffhanger-plot-mongering to inject some interest into her sad sack criminal and his grandiose delusions. But don't be fooled – this is another one of those books that started out as a magazine piece then got stuffed with a lot of junk to expand it to book length. To do so, in what must have been a stupefyingly boring process, Bartlett conducted multiple interviews with Gilkey, in jail and out over a period of years in order to hear essentially the same vulgar aspirations (basically, he wanted a big, impressive wall of impressive books in order to...come across as big and impressive) and vile self-justifications (basically, if somebody else (book store owners) had books he wanted, this was a grave injustice, so in order to right a wrong Gilkey stole 'em). This amounts to a tremendous amount of over-kill, since Gilkey never really had anything new to say and obviously loved having a journalist-audience jotting down every rambling word.

This being said, Gilkey's modus operandi was somewhat interesting in that he pulled it off so easily: he worked at the San Francisco upper crust Saks Fifth Avenue selling clothes and stealing credit card receipts (this was back in the day just before identity theft became a big concern). He would then make rare book purchases over the phone, charging them to the stolen accounts. Because the typical Saks customer is buying \$800 shoes, a \$600 book wasn't really much of a blip in their overall rate of consumer spending, which is to say Gilkey got away with it a lot of the time. Amusingly, he only lost his job at Saks after management tried to force a promotion on him (they were very happy with his performance) at which point their HR department did a more thorough background check. This was after he'd stolen gazillions of credit card receipts. Not surprisingly, nobody at Saks corporate wanted to talk to Bartlett about Gilkey – although she never seemed particularly interested in this angle of the story (although

she did cover it), the way a smoothie like Gilkey (he was polite and well-groomed) can hoodwink an upscale retail company. This was far more interesting than Gilkey's generalized bent morals and repetitive self-justifications. Or even his book stealing.

As is often the case, the people trying to stop the crime were more interesting than the criminal. Ken Sanders a book store owner and security chair for the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America was the force behind the apprehension. Sanders is an energetic free-spirit hippie type, incongruously located in Salt Lake City where he has made for himself a cultural niche that sort of made me love Ken Sanders and America as a whole just for existing. When Sanders started putting together the chain of credit card book thefts (as reported to the ABAA) in California, he latched on to the case with astonishing tenacity. Almost miraculously, a cop who gave a hoot about book thieves materialized, San Jose police detective Ken Munson. Because of their efforts, with a lot of overall booksellers' cooperation, in what is essentially a police procedural kind of way Gilkey finally got his comeuppance and was put behind bars. Then the tediousness sets in: Gilkey was released and stole again. And was jailed again. And was released and stole again... Talk about recidivism! Stealing books does not get you a lot of time in the Big House. Gilkey did not like jail much, but Gilkey is a sociopath – a non-violent one to be sure, but totally deluded and totally without a conscience and a great big book-stealing obsession to boot – so what could be expected of him but more thefts? Bartlett talks to Gilkey a lot about what it “means” to steal and go to jail, etc. Intellectually pretentious but essentially shallow and not particularly curious, Gilkey's conversations with Bartlett are devoid of interest beyond their outrageous low-grade criminality, despite Bartlett's breathless astonishment and bafflement at it all.

One of Bartlett's somewhat oversold plots in this book is the way she got caught up in her story, perhaps to an unethical extent. I was made aware of this book by a review written by my friend Joel Hyde, owner of one of the Midwest's best book stores (Every Other Book, his shop, is in Fort Wayne, IN). Joel told me that there was considerable book shop owners' hostility generated towards author/journalist Allison Hoover Bartlett, who is seen as being far too empathetic with her criminal subject John Charles Gilkey. Bartlett herself reports this hostility. Joel's store has been robbed a couple of times by somebody who knew what he was doing – he took the good stuff, apparently had it all cased ahead of time and then did a snatch-n-run. Which is to say Joel has a keen interest in the stealing of books and preventative measures. He sent me a review of this book he wrote for the Midwest Antiquarian Booksellers Association on-line newsletter, which focused on this aspect and the light it sheds on the journalist's (rather amoral) processes (his review is called “The Journalist Who Wanted Her Story Too Much”). I agree, and yet this isn't exactly one of those big hard-to-crack stories like Watergate. In order to make things more frantic, Bartlett overcooks the minuscule, fairly straightforward situation for affect – did she really need years to get to the bottom of the essentially shallow Gilkey's motives and strategies? To ramp up the voltage, she engages in some fishy scene setting. At one point she accompanies Gilkey to one of the upper-end bookstores he earlier robbed, which is ridiculous in a theatrical, journalistically pointless way. The owner of the shop (Brick Row in San Francisco) immediately recognized Gilkey and was not very nice to him, although he did not throw him out. The whole episode was embarrassing and pathetic (Gilkey walks the shop complaining loudly about how he'd been ripped off by booksellers over the years – Gilkey only very occasionally paid real money of his own for a book, so the outrageousness of this is

obvious if not very interesting). They leave (without stealing anything) and it is hard to tell what the point of this was. When bookseller “bibliodick” Ken Sanders back in Salt Lake City hears about this visit, he explodes in rage at Bartlett for reasons I cannot completely fathom – I saw it rather as another occasion to lose all respect for Bartlett rather than get mad at her. Hers had become the sort of “journalism” where you give Charles Manson a microphone and allow him to rant while you the journalist pucker your brow and frown a lot. That the victims are unhappy about this practice is understandable, but Bartlett’s iffy reporting is not going to generate any sympathy for loony Gilkey or his crimes. More than tapping into the root of some unspeakable evil, her efforts come across merely tactless and journalistically vulgar.

However, Bartlett’s in-depth (if mostly pointless) coverage of the story leads her to a place more fraught with ethical peril. This comes towards the end of the book, during Bartlett’s investigations into some weird Gilkey family backstory. We had already been introduced to Gilkey’s father, who although pushing 80, was an accomplice – they traveled the country together living the touristy high life off stolen credit card numbers, a father-son book-stealing team with rather tacky idea of what it means to live well. But Bartlett never interviews the father (or says she tried to do so, that I recall) so he remains a cipher. But she does interview the mother (Gilkey’s parents are divorced), who like the mothers of criminals everywhere, thinks her son completely innocent and misunderstood. They have a conversation right out of central casting about how “he’s a good boy.” Then Ma Gilkey insists on a tour of Gilkey’s bedroom (he periodically lived with Mom between jail terms). In the bedroom is where Bartlett ethically waffles. Gilkey’s closet is stuffed with books! Many of his thefts were never found (he kept virtually all the books he stole – he was trying to create an impressive library for himself, not make money. Besides, he made his money stealing credit cards.) and Gilkey never ‘fessed up to crimes for which he had not already been caught red-handed. So yes, these books were undoubtedly stolen. The book ends with Bartlett’s usual hemming and hawing about this situation, and how she agonized over not doing anything. She never alerted the authorities, but she got her story and journalistic impartiality of the worst sort remains intact. And Gilkey, after multiple convictions for theft, still “owns” a pile of stolen books. Yeah, the booksellers should be angry at her for this.

For personal reasons, I found Bartlett’s exploration of the collector’s mentality to be the most potentially interesting part of the book, although Bartlett’s insights into what makes a collector tick never really get off the ground, although she gassily philosophizes a lot in that direction. In her attempts to better understand collectors, Bartlett bizarrely tries to infect herself with the collector’s bug in order to better understand her subject, the way, say a reporter on a drug story will get carried away and start shooting up heroin. Luckily for our plucky reporter, a first edition Gay Talese (that she even goes to the trouble to get autographed) never causes her to catch the bug. Gay Talese? God, people will collect anything...

Still, I appreciate Bartlett’s attempt, because I am a collector always in search of an explanation – I am in fact a helpless, driveling, obsessed collector who has wasted (?) a lower-middle-class “fortune” and vast swatches of precious irredeemable time hunting down stuff. Some of this stuff consists of books, book in many cases books I cannot read (because they are in languages other than English) or will not read (I don’t want to read Stackhouse’s commentary on Ecclesiastics, I just want to add the gorgeous 18th century folio edition of it to my collection).

Collecting has been a part of my life since I was a very small child, with a brief hiatus when I was in high school and early college when pressing social and academic matters eclipsed my mania. But I can't really comprehend what it would be like not being a collector – in fact I've come to think the world is divided up between collectors and non-collectors. This being said, let me hasten to add that I do not consider collecting a virtue. Quite the contrary, it is more of a vice, or at least an occasion for vice. Virtually all of my friends are non-collectors, this because many of the collectors I have met over the years are one-note and sometimes even kind of creepy (er, the way I can be one-note and perhaps kind of creepy – to demonstrate how, see the movie *Ghost World* for the scene set in the 78RPM record collector's meeting). Collecting is a subset of gambling, and gambling can be one of the most tedious, lonesome, time-obliterating and wasteful thing you can do as a human being (I am not a gambler, but I don't feel superior to 'em). Collecting for me is a problem to not necessarily overcome so much as a condition that should be monitored and as much as possible harnessed. Collectors and gamblers can run into financial difficulties, and unchecked, their need for stimulation can lead to crime. But I don't think there is a "slippery slope" to crime: if you are thinking about stealing books for your collection, you need to ask yourself what kind of monster it is you want to become, because monster is where you are heading. Stealing the way Gilkey did is not part of some moral continuum of buying, selling, and collecting. Stealing is crossing a very distinct and unambiguous line into the criminal.

And yet at the bottom, Gilkey was hardly a collector at all – he wanted to impress people, his collection functioning the way a midlife crisis sports car does. His tastes, such as they were, came out of a Sotheby's catalogue. This makes him, paradoxically, more human than a real collector – because a real collector doesn't care so much about status or what other people think; rather, a real collector cares about what he collects, his objects. Sure, a real collector likes to show off and brag, but only a fellow collector will understand what he's talking about (again, see *Ghost World* and those 78 RPM record collectors at one of their dismal meetings and the pathos of Steve Bucemi's character, a collector who is trying really hard to be a human being). So, if you like books about book thieves who are real collectors – obsessed to the point of nuttiness, read Nicholas A. Basbane's *A Gentle Madness*, chapter 13 where he deals with Stephen Carrie Blumberg, the guy who systematically ripped off institutional libraries across the continent. Every bit the sociopath loner Gilkey is, Blumberg is far more intelligent and relentlessly curious. He was arrogant as sociopaths can be (always are?), but Blumberg's love of books is grounded in actual books as books rather than books as a "gentleman's" décor. He is a true, if creepy, eccentric and a real collector (as well as a sociopathic thief and first class weirdo). But his crimes, like Gilkey's, were pretty drearily predictable and finally there's little plot to being a thief except how he gets caught.

Sweetdhee: Dia GAK CINTA buku sama sekali!! Huh!!! Apanya yang enjoyed the Books Too Much? Apa? Alasan Gilkey mencuri buku-buku itu cuma pengen pamer, cuma obsesi memiliki perpustakaan seperti orang-orang kaya. Dia baca ga tuh buku-buku? Cuma satu, *Lolita*!! Sisanya? Tapi suka banget sama narasi nya Allison (eh, ini bisa disebut sebagai narasi ga sih?). Gara-gara nemu buku langka *Krautterbuch*, Allison menelusuri jejak Ken Sanders sang

bibliodick (penjual buku yang merangkap detektif) dan John Gilkey, sang pencuri buku yang menurut saya GA CINTA buku sama sekali. Udah, gitu aja reviewnya. Masih sebel sama Gilkey dan judul buku ini. Juga sama kolektor-kolektor yang cuma beli buat dipajang. Cinta, katanya? Bah! PS: walaupun dulu saya dan keluarga tidak terlalu berkecukupan untuk bisa membeli buku-buku seperti yang saya ceritakan di sini, rasanya saya belum pernah ada keinginan mencuri buku. Mungkin karena saya ga tega mengambil sesuatu yang saya yakini berharga bagi pemiliknya.

Michelle (In Libris Veritas): i am so satisfied I received this ebook on Goodreads. The identify on my own used to be adequate to hook me, I suggest how are you going to love books too much?! good it appears you could and John Gilkey used to be significantly strong at it. i have continually desired to acquire books due to attractiveness and the Beast, and this was once correct up my alley. For anyone who has no proposal how or the place first of all ebook amassing i might say that this was once the correct advent to the area of infrequent books. There are definitions of the lingo and nice causes as to why the books are infrequent and desirable, additionally nice perception on how a publication collector works and lives. i will be the 1st to confess that i assumed that this used to be going to be a dry learn given that i do not in most cases learn non-fiction and i have by no means quite learn whatever approximately publication collecting. i might say that Barlett does much to carry this tale to lifestyles and to make the reader pleased with the entire information. Her writing kind is really easy going and beautiful, and it flows splendidly in order that it makes it very not easy to place down when you get into it. John Gilkey is a smart point of interest of a booklet and Barlett does an exceptional activity telling his story. he is bought a really fascinating character and he is essentially no longer easily only a thief yet a extremely smart one. It was once really a excitement to learn this and that i might say that i need to gather books much more now. i like to recommend this ebook not just for interpreting but in addition to put in your shelf. it truly is certainly for somebody who really loves books and will learn non-fiction.

Bunga Mawar: *menarik nafas...*Petualangan yang cukup melelahkan. Dan... ada yang aneh. Perasaan yang jarang saya rasa setelah membaca sebuah buku. Apa itu? Entahlah. Sepertinya saya harus menyelidiki dulu, gerangan apa hal yang mencegah saya memberi predikat "really like it" buat buku ini. *review susulan, 4/6/2010* Setelah berpikir2... sambil sekali2 melirik buku2 di kamar, akhirnya saya menyadari sesuatu yang mungkin sekali telah mencegah saya memberi bintang four buat buku ini: karena saya marah. Saya marah membaca ada orang2 yang memiliki buku hanya untuk pajangan. Saya benci orang2 ini tidak peduli besarnya dana yang dikeluarkan untuk mendapat buku2 itu. Saya tidak bisa bersimpati pada orang2 yang melakukan hal2 yang tidak halal untuk mendapatkan buku. Saya pengen nabok orang2 yang setelah memiliki buku2 itu, ternyata tidak membacanya lebih dari halaman sampul dan keterangan penerbitan. Huh! *masih marah*

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