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.

**Personal Review: 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**

By Bill Marsano This is a fine, gracefully written book about the cat-and-mouse game between John Gilkey, persistent and multiply convicted rare-book thief and Ken Sanders, the rare-book dealer who is hunting him down. Bartlett gets close to both, and in doing so regales us with diverting stories of book crime and book criminals--appetizers to her main course, which is getting inside Gilkey's head. A tricky business, this, because by and large the real difference between Gilkey and other rare-book collectors that he steals and they pay. Otherwise he, like most collectors, is more interested in the object than its contents--the thrill of the hunt, the bragging rights conferred by success.

It is also an important book for reporters. It is the story of a reporter who investigated corruption until it bedazzled her, until she became what she beheld. It is a five-star warning.

As Bartlett learns in frequent interviews in and out of prison, Gilkey is clever and a master of rationalizations. He doesn't, he says, steal books--he `gets' them. Losses don't matter--the insurance company will compensate his victims. If not, no matter: then book dealers in general are crooked and charge too much. They deserve to be robbed. They should regard theft as part of doing business. He himself is never in the wrong, and actually he is far shallower than the shallower legitimate (paying) collectors. Gilkey has no interest in books except as expressions of trappings of gentility, as outward signs of the cultured person he wants, or thinks he wants, to be. And so he steals only books that are on this or that "100 Best" list. He's clever enough to makes suckers out of dealers and Bartlett, too. She sinks into ethical mire as she learns more and more
about Gilkey and his crimes and lacks the courage to do anything about it. Finally she winds up making excuses for him: he is, he tells her, enrolled in college. She believes him (fool, she!), and decides to believe he's pretty much like other obsessed collectors: "I realized that the man I thought was stealing books so that others would consider him a cultured gentleman . . . was in fact working diligently to BECOME that gentleman. He was studying philosophy, researching authors, even writing his own essays and plays . . . attempting to create his ideal self. Another way of begetting this self, I came to understand, was by telling his story through me." (Bartlett is from San Francisco, where there must be something in the air that warps your brain as soon as the word 'self' comes up.) More than once Bartlett worries enough about her involvement that she consults lawyers. They--don't you just love 'em?--say she's LEGALLY off the hook, so she largely ignores ethics and morality. What Bartlett tells us is fascinating; what she doesn't is morally important.

Others here, although not criminal, are hardly blameless: dealers who whine about thefts they did little or nothing to prevent and won't report out of mere embarrassment, and the law, which often regards book theft as little more than a prank or a quirk.--Bill Marsano is an award-winning professional writer and a book- and map-lover whose collections may be small but weren't stolen.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
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 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!