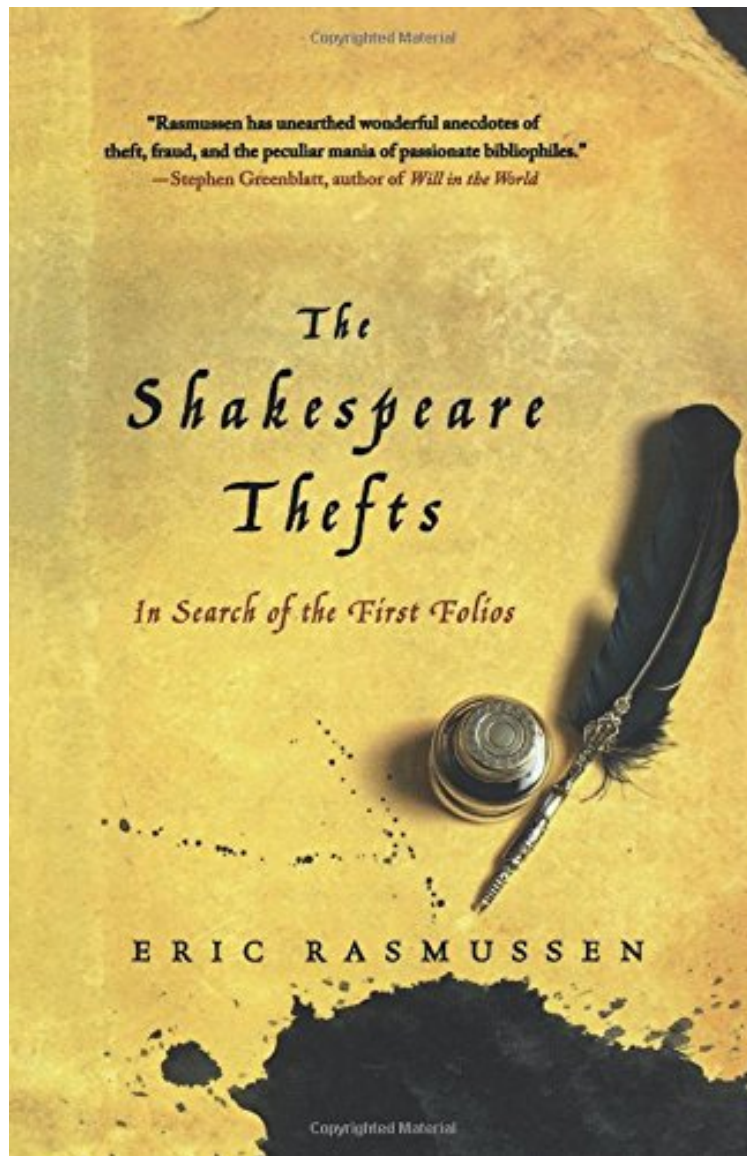


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## The Shakespeare Thefts: In Search of the First Folios

*Eric Rasmussen*

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**Eric Rasmussen : The Shakespeare Thefts: In Search of the First Folios** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Shakespeare Thefts: In Search of the First Folios:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Quick Read and a Major Treat for a Shakespeare Nut By John Michael Albert The blurbs on the back cover give the game away: "page-turner," "travelogue," "hugely enjoyable," "brisk and amusing." It almost sounds like a summer read, if your idea of a great summer includes iced tea, a towel, sun block and Shakespeare. Well, I'm a major Shakespeare junkie and, yes, that's my idea of a good summer.

Rasmussen and his team have completed a catalog *raisonne* of every existing (200 some) copy of the First Folio (which ran to a printing of about 750). Every detail of each copy is painstakingly recorded, covering subjects like provenance, cover/condition, damage, replacement, forgery, changes in the text from copy to copy, marginalia (!!!), etc. It's mind boggling. And THAT is NOT THIS BOOK. This book is a collection of the human interest, detective stories Rasmussen and his team collected along the way. Copies we seem to know everything about except where they are; copies we know next to nothing about except that they exist. Institutions that refuse to protect their copies. (You can get about \$6 million for one these days. C'mon now!) Thieves who think they can rip off the cover or remove an owner's *ex libris* and pass a copy off as newly discovered. Generally, I am a big fan of books about art forgery and art theft because, to me, those topics contain everything good and bad that makes us human. So I always come away from a book like this with a sense of gratitude for so many more things to think about my fundamental humanity. And since I'm reflecting on those things in the presence of my bud, Will, all the better.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting read for Shakespeare fans  
By Hal Jordan  
Eric Rasmussen, along with Anthony James West and several other researchers, has spent years tracking down and thoroughly cataloging every copy of Shakespeare's First Folio -- 232 are known to exist. Every marginal note, bookmark, stain, and so on has now been recorded. As Rasmussen notes, one unintended consequence of this effort is that stealing a First Folio with the hope of later selling it as a newly discovered copy is now less likely to be profitable because all known copies are so well documented. (Although, Rasmussen also notes that there is a possibility that thieves will now be motivated to more extensively mutilate a stolen copy to remove any identifying marks!) This book consists of 20 short chapters that recount just about every interesting anecdote that is known about the First Folio. The title is a bit misleading because most of the anecdotes don't have to do with theft. The book is a quick read at only 186 pages set with a large typeface. I can't imagine that someone with an interest in Shakespeare, or in book collecting more generally, won't enjoy it.<sup>0</sup> of 0 people found the following review helpful. I was entertained and not bored.  
By G. Price  
Well organized and written and the information was presented in a very readable manner. I was entertained and not bored.

Part literary detective story, part Shakespearean lore, *The Shakespeare Thefts* will charm the Bard's many fans. The first edition of Shakespeare's collected works, the First Folio, published in 1623, is one of the most valuable books in the world and has historically proven to be an attractive target for thieves. Of the 160 First Folios listed in a census of 1902, 14 were subsequently stolen-and only two of these were ever recovered. In his efforts to catalog all these precious First Folios, renowned Shakespeare scholar Eric Rasmussen embarked on a riveting journey around the globe, involving run-ins with heavily tattooed criminal street gangs in Tokyo, bizarre visits with eccentric, reclusive billionaires, and intense battles of wills with secretive librarians. He explores the intrigue surrounding the Earl of Pembroke, arguably Shakespeare's boyfriend, to whom the First Folio is dedicated and whose personal copy is still missing. He investigates the uncanny sequence of events in which a wealthy East Coast couple drowned in a boating accident and the next week their First Folio appeared for sale in Kansas. We hear about Folios that were censored, the pages ripped out of them, about a volume that was marked in red paint-or is it blood?-on every page; and of yet another that has a bullet lodged in its pages.

“A Shakespeare authority recounts his attempts to identify and document all extant copies of Shakespeare's First Folio of 1623 . . . [Rasmussen] also provides a terrific appendix, which readers should not skip, that tells how Elizabethans printed books and how the First Folio came to be.”<sup>?</sup> Kirkus s“Every book comes with a story, and great books, like comets, often carry in their wake a tail of great stories. Eric Rasmussen, who with a team of fellow scholars is engaged in tracking and examining every known copy of Shakespeare's First Folio, has unearthed wonderful anecdotes of theft, fraud, and the peculiar mania of passionate bibliophiles.”<sup>?</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, author of *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*“Shakespeare's First Folio contains thirty-six plays of wit, passion, crime, and folly. In this brisk and amusing account, Eric Rasmussen tells us how the book itself has been the cause of wit, passion, crime, and folly in those who seek to own one of the surviving copies.”<sup>?</sup> Peter Saccio, Leon D. Black Professor of Shakespearean Studies at Dartmouth College and author of *Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama*“Eric Rasmussen's fascinating and hugely enjoyable collection of tales about the fate of individual copies and of his own experiences accumulating the data for a census of the surviving copies is a joy from first to last. Stories of thefts old and new, of copies mutilated or destroyed, and of the mania of book-collecting cover the centuries from its first purchasers to its most recent thieves. For anyone who thinks the work of scholarship is as dry as libraries, *The Shakespeare Thefts* will quickly convince them that it is actually a cross between CSI and big-game hunting.”<sup>?</sup> Peter Holland, McMeel Family Professor in Shakespeare Studies at the University of Notre Dame.“An irresistible true crime story revealing the long history of the desire to own one of the world's most valuable books. Amidst his captivating tales of unscrupulous scholars, wealthy industrialists, avaricious con men, and even a Pope who wanted to own the First Folio, Rasmussen makes clear his own love for and deep knowledge about the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, gently sneaking in a rich bibliographic history of the book itself as he unfolds his engaging accounts of those who were willing to steal to own it.”<sup>?</sup> David Scott Kastan, George M. Bodman Professor of English,

Yale University, and General Editor of the Arden Shakespeare. "A page-turner, a series of detective stories and a work of scholarship all at once - Eric Rasmussen brings to life a truly Shakespearean cast of characters as he tracks the First Folio down the centuries and around the world" ?Jonathan Bate, author of *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare* "With irresistible intrigue like that of fine mystery novels, erudition and rigor characteristic of the most esteemed scholarship, and a delightful readability that only the best popular fiction boasts, this book will bring great joy to a remarkable range of people, from anyone who gives a hoot about Shakespeare to aficionados of literary history to simply lovers of good stories. It is no surprise that a team of researchers assisted Rasmussen, for it more often than otherwise takes a collaboration of brilliant minds to produce extraordinary work. And extraordinary this book is." ?Bryan Reynolds, Professor of Drama at UC Irvine and author of *Performing Transversally* "This is a travelogue, a thrilling detective story, an account of the world's most famous book -- and a compellingly good read." ?Laurie Maguire, author of *Where There's a Will, There's a Way* About the Author Eric Rasmussen is department chair and professor of English at the University of Nevada. He is co-editor of the RSC Complete Works of William Shakespeare, the Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama, and of the works of Christopher Marlowe in the Oxford World's Classics series as well as individual plays in the Arden Shakespeare series, the Revels Plays series, and the Malone Society series. Since 1997, he has written the annual review of editions and textual studies for Shakespeare Survey. He lives in Reno, Nevada.