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Book thieves can be anyone from head librarians to high school dropouts. They steal for many reasons, including revenge, greed, desire, desperation, ignorance, and sometimes inexplicable compulsion. This paper is an attempt to explore the history of book theft, including the "sicknesses" that have become known as bibliomania and bibliokleptomania. In the introduction, there is some discussion of the supposed difference between biblioklepts and common book thieves. Nine different book thieves are discussed in detail. Twenty-eight others are discussed only briefly. Each entry seeks to answer the following questions: Who is the book thief? How did s/he get away with the crimes? How was s/he caught? Why did s/he steal? What, if any, was the punishment?

Headings:

- Book thefts
- Thieves – Biography
- Libraries – Security measures
- Bibliomania – History
- Bibliomania – History – Case studies

"A LEARNED CONGRESS":
A CLOSER LOOK AT BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT THIEVES

by
Margarite Annette Nathe

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Jerry Saye

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A Blast Against Book-Keepers

“Sometimes he steals ‘in certain lines’:
 Again he captures all in sight.
 Ubiquitous the villain roams,
 From Golden Gate to Plymouth Rock.”
 or again hear his expert testimony:
 “But one incarnate devil thrives
 At his foul business an adept—
 The bane of all good bookmen’s lives—
 The vile and vicious Biblioklept!”¹

Yates Snowden

¹ Edwin White Gaillard, “The Book Larceny Problem,” *The Library Journal* 45 (15 March 1920): 247.
 Poem originally published in *The Carolinian*.

INTRODUCTION

There are many different terms used to describe the love of books. A person may be called a bibliophagist, a bibliophile, a bibliolatrism, a bibliomaniac, or even a biblioholic. A biblioholic has “the habitual longing to purchase, read, store, admire, and consume books in excess.”² According to the Oxford English Dictionary,³ a bibliophagist is “a devourer of books”; a bibliophile is a “lover of books; a book-fancier”; and a bibliolatrism is given to or characterized by “extravagant admiration of a book.” Holbrook Jackson calls the bibliophile “a miser, hoarding his treasures, doting upon them”⁴ and bibliomania “an habit, or a disease.”⁵

A bibliomaniac is one affected with “a rage for collecting and possessing books.”⁶ Thomas Dibdin wrote of bibliomania as a fatal affliction and referred to it as “the Book disease” that has historically “almost uniformly confined its attacks to the *male* sex, and among these, to the people in the higher and middling classes of society, while the artificer, labourer, and peasant have escaped wholly uninjured.”⁷ Dibdin goes on to say that bibliomania is found “chiefly in palaces, castles, halls, and gay mansions; and those things, which in general are supposed not to be inimical to health, such as cleanliness, spaciousness, and splendor, are only so many inducements towards the introduction and

² Tom Raabe, *Biblioholism: The Literary Addiction* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1991), front cover of the paperback edition.

³ *Oxford English Dictionary Online: The Definitive Record of the English Language*. 31 March 2005 <<http://dictionary.oed.com>>.

⁴ Holbrook Jackson, *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1950), 367.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

⁷ Jackson, 14-15.

propagation of the BIBLIOMANIA.”⁸ He lists dozens of clergymen, aristocrats, kings, and noblemen who were known to suffer the disease. Of course, this elitism was a result of the rarity and high cost of books until the nineteenth century; only the wealthy and powerful had the resources to own books and the education to appreciate them.

In the first volume of *Dictionnaire de Bibliologie*, Peignot defined bibliomania as “a passion for possessing books; not so much to be instructed by them, as to gratify the eye by looking on them. He who is affected by this mania knows books only by their titles and dates, and is rather seduced by the exterior than interior.”⁹ The Albrecht Dürer engraving known as “The Book Fool” illustrates such a character. Below are the engraving and its inscription:



Who clothes his books in Tyrian dyes,
Then brushes off the dust and flies,
Nor reads one line to make him wise,
Spends lavish gold and—FOLLY buys.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁹ Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *The Bibliomania; or, Book-madness; Containing Some Account of the History, Symptoms and Cure of This Fatal Disease, in an Epistle Addressed to Richard Heber* (London: W. Savage, 1809), 57-58.

¹⁰ John Willis Clark, *The Care of Books: An Essay on the Development of Libraries and Their Fittings, From the Earliest Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 299.

Despite the beliefs of Peignot and Dibdin, not only rich and famous men are bibliomaniacs and booklovers are passionate about books for many different reasons. Some harbor a deep appreciation for scholarship and value the potential for learning, growth, and development that books offer. Many are drawn to books and book collecting because of a love for them as physical objects; the workmanship of a sixteenth-century volume, for example, may be prized by its owner over its content. Others simply love reading for pleasure.

Pliny, the scientist and author who lived during the first century A.D., found limitless comfort in the company of books. He said:

I am quite transported and comforted...in the midst of my books: they give a zest to the happiest, and assuage the anguish of the bitterest, moments of existence! Therefore, whether distracted by the cares or the losses of my family, or my friends, I fly to my library as the only refuge in distress: here I learn to bear adversity with fortitude.¹¹

The number of book collectors is rising thanks to phenomena such as the popular PBS television series *Antiques Roadshow*, which features live appraisals of privately owned antiques. Many people are becoming more aware of the market value of their seemingly everyday items. Open Internet auctions, available through services like eBay, give owners the opportunity to sell their antiques easily to the highest bidder. Demand for antiquities like rare books and maps is skyrocketing, driven by the economy and affluent, determined collectors.¹²

Where is that invisible and notorious line over which a book lover must step to become a book thief? When does the rage for collecting begin to cloud the judgment and make theft a viable option? Hans Bohatta said, "The bibliophile is the master of his

¹¹ Ibid., 15-16.

¹² Jennifer Brooks, "Thieves Plunder Libraries for Profit," *The Detroit News* 21 Jan. 2001. 1 March 2005 <<http://www.detnews.com/2001/metro/0101/22/a01-178263.htm>.>

books, the bibliomaniac their slave.”¹³ A person who cannot control the desire for books and is willing to steal them in order to make them part of his personal collection is called a biblioklept, or “a book-thief regarded as insane.”¹⁴ Some believe “there is something of the biblioklept in all who traffic among books,”¹⁵ that although we all have the capacity to steal books, we should be thankful we’ve not yet given in to temptation (if, indeed, we have not yet). Given such capacity, we may have some small sympathy for biblioklepts, but we continue to “commend them that resist, and condemn them that fall.”¹⁶

Although not all book thieves steal because they are compelled by a lust for books, biblioklepts seem to garner more sympathy, leniency, and respect than the common crook. Many of us are inclined to “be excessively generous with these individuals simply because such a noble pursuit as book collecting is the ultimate cause of their crime, but...it makes little difference to the victim what their motives were.”¹⁷ In fact, some have gone so far as to suggest that book theft is not true theft if the thief does not steal for financial gain. (Surely the original owners of sorely-missed stolen tomes would not agree.)

While most agree that biblioklepts are not necessarily moral people, some believe the biblioklept to be a “better citizen than the Philistine in so far as he appreciates books.”¹⁸ In general, “a thief with no intellectual pretensions is...considered to be on a lower level than his confreres with doctoral titles.”¹⁹ According to Slade Richard

¹³ Lawrence S. Thompson, *Bibliokleptomania* (Berkeley, California: Peacock Press, 1968), 4.

¹⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

¹⁵ Jackson, 359.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁷ Thompson, 5.

¹⁸ Jackson, 365.

¹⁹ Thompson, 31.

Gandert, rare book and manuscript thieves are connoisseurs: “They study assiduously, and many become notable experts in their field. While they are thieves, they are highly educated and elegant thieves.”²⁰ It is easy for esteemed researchers and scholars to gain the respect and confidence of librarians; often, because of their noble pursuits, their quirks are smiled upon and forgiven, even when such quirks include a forgetfulness regarding check-out policies.

Book thieves and bibliokleptomania have existed since the beginning of books and libraries. Even Cicero complained that many valuable manuscripts from his personal collection had been stolen by his trusted slave, Dionysus. In fact, “early Roman libraries were largely composed of Greek works simply because the first Roman libraries were stolen from Greece by Roman generals.”²¹ In an attempt to protect valuable manuscripts, medieval librarians had strict loaning rules, frequently hid books in secret places, and chained them to the desk or shelf to prevent any disappearances. They also used curses and admonishing bookplates to dissuade potential thieves.²² In Renaissance Poland, books were so highly prized that people sued one another for not returning them.²³

As a result of the tendencies of biblioklepts and other thieves, libraries and archives are particularly vulnerable, as some tend to view them as “payment-optional bookstores.”²⁴ Most book thieves prefer libraries to bookstores because of the wider selection (including greater access to books of varying values) and the minimal danger of being caught in the act. Also, it is easier to ingratiate oneself to a librarian than to a

²⁰ Slade Richard Gandert, *Protecting Your Collection: A Handbook, Survey, & Guide for the Security of Rare Books, Manuscripts, Archives, & Works of Art* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982), 15.

²¹ Thompson, 9.

²² See Marc Drogin’s *Anathema! Medieval Scribes and the History of Book Curses* (Totowa, New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun & Co., 1983.)

²³ Thompson, 6.

²⁴ Shelley Mosley, “The Self-Weeding Collection: The Ongoing Problem of Library Theft, and How to Fight Back,” *Library Journal* 121, (15 Oct. 1996): 38.

bookseller. Many biblioklepts will not hesitate to seize books from the libraries of friends and loved ones as well.

Some feel that theft from libraries is only going to get worse, especially given the ease of selling stolen goods on the Internet. Ken Sanders, the security committee chairman for the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, said, “Libraries are really sitting ducks, as lay people become aware of how much some of their things might be worth. We’re really going to need to fasten our seat belts, because book theft in general is just going to skyrocket...”²⁵

Some thieves may steal paperbacks and best sellers they could have afforded to buy. Other book thieves have more discerning tastes, preferring rare or unique items, valuable first editions, or incunabula. This can be highly lucrative for the thief given that books have joined *objets d’art* as items considered to be solid investments; in fact, the fine arts market is second only to drugs as the largest arena of international crime.”²⁶

All types of libraries—public, academic, special, and private—are vulnerable. Unfortunately, communication between libraries and with law enforcement is not always good; many libraries do not want negative publicity or to advertise their vulnerability. One librarian lamented:

A lot of library thefts have gone unreported in the past. You’re embarrassed, and maybe you say to yourself, ‘What will the donors think?’ And you’re reluctant to talk about the whole issue because you don’t want to give the crazies ideas.”²⁷

In public libraries, some of the most commonly stolen items include *The Joy of Sex*, G.E.D. examination books, and *Prophecies of Nostradamus*. These statistics led

²⁵ Brooks, “Thieves Plunder Libraries for Profit.”

²⁶ Daniel Traister, “Seduction and Betrayal: An Insider’s View of Insider Theft of Rare Materials,” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 69 (Sept. 1994): 33.

²⁷ Miles Harvey, “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot to Control the World,” *Outside Magazine* (June 1997). 13 March 2005 <<http://outside.away.com/outside/magazine/0697/9706bland.html>>.

New Jersey public librarian Judy Elikor to speculate that the composite book thief was probably “a high school dropout sitting on a mountainside casting spells and waiting for the end of the world, but having really great sex.”²⁸ Unfortunately, it is impossible to typify the book thief.

Who are the people who steal from libraries and archives? In Gaillard’s 1920 article, he claims that his observations support the theory that book thieves are “often physically defective and frequently not quite balanced, and sometimes queer enough to be sent to a hospital for the insane.”²⁹

Thompson divides book thieves into two categories: common thieves, who steal from financial greed or need; and bibliomaniacs, who could be “private individuals acquiring the books of others for their own collections.”³⁰ Gaillard agrees, stating, “Library books are stolen from two main causes, to be sold, and in order that the thief may possess the property.”³¹ Ruju and Mostert, biographers of nineteenth-century book thief Count Guglielmo Libri, divide these categories further and suggest that there are actually three reasons a thief might steal from public collections: “first simple greed, to make money; second ‘the maniac’s theft’, to seize an object irresistibly craved; and third ‘the monomaniac’s theft’, an act of habitual or occasional madness.”³² This conception proves to be the most accurate; the second and third reasons seem to define the difference between what we know as a bibliokleptomaniac and what may simply be called a kleptomaniac, someone whose compulsion is to steal and collect. While most thieves fall

²⁸ Mosley, 38.

²⁹ Gaillard, “The Book Larceny Problem,” 251.

³⁰ Thompson, 5.

³¹ Gaillard, “The Book Larceny Problem,” 250.

³² P. Alessandra Maccioni Ruju Marco Mostert, *The Life and Times of Guglielmo Libri (1802-1869): Scientist, Patriot, Scholar, Journalist, and Thief: A Nineteenth-century Story*, (Hilversum, Netherlands: Verloren Publishers, 1995), 334.

into these categories, there seem to be endless variations on the theme, making the average book thief incredibly difficult to spot.

Because 75% of thefts in archives and libraries are “inside jobs”³³ committed by employees rather than professional thieves (and in some cases they are the same beast) librarians are often believed to make up the largest percentage of biblioklepts. Daniel Traister, a rare books librarian who was shocked to find a trusted employee stealing and selling items from the collection, was moved to wonder who watches the watchers; he said, “Quite simply, almost no one, except for my immediate colleagues, is as dangerous to the security of the collections in which I work as I am.”³⁴

Librarians and other figures of authority are rarely scrutinized by security guards or co-workers out of respect and fear of retribution. As Gandert says, “Appearance is all. Many times security guards are cowed by individuals in three-piece suits who are outraged that they are being questioned about their purposes.”³⁵ Their freedom and familiarity with the collections they care for has presented too much temptation for many a librarian. In some cases, library employees become disgruntled and disenchanted with their institution and seek their revenge by preying on the collection.³⁶

Clergymen have historically followed closely behind librarians on the list of most common biblioklepts. This is perhaps because in the past, clergymen have acted as statesmen, legislators, diplomats, and administrators, and as a result have had more contact with books than has the general public. There have been many men of the cloth

³³ S. Van Nort, “Archival and Library Theft: The Problem that Will Not Go Away,” *Library and Archival Security* 12 (1994): 25-49.

³⁴ Traister, 30.

³⁵ Slade Richard Gandert, “Fictional Theft and the World of Reality,” *Library and Archival Security* 4 (1982): 51.

³⁶ See entry below on Mimi Meyer.

who have used the cloth of their flowing robes to conceal the coveted tomes of their neighbors.³⁷

Scholars, including college professors, also make up a large portion of the biblioklept population. Who knows the collection of civil war era literature in a state archive better than someone who may have written a book or two on the subject? Other than the librarian, that is. Again, a longtime, intimate relationship with valuable materials can be enough to break the wills of many scholars. Librarians are usually quite familiar with university faculty and often grant them privileges most patrons do not enjoy. According to Gandert, “Security officers agree that it is the person who is known to the staff and who is respected by them that is many times the greatest security risk.”³⁸ As stated above, these thieves tend to receive more leniency than common robbers because they have greater scholarly appreciation and regard for the preservation of the books and treat them with care and respect.

Academic pressure and competition may lead some scholars and students to steal items so that their scholastic competitors may not make use of them. If the library does not have a functional copier, or even if the patron does not have change for the copier, the convenience of ripping the needed pages from the book may motivate a thief. The same is true for borrowers who may not be able to afford to pay the fines accrued on their accounts. These thieves are often ignorant of the extent of the damage they cause.

Some thieves may be community members or parents that consider themselves to be self-appointed censors who “vow to keep ‘unsuitable’ items out of ‘their’ libraries by

³⁷ Jackson, 361-362.

³⁸ Gandert, *Protecting Your Collection*, 16.

any means,”³⁹ including removing entire books, ripping or cutting out offensive passages or images, or adding their own commentary in the margins. These censors often belong to controversial religious or political groups that are offended by library materials that contain negative comments about their organizations. They may also be antigovernment or antiestablishment fanatics.

Some people who are angry over the high cost of books, especially undergraduates who must pay hundreds of dollars for their science textbooks, may feel justified in taking the books they need from a library or bookstore. If a student holds the university responsible for such costs, s/he may take it out on the library; “By charging such high prices, you’re standing in the way of social progress, so I’m justified in ripping you off.”⁴⁰

Some feel they can provide better care for books than the libraries can.⁴¹ Biblioklepts “hate libraries because the books they love have been defaced with barcodes, stamps of ownership, etc., then checked out. They see themselves as the liberators of the abused volumes.”⁴²

Perhaps the worst of all is the biblioklept who is also a biblioclast, a destroyer of books, also known as a “book ghoul.”⁴³ Jackson tells the story of “a strange bibliomaniac in Paris who tore out so many offending pages that his library contained only one complete volume; the rest were composed of fragments and remnants

³⁹ Mosley, 39.

⁴⁰ Guy Robertson, “A Word from a Pro: Protecting Your Store Against Book Thieves,” *Provenance Magazine* 3 (2000). 13 March 2005 <<http://www.netpac.com/provenance/vol3no1/bookthief-robertson00.htm>>

⁴¹ See entry below on Stanislas Gosse.

⁴² Mosley, 38.

⁴³ Thompson, 7.

magnificently bound.”⁴⁴ This group also includes owners of rare volumes who seek to destroy other copies in libraries and archives, thus making her/his own copy rarer and more valuable.

Book thieves can be overenthusiastic hobbyists, drug addicts, gamblers, politicians, priests, librarians, night custodians, building maintenance workers, PhD candidates, library benefactors,⁴⁵ or historians. They may steal only once. They may have their method down pat, having long been in the business of living off of stolen goods. They do not have any specific “look” but are often charming, knowledgeable, and friendly. Ian D. D. Eaves, Curator of the Armory at Her Majesty’s Tower in London and a gentleman, said with a pleasant smile while viewing the armor collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, “There’s a number of things I’d like to make off with if I could be sure I would be undetected.”⁴⁶

People steal using any number of methods and the simpler the technique the more successful it is. One particularly appalling practice is for an adult to have a child check materials out, never to be returned. In some states, parents and guardians are not held responsible for making restitution for lost materials checked out by their children.

Many thieves have learned to take advantage of any lapse of judgment on the part of librarians who unwittingly keep rare and valuable items in the circulating collection. Once an item is checked out, the borrower may claim it is lost and, depending upon the policies of the library, may only have to make restitution for the cover price of the materials rather than what it would realistically cost to replace those items.

⁴⁴ Jackson, 571.

⁴⁵ See entry below on John Papanastassiou.

⁴⁶ Slade Richard Gandert, “Greeks Bearing Gifts and Other Sad Tales,” *Library & Archival Security* 4 (1982): 44.

Depending upon the physical layout of the building and the security measures in place, thieves can easily find a secluded corner in which to decide what they would like to take. Some steal books from small or public libraries by “by tossing them down a balcony, over a patio wall, or through a restroom window, often to an accomplice.”⁴⁷

In 1904, a librarian uncovered a group of people who were systematically stealing from libraries and selling the items to other libraries and to vendors. He found that one member of the group would investigate the library’s holdings for valuable materials, another one would steal the materials, and the third would sell the books.⁴⁸

Some thieves are “confidence men” who make sure to be on friendly and familiar terms with library staff in order to gain their trust and fondness.⁴⁹ These are the patrons many librarians are least likely to suspect when they find that valuable materials have gone missing.

By making seemingly generous donations and contributions to libraries, some benefactors have found that they can easily gain access to restricted collections. Libraries tend to trust such donors completely and to look upon them with favor. Charles Merrill Mount, who stole some \$150,000 worth of materials from the Library of Congress and the National Archives, was given his own private workspace in the Library of Congress manuscripts collection after donating notes from scholarly books he had written; Nancy Bush, spokeswoman for the Library after Mount was arrested, said, “We always try to be nice to our donors.”⁵⁰ Armed with such goodwill and privileged confidence, thieves find easy pickings among the choicest volumes in the collection.

⁴⁷ Mosley, 40.

⁴⁸ E.W. Gaillard, “Book Thieves: An Incident and Some Suggestions,” *The Library Journal* 29 (1904): 308.

⁴⁹ See entry below on Martin Strich.

⁵⁰ Dale Nelson, “Mount Arrest Stirrs LC,” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 62 (November 1987): 47.

Libraries are often plundered while the staff remain completely unaware of the gaps in the collection. Due to short staffing and limited funds, many institutions house gifts and collections that have not yet been cataloged and for which no sufficient documentation of ownership has ever been created. As in the Library of Congress thefts of the 1890s, when the aging and overworked Librarian of Congress Spofford was the sole caretaker of a priceless collection, lack of documentation can make it near impossible to know when something has been taken or to prove ownership to retrieve it once the theft has been discovered. This sort of internal chaos makes the job of a book thief completely unproblematic.

Before the invention of the printing press and the Industrial Revolution, production of books was very labor-intensive and expensive. Literacy levels were lower and fewer people had need of or money for books. Those who did have the resources to construct a small personal library were well aware of the scarcity and value of such things and were often very protective of their collections. Because of the sparseness of such luxurious commodities in past centuries, book theft was considered by all to be a serious crime and sacrilege deserving of anathema by many.

In the time of Henry IV (the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries) a man named Johannes Leycestre and his wife Cecilia stole “a little book from an old church.”⁵¹ The record of their punishment (or at least that of Johannes) reads: “Let him be hanged by the neck until his life departs”; the enthusiastic Gaillard laments, “Would that we had lived in those days, or that [such a punishment] had survived until ours!”⁵²

⁵¹ Gaillard, “The Book Larceny Problem,” 248.

⁵² Ibid.

Sir Thomas Bodley was very protective of the great library he had organized and, given his tendency to chain books to desks, was apparently aware of the danger of theft and mutilation. He had a very clear policy regarding the punishment of thieves:

...he shall be publickly disgraced...for which the Vice Chancellor or his substitute shall pronounce the Sentence of his Banishment in the open Congregation and keep a permanent Record both of the Kind and Quality, of that Delinquent's Perjury and of the exemplary Punishment inflicted upon it.⁵³

Unfortunately, book thieves throughout recent history have typically been given very light sentences, if tried and sentenced at all. Indian library scholar Badri Prasad believes that depriving offenders of library privileges is sufficient punishment for any thief or mutilator of library materials.⁵⁴

When a student was caught stealing from the New York Public Library in 1897, trustees attempted to prosecute him for his crimes. However, they found themselves being denounced and ridiculed by the press and the public. Meanwhile, the student was befriended by the Society for the Aid of Jewish Prisoners and philanthropist David Schiff, who convinced the magistrate that any punishment would be too harsh. In the end, the student was fined \$25.⁵⁵ The opportunity for easy money without consequences undoubtedly contributes to the number of items whisked away from libraries every day.

According to legend, Saint Anastasius practiced such patience and tolerance that when a fellow priest stole his parchment Bible, worth 18 florins, he did not seek its return. Even when the fellow priest took the Bible to a prospective buyer and the buyer in turn asked Father Anastasius's opinion as the local expert on such things, the pious man said only that "It is a good book and worth the price." When the offending priest

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gandert, *Protecting Your Collection*, 24.

⁵⁵ Gandert, *Protecting Your Collection*, 22.

was told that Father Anastasius had been consulted and had not exposed him, he returned the book with tears in his eyes. The two lived happily together for the rest of Father Anastasius's life.⁵⁶ Although most librarians, archivists, and other book owners do not feel the same tolerance for thieves, they are nonetheless plagued by a constant trickle of theft.

This is partly due to the fact that local law enforcement officials are usually unable (and often unqualified) to deal with matters of book theft and library crime. Many people who do not work in libraries or archives do not feel that such crimes are to be taken seriously, when in fact they are very significant. One librarian said, "When we tried to raise the consciousness of [law enforcement] they regarded it as a victimless crime."⁵⁷ Thieves often prey on rare and valuable materials that are held by libraries in an attempt to preserve documentation of a culture and the nation's heritage. Many such items are irreplaceable. Even when a thief steals popular materials from the public library, it deprives the community of users access to the items, sometimes permanently.

Despite what some law enforcement officials believe, the victims of such crimes are the public, the national and international community of scholarship, and the intellectual freedom of society. Unfortunately, only the large-scale exploits of thieves like Stephen Carrie Blumberg, who stole tens of thousands of items from hundreds of different libraries around the country, are able to attract the attention of the FBI and law enforcement.

Librarians have come to realize that they must work with their colleagues around the country to prevent crime in libraries and archives. They have developed such

⁵⁶ Thompson, 10.

⁵⁷ Evan St. Lifer, "How Safe Are Our Libraries?" *Library Journal* (August 1994): 36.

services as Bookline Alert/Missing Books and Manuscripts (BAMBAM), Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (ABAA), and National Stolen Art File (NSAF) to communicate about thefts, make the community aware of stolen items that may surface on the market, and offer suggestions for how to deal with larceny.

Many consider the lives and actions of book, manuscript, and art thieves to be romantic or daringly adventurous. In recent years there have been several Hollywood movies produced that could almost be based on the careers of some of the more famous art and rare books thieves. *Entrapment* (1999) and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999) “romanticize the life of the art thief and highlight fantastic feats that enable the story’s characters to defy high-level security systems”⁵⁸ and portray the work as that of a Robin Hood figure, who steals priceless items from the elite and makes them accessible to those who would otherwise never have such an opportunity.

Librarians and archivists struggle to find a balance between security and preservation of their collections and providing access to users. A library with a security policy that is too severe is likely to alienate patrons and possibly hinder scholarship. Public libraries especially strive to make the library user-friendly and to bring in as many patrons as possible; librarians in this field shy away from any policies that may estrange users. There are also many librarians who prefer to believe that every patron has honest intentions and that any occurrences of theft are isolated instances that can “no more be foreseen or prevented than can a lightning stroke be forestalled.”⁵⁹ Pleasant W. Martin,

⁵⁸ K. Janus, “Securing Our History,” *Library and Archival Security* 17 (2001): 3-15.

⁵⁹ Gaillard, “The Book Larceny Problem,” 247.

Nassau County Library System Technical Services Director, says, “We never accuse anyone of theft. We always say they’ve most likely forgotten to check out.”⁶⁰

Some believe the only way to make our collections completely safe is “to ban all people, patrons and staff, from the library.”⁶¹ Too little security will also hinder scholarship in that “you might well have nothing of value to offer for access a few years hence.”⁶² Thompson says,

Possibly when bibliothecal caution has compelled us to observe the last rites of the sepulcher on the open-shelf system, somebody may have time to compile a register of all hitherto recorded thefts from public libraries; but no matter what precautions may be taken, as long as there are collections, public and private, and collectors – *et amici*⁶³ – biblioklepts of some sort will be with us.⁶⁴

Many professional librarians join the field because of a love for books. How can professional bibliophiles protect their collections from professional biblioklepts (as well as from their own weaknesses)? Must librarians and archivists become bibliotaphs⁶⁵ in order to protect their collections? Possibly, it would lower the number of thefts. As we will find upon examining the sections below, however, many biblioklepts and other thieves who are determined to gain access will seemingly stop at nothing to find buried treasure.

The following section consists of detailed outlines of the lives and careers of nine different book thieves. The unifying trait of each of these seemingly disparate thieves is that they were all very successful for a time. Each entry is an exploration of what kinds of materials the thief stole, how s/he stole it, what her/his motivation was, how s/he was

⁶⁰ Gandert, *Protecting Your Collection*, 23.

⁶¹ Mosley, 39.

⁶² Gandert, “Greeks Bearing Gifts and Other Sad Tales,” 43.

⁶³ “and friendship”

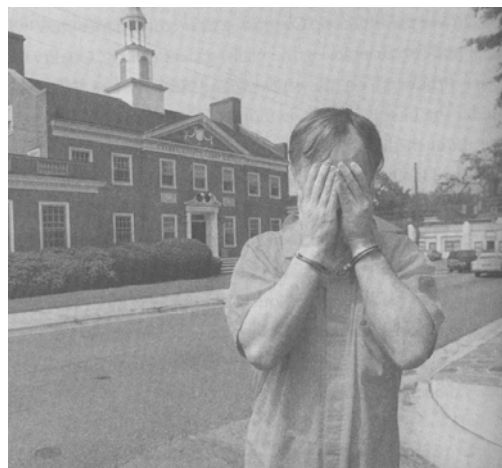
⁶⁴ Thompson, 3.

⁶⁵ One who buries books by keeping them under lock and key.

caught, and what (if any) punishment was imposed. There is also some discussion (where such information is available) of the childhood and pre-criminal life of each thief. The entries are arranged alphabetically by the surname of each subject, with the exception of The Library of Congress Thieves, who are treated as a group.

Gilbert Joseph Bland, Jr. – “Scatterer of Maps and Destroyer of Books”

Miles Harvey, Gilbert Bland’s leading biographer, calls Bland a “cartomaniac,” or one obsessed with collecting antique maps. There are roughly 10,000 antique map collectors in the United States. Barry Lawrence Ruderman, a dealer and self-confessed cartomaniac, claims that cartomania is a sickness. He said, “It’s



obsessive. Once you’re in up to your ankles, you want to be in up to your knees; once you’re in up to your knees, you want to be in up to your waist.”⁶⁶ Werner Muensterberger, a psychoanalyst and expert on collecting, says that many cartomaniacs come from broken homes and troubled childhoods and throw themselves into collecting as a way to ground themselves; “Looking for maps, especially antique maps, is really looking for the past – Where do I come from? Who were my ancestors? – And symbolically, finding security.”⁶⁷

Bland’s past is much more checkered than any of the librarians from whom he requested centuries-old maps would have imagined, especially when confronted with such a nondescript and mild-mannered patron. After his parents were divorced when he was three years old, Bland’s stepfather allegedly physically abused him. Soon after he

⁶⁶ Harvey, “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot to Control the World.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

graduated high school, he joined the army, but not before his first run-in with law enforcement officials; he was arrested for possession of a stolen car. He served in Vietnam and afterward suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Coupled with depression, it is what his attorney would later claim was the cause of Bland's troubles and the crimes committed in his adult life.

After being discharged in 1971, Bland married Carol Ann Talt, with whom he had two daughters. He had a string of arrests over the next few years and he abandoned his wife and children in 1976. He served a three-year prison term after defrauding the government using fake identities in an unemployment compensation scam.

He opened a computer leasing business in 1992 with his second wife, which failed and left them in debt. It was around this time that Bland bought an assortment of items that someone had left in a storage unit, including some old maps. According to Bland, someone told him the maps may be valuable. Bland and his wife, in an attempt to pay their debts and support Bland's gambling habits, decided to open a store, Antique Maps & Collectibles, near their Coral Springs, Florida home. Bland then began building their stock.

Over just a few years, Bland managed to visit rare books collections all over the country, including Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was described as clean-cut, quiet and looked neither young nor old.⁶⁸ Harvey says, "A studious man in his mid-forties, wearing a blue blazer and khaki pants, he could have been mistaken for half the scholars who walk through the library's doors. He was withdrawn, slight-framed person with a biggish nose, smallish chin, reddish hair and a

⁶⁸ Ibid.

mustache.”⁶⁹ It seems Bland’s unremarkable appearance makes him a difficult character to remember. Linda McCurdy at Duke University’s Special Collections Library said, “Part of the way he operated was to make as few ripples as possible.”⁷⁰

Bland’s key to the cartographic world was his total lack of character and distinction. Harvey said, “Medium height, medium weight, middle-aged, middle everything—he was a cipher, a blank slate; in cartographic terms, terra incognita.”⁷¹

Librarians did not suspect that he was using a razor blade to cut valuable maps from atlases and books dating from the sixteenth century. Even in libraries with seemingly strong security, Bland was able to hide over a dozen maps at a time under his clothes and leave the building without a hitch. On occasion, he even added to the librarian’s pencil-written inventory at the front of a book, making it seem as if maps he’d just stolen had been missing from the volume for years. He used several different aliases⁷² and his credentials were never brought into question.

His customers quickly began to recognize his operation for frequently having very rare items (and often multiple copies of them) for incredibly low prices. One dealer thought it a bit odd that Bland “really didn’t know his prices all that well... He really just wanted you to make offers. And he accepted most of the offers.”⁷³ Another went so far as to say, “the man didn’t seem to know dick about maps.”⁷⁴ A client later recalled that he often asked Bland if he had certain items in stock that were not listed on the store’s catalog; Bland would get back to him a week or two later saying that he did in fact have

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Miles Harvey, *The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), xx.

⁷² Bland’s aliases included James Morgan, Jason Pike, Jack Arnett, Richard Olinger, John David Rosche, Steven Spradling, James Bland, James Perry, Gilbert Anthony Bland, and Joseph Bland.

⁷³ Harvey, “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot to Control the World.”

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the requested item. Although some of his customers were baffled by his incredible stock, none questioned him closely about where he got his materials.

Barry Ruderman, one of Bland's clients, decided after having a conversation with him that Bland was more interested in making sales than learning about maps. This points to the likelihood that Bland was never actually a cartomaniac; he was simply interested in ripping cartomaniacs off and enjoying the hefty profits.

Bland went into the antique map business at a "boom time, when the fascination with ancient maps was steadily spreading from the esoteric fringes [and] cartomania had become something of a bull market in the United States."⁷⁵ While exciting for enthusiastic collectors, this was disturbing news for the nation's libraries, who suddenly found themselves responsible for caring for incredibly valuable collections, often without the resources to protect them.

Bland was finally caught on December 7, 1995 when an alert librarian at the George Peabody Library in Baltimore saw him tear a page from a book. She alerted security guards, who chased Bland all over downtown Baltimore before finally cornering him. As the guards gained on him, Bland threw his spiral notebook, which was about the size of a steno pad, into the bushes. When the guards retrieved it later, they found that Bland had folded three maps from a rare 1763 book between the pages, all of which were worth about \$2,000.

After returning with the stolen maps, the library released Bland after he promised to pay the cost of restoring the damaged book, about \$700. When Bland left without his spiral notebook, librarians were shocked to find that it actually contained a hit list of the names and prices of rare maps along with the major libraries at which they could be

⁷⁵ Ibid.

found. When they used this list to go through and examine their collection, they found many other books out of which maps had been cut. These books had all been used by Gilbert Bland. The director of security at the Peabody, Donald Pfouts, said, “He was violating the trust of practically every community in the country, committing crimes against our history.”⁷⁶

Soon after the incident at the Peabody, the shop owners across the mall from Antique Maps & Collectibles noticed that all the maps were gone from the walls and that the place had been cleaned out. Bland apparently left a note for his landlord reading, “See you later.”⁷⁷ Finally aware of his activities, the FBI looked for Bland at his shop and eventually traced him to his Coral Springs home, where he was arrested.

Unfortunately, the whereabouts of the majority of Bland’s stolen treasures was unknown. Somewhere there were 150 of the 250 maps Bland had stolen, including old maps of states in the U.S., countries all over the world, the North Pole, and the trade winds, all worth about \$500,000. Harvey said, “Figuratively speaking, he was holding the world hostage.”⁷⁸ Bland used this knowledge as leverage in making a plea bargain. He “promised, among other things, to cooperate with federal authorities and to advise libraries on ways to beef up their security to prevent future thefts” in return for a reduced sentence and limited immunity from further prosecution.⁷⁹ In the end Bland was sentenced to 17 months in prison and ordered to pay \$70,000 in restitution.

Most of the dealers and collectors in the antique maps industry were shocked by how easily Bland seemed to get away with his crimes without serving more than a year

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

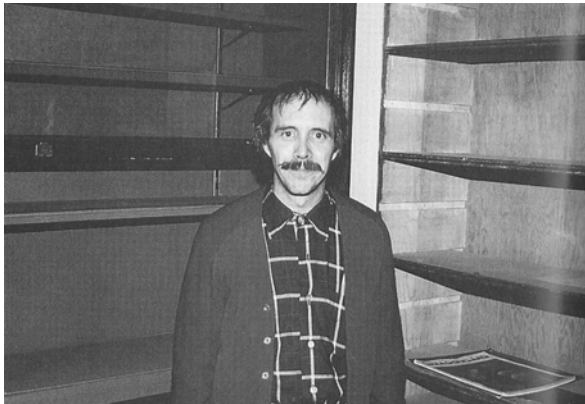
⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

and a half in prison. Ruderman believes this sort of crime is not taken seriously; he said, “It’s very easy for a prosecutor to say, ‘He ripped a few pages out of a few books? I’ve got better things to do.’ To the 99% of the people who don’t understand the magnitude of what he’s done, Bland just doesn’t seem to represent a threat to society.”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Stephen Carrie Blumberg – The Passion to Collect



Stephen Carrie Blumberg was born in 1949 to a violent mother who was schizophrenic and schizoaffective; she took psychotropic medication and believed that the television and radio had special messages for her. Blumberg's

father fought in World War II and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Still experiencing occasional nightmares, his father was depressed and had gone to a psychiatrist at one point to discuss thoughts of killing himself and his son, Stephen. Blumberg's grandfather had been hospitalized for a nervous breakdown and his grandmother suffered from depression, drank heavily and took pills. His great-grandfather, who was well-liked and a very successful horse trader, was a known collector. He collected all manner of junk, mostly things that had little practical value, but also property that was, 100 years later, very valuable.

As a child, Blumberg was gentle and intelligent, but a loner who cared only for relics of the past. He was fascinated by antique doorknobs, hardware, and stained glass. From a very young age, he sought out abandoned and condemned buildings from which he took all kinds of artifacts in an attempt to preserve them from destruction and neglect. His father was irritated by his son's habits and usually threw away his acquisitions.

Blumberg escaped in books, but struggled in school. He was diagnosed as delusional and hospitalized for a short time as a teenager. He began stealing from houses, old buildings, and libraries as an adolescent. He claimed that his goal was to “steal all of Minneapolis and sell it to Texas.”⁸¹

As an adult, Blumberg found he was free to pursue his interests and travel freely, living off of a family trust fund that provided him with about \$72,000 a year. He continued with his obsession for collecting and turned his attentions to the nation’s libraries. He conducted extensive research to find the materials he wanted and made trips to specific cities based on the holdings of the libraries in the area. Over the years, he stole some 23,600 books from 268 libraries in 45 states, two Canadian provinces, and the District of Columbia.⁸² He also managed to put together a collection of 100 incunabula in just three years.

He later admitted his special passion for Americana, which librarians had already guessed from his selections. His interests also included architecture, views of cities, and the history of printing. One of Blumberg’s goals was to get one copy of every California history book on a list established in 1945 by a group of prominent book collectors.

While visiting the library at the University of Minnesota, Blumberg came across a forgotten library card, which he quickly pocketed. The card belonged to associate professor of psychology Matthew McGue, who actually bore a physical resemblance to Blumberg. He had other false forms of identification made and began posing as Professor McGue whenever he visited university libraries. When appearing as McGue, he bathed (which he seldom did otherwise), wore charmingly eccentric clothes, carried a

⁸¹ Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books*, (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1995), 505.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 467.

briefcase, and spoke with authority. In this way, he was able to gain privileges and access he'd not been allowed as a community member and he relished the respect his change in identity seemed to get him. Later, he said,

Even though I've done a lot of reading, I barely made it through high school. All my education has come from books and talking to people and observing what's around me, and speculating and analyzing. Here I was, a visiting professor, there to do research, a scholar. And they accepted me.⁸³

The illusion of prestige and respectful acceptance were new and intoxicating to Blumberg.

When visiting a library to browse the stacks, he often wore an oversized coat with large pockets sewn into the insides so that he could carry out several items at a time. He used a pencil to write tiny codes on the inside covers of volumes he would leave with to suggest they had come from a secondhand dealer for prices anywhere from five cents to one dollar. Kenneth J. Rhodes, Blumberg's friend and traveling companion for 15 years, later testified that:

He'd take the card pocket out, and he would also take the library sticker off the inside of the binding. He'd search for any little metal alarm devices. And he'd sand the edges of the page off [to eradicate library stamp marks], and he'd restaple [the pages] and then reglue. He had a little container of glue and a razor blade, and he'd cut out a page that might be embossed with [the university name] on it, hide that in his briefcase and do that to each book, and it would take a considerable amount of time. He would actually have to physically lick the bookplate until the glue loosened and he could peel it off. And then he'd put the new [bookplate] on and out through the security he'd go.⁸⁴

Blumberg sometimes made himself sick from licking too much glue.

Blumberg also had an intimate knowledge of library security procedures, which allowed him to enter many libraries after hours, particularly if there were too many items to take during the day. He was able to steal pickup truck-loads of books from libraries in

⁸³ Ibid., 482.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 496-497.

California because of his ability to pick locks and stop elevators on any floor he wished—including those which housed rare books collections.

He waited until the staff had gone home to pick the locks to the librarians' offices, where he would steal keys to restricted areas. The next day, after he'd made a copy of the desired keys, he returned the stolen set to avoid arousing suspicion. This gave him his own personal passkey to any restricted area in the building.

If he was unable to get a key, Blumberg would resort to other ways of entering restricted sections. He pushed ceiling panels up and crawled through the ductwork in the ceiling to get past metal gates or locked doors. He also climbed elevator shafts when no other point of access presented itself. He recounted later a visit to a library in California where he was almost crushed to death:

There was an elevator they used in one of the colleges to haul books back and forth, and I was inside the shaft climbing up. I didn't think anybody was still in the building, but about halfway up there I heard a terrific noise, and above me I saw this thing coming straight down. I was able to squeeze myself into one of the nooks they have at each of the floors where the elevator stops, but it was pretty tight.⁸⁵

Blumberg got scared and stopped stealing for about two years after an incident at the University of California at Riverside library. A staff member caught him inside a restricted area of the library. In a panic, he ate the rubber stamp that he used to mark books he was going to steal to make it seem that he had brought them with him from another library. When he was searched, he was found to be carrying the identification cards for Matthew McGue and a goody-bag full of dental picks, sandpaper, and other tools, and a pouch containing a pound of gold. He was fingerprinted, charged with trespassing, released on a \$100 bond, and sentenced to three years of probation.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 480.

Blumberg kept most of his stolen books in his home, neatly shelved and organized. Before he was apprehended, he was working on his own cataloging system based on the Dewey Decimal System (which he had memorized). He kept a scrapbook of his souvenir bookplate collection, which he said “became a collection in its own right”;⁸⁶ he also said that he had not stolen from every library represented in the scrapbook.

The extent of Blumberg’s activities may never have come to light if he were not turned in by his friend, Rhodes. Rhodes, who had admitted to extensive criminal activity, including drug dealing, turned Blumberg in for a \$56,000 bounty he negotiated with the Justice Department. Rhodes had no qualms about transforming himself into a government informant in order to escape harsher sentencing for his own crimes.

Blumberg was arrested in Ottumwa, Iowa at two o’clock in the morning on March 20, 1990. His trial in 1991 “marked the only known instance in which criminal bibliomania was defended in an American courtroom with a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity.”⁸⁷ He was found guilty, sentenced to 71 months in prison and fined \$200,000.⁸⁸ The judge expressed his hope that Blumberg would at some point seek the psychiatric care he seemed to need.

Blumberg was not happy with idea of claiming insanity. He said:

If I lose, I wind up in prison. If I win, I wind up in the grin bin, and they can keep you in there for the rest of your life. If I win, then that also means I’m crazy and that I’m a danger to society. So to tell you the truth, I’d rather be locked up, do my time, and get out.⁸⁹

He was released on parole in 1995. This made librarians around the country anxious and they circulated Blumberg’s photograph as if it were a wanted poster. He had

⁸⁶ Ibid., 467.

⁸⁷ Ibid., xxv.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 479.

no direction upon release; deprived of his anonymity, he was no longer able to spend his days pursuing the only life he knew. He was faced with the challenge of finding a way to control his compulsions. He was frustrated because he felt that the only people with whom he could communicate were other prisoners.

The stipulations of his parole included not entering abandoned or condemned houses or buildings. He was also required to present a letter to the staff at any library or bookstore he entered stating that he was a convicted book thief; before leaving any such establishment, he was required to submit to a bodily search.

In 1996, after repeated instances of parole violation, he was taken back into federal custody. He was arrested again in 1997 when police found him retrieving hardware from an abandoned Victorian house; he was charged with stealing antique doorknobs and assorted lighting fixtures and sentenced to five years in prison.

To Rhodes's disappointment, the initial \$20 million estimate of value for the Blumberg collection was inaccurate; the stolen items were actually worth closer to \$5.3 million. Rhodes had been hoping to negotiate a higher bounty and to convince victimized libraries to pay him a "finder's fee" based on the initial figure.

Despite the fact that Blumberg sometimes stole hundreds of items from the same library, many of the institutions that had been victimized were unaware of any of the thefts. Many librarians maintain that unless a stolen book is requested and found to be missing from the shelf, it is impossible to know that it has been taken.

During his trial, Blumberg said, "[The books I stole] were sort of on an interlibrary loan to me...because I always intended to give everything back."⁹⁰ He also said that he didn't feel the libraries from which he had stolen had inadequate security

⁹⁰ Ibid., 491.

measures in place; he'd simply seen the opportunity to obtain materials for his collections. Of collecting in general, he said, "The chase really is something... It just gets worse, especially when you get close to achieving the ultimate. It's agonizing. Sometimes you wish you hadn't started."⁹¹ He also said, "I was consumed by the passion to collect... I'd be so wrapped up in that, I wouldn't really think about the whys or the wheres of what else was happening."⁹²

Blumberg, who desires recognition as the greatest book thief of the twentieth century, seems to have been a passionate collector who needed an outlet for his compulsive tendencies. He was attracted to the challenge and the thrill of stealing as well as the desire to accumulate a reference collection for himself. While he certainly suffers from mental illness, it appears that the library theft caused by his book obsession was simply one avenue on which he was able to fixate his compulsions.

Special Agent Aiken, who worked on the Blumberg case, felt that libraries would be hard pressed to stop a thief like Blumberg no matter what security measures they took. He said, "I supposed that if these people were willing to dig a fifty-foot hole in the ground and encase everything in concrete, he might not have been able to get in, but I wouldn't bet on that either."⁹³

Another detective working on the case was eager to finish the Blumberg business and get back to the real world of crime fighting. He said:

Stephen is a clever thief and deserves to pay a price for what he did. But I have a lot of trouble with those people who want to see him hang. Maybe I'm coming at it from a different direction, but then most of the cases I work on are murders, rapes, wife beatings, drugs, and child abuse, so I have a hard time making Steve out to be something he isn't. He stole valuable books, but he treated them with respect, and

⁹¹ Ibid., 492.

⁹² Ibid., 481.

⁹³ Ibid.

they are going back to where they belong. Harm was done, but maybe now these libraries will pay a little more attention to their security. It may be true that he is one of the great cultural robbers of our time. But he is not an evil man.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ibid., 519.

John Charles Gilkey – The Credit Card Book Thief



John Gilkey was a rare books lover and collector based in Treasure Island, California. Although he did not physically fit the genteel image of a collector in the eyes of the many San Francisco Bay area rare books dealers with whom he did business, Gilkey had a deep appreciation for nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, including children's books, fantasy and science fiction, mystery and detective fiction, and Hollywood memorabilia and movie tie-ins. He had expensive taste and often purchased signed and autographed materials, including Einstein letters and Brahms postcards.⁹⁵ Despite his frequent purchases, his real name and face were a mystery to many of the dealers whom he defrauded over a period of two years.

Ken Sanders, the security chair for the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America and rare books dealer, said, "With this increase in cyber commerce, a Wild West frontier mentality has also come to the fore; the gunslingers and cattle rustlers of the Old West have been supplanted by the forgers and credit card thieves of the New West."⁹⁶ Gilkey, a cattle rustler of the New West, managed to swindle rare books dealers all over

⁹⁵ Ken Sanders, "The Name of the Thief: A Portrait of John Charles Gilkey," *ABAA Newsletter* 14 (Spring, 2003). 13 March, 2005 <<http://www.abaa.org/pages/new/newsletter/03spring-3thief.html>>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

the country out of at least \$100,000 worth of merchandise by using stolen credit card numbers to make purchases.

Gilkey's job in a ritzy San Francisco department store allowed him to "quietly [harvest] its high-end customers' credit card account numbers and expiration dates."⁹⁷ Around 2000, he began calling dealers in the area and inquiring about specific titles. Later, the dealers with whom he spoke remembered that he seemed friendly, polite, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable about the materials and the book trade in general; this familiarity with the trade made it easy for Gilkey to gain most booksellers' confidence. He then gave a stolen credit card number to the dealer along with a fake name. The dealer ran the credit card and, most often, the purchase went through without a hitch. Gilkey would then tell the dealer that he (or an uncle, son, brother, friend) was going to be in the area and would just drop by the next day to pick the item up. Gilkey would either arrive in person or send his father to pick up the purchases. The dealers never knew the sale was amiss until the owner of the card called the credit card company to have the charge cancelled. The dealers were then left to cover the costs of the losses.

Ken Sanders, who is responsible for posting reports of thefts to the ABAA listserv, began to notice a trend in the rash of crimes in the Bay area, but was long at a loss about how to proceed. Credit card fraud was still a new concept at the time and dealers did not yet know how to effectively deal with or combat it.

Gilkey must have known that his work was attracting attention and seemingly halted operations for a time. However, Sanders later found that Gilkey had not stopped making purchases; he had simply refined his technique and "expanded the parameters of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

his crimes” to include rare books dealers all over the country, “leaving a trail of stolen books that would stretch from the California coast to the New York Island.”⁹⁸

Gilkey’s new tactic still involved making purchases over the phone, only now he asked dealers to overnight items to him in California, adding the cost of shipping to the credit card purchase; he often explained that he needed the item in a hurry as a birthday gift. He had begun to use the stolen credit card information and fake names to make reservations at hotels in the Bay area. While he never actually stayed at the hotels, the reservations assured that the front desk would hold any packages delivered for him. Once again, the dealer was unaware of any problems with the purchase until weeks or months later. Many of the dealers recall that their suspicions were raised only when Gilkey stumbled over the name of a street or city, reciting addresses as if he were reading them, or phonetically sounded out the pronunciation of his supposed surname.

Meanwhile, Sanders was collecting reports of the thefts and beginning to piece clues together. He found that there was no evidence that the stolen items were being resold anywhere and thus concluded that the thief was most likely a collector. After Sanders realized the thief was having books shipped to hotel addresses, he posted alerts on the ABAA listserv warning dealers of Gilkey’s *modus operandi*.

Soon after this, Ken Lopez, ABAA president and rare books dealer in Massachusetts, called Sanders after receiving an order from a man he believed to be the “Northern California Hotel/Motel Credit Card Book Thief.”⁹⁹ After the caller told Lopez the address to which he wanted the purchases shipped, Lopez had typed the location into Google and found that it was a hotel. Sanders and Ken Munson of the San Jose High

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Tech Crime Unit set up a sting operation at the hotel. When Gilkey came to retrieve his order, he was wearing rumpled slacks and a baseball cap; he turned out to be a “somewhat scraggily dressed Caucasian male, slim build, about five feet, nine inches tall.”¹⁰⁰ Munson said he was dirty and looked like a homeless transient.

Despite Gilkey’s appearance, Sanders and Munson did not believe his claims that he was a transient and that a man had given him \$20 on the train to pick up the package. Gilkey then led them to various places around the Bay area where he was supposed to meet the man and receive his payment. After several hours, Gilkey was arrested. Before he could be brought up on charges, Gilkey bailed himself out of jail (for \$15,000) and disappeared.

Over the next several months, Sanders tracked Gilkey’s efforts to sell some of his stolen books in San Francisco and Los Angeles in an attempt to raise money for an attorney in time for his trial. Sanders was unable to have him arrested, however, because his actions were outside of Munson’s jurisdiction; Munson told Sanders that it would be “quite difficult to get the SFPD interested in such a relatively minor bit of larceny” and even more difficult to attract the attention of the LAPD.¹⁰¹

Before the trial even began, Munson found Gilkey’s apartment and entered with a search warrant. He found there many of the books that had been reported stolen; others may have been hidden in storage facilities. Gilkey was sentenced to three years in prison, thus ending his “reign of terror.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Stanislas Gosse – *The Name of the Rose* Thefts

Stanislas Gosse, a former French Naval officer, worked as a professor of mechanical engineering at a Strasbourg engineering school. His amateur studies of Latin led him to a passion for fifteenth-century books. It is not known when he began to visit Mont Sainte Odile or what his initial intentions were. It would lead, however, to a two-year love affair with the wondrous library there and his eventual capture at age 32.

The convent of Mont Sainte Odile was built in the eighth century in the Vosges Mountains of France. Today, it is the most popular attraction in Alsace for pilgrims and holiday-makers. Although it is still intended to offer opportunities for contemplation and meditation, it comes complete with a hotel, gift shops, restaurants and hiking trails. Stanislas Gosse found it easy to visit the convent, but somewhat difficult to enter the library, which is and always has been locked and closed to the public.

The library at Mont Sainte Odile holds thousands of priceless illuminated manuscripts and volumes dating back to the fifteenth century. Father Alain Donius, the prior, was at a loss when items began rapidly to disappear from the locked room.¹⁰³

Gosse would arrive at the convent during the day with the teeming visitors and managed never to attract attention or suspicion. He first entered the library in August of

¹⁰³ Later, Father Donius would say of his conversation with the thief: "Then, blow me down, he told me that I had instructed him in the catechism when I was still a country curate."; Philip Jacobson, "Secret Passage Used to Strip French Abbey of Rare Books," *The Telegraph* June 16, 2002. 13 March 2005 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2002/06/16/wabbey.16.xml>>.

2000 using a set of keys he had stolen from some unwary keeper. Once inside, he perused the collection and chose what he wanted to carry home with him on his bicycle.

Father Donius was mystified by the disappearance of a few conspicuous items and immediately ordered the locks changed. For a short time, the library remained untouched.

During this time, Gosse found architectural plans of the building that houses the library at Mont Sainte Odile which showed him the existence of a forgotten secret passageway. Accounts differ concerning where Gosse found these plans, as he never imparted that information upon his capture. The prosecutor in his case claimed it was discovered in an obscure journal article found in the Strasbourg University library;¹⁰⁴ some assert the map was in a book Gosse stole from Mont Sainte Odile before the locks were changed;¹⁰⁵ others maintain the map was found in the public archives.¹⁰⁶

Using the map, Gosse deduced a way into the library of which not even the residents and officials of Mont Sainte Odile were aware. While some structural details are uncertain, many accounts agree on certain aspects of Gosse's methods. The journey inside required him to scale a sheer exterior wall, which led to an attic workshop, which is now part of the hotel. From there, he followed a disused corridor to the next building. At the end of the corridor, he climbed down a very old rope ladder to a small sealed room. By pushing on a portion of the wall, he discovered that a bookcase inside the next room gave way. He then found himself standing inside the library. Once there, he

¹⁰⁴ Jon Henley, "The Mystery of the Hilltop Monastery, the Locked Room and the Missing Manuscripts," *The Guardian* May 24, 2002. 13 March 2005 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4420440,00.html>>.

¹⁰⁵ Jacobson, "Secret Passage Used to Strip French Abbey of Rare Books."

¹⁰⁶ Paul Webster, "Mystery at the Monastery Ends as CCTV Reveals Chamber of Secrets' Daring Thief," *The Guardian* June 19, 2003. 13 March 2005 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/sotry/0,3604,980213,00.html>>.

leisurely perused and read, leaving only at night with departing hotel or restaurant guests. Gosse eventually became so comfortable with his routine that he began to taunt Mont Sainte Odile officials by leaving a single rose in the library to show he had visited.

When Father Donius found that even more items were disappearing from the library, he ordered the locks changed again and the windows sealed. Books continued to vanish, sometimes a dozen at a time. The locks were changed a third time. When entire shelves began to be cleared, Father Donius thought, “One day I’ll come in and there’ll be nothing left.”¹⁰⁷

Confounded and distraught, Mont Sainte Odile officials sought help from local investigators and law enforcement. They concluded there must be another entrance to the library. They tested floorboards, walls, and the ceiling. Finally, a *gendarme* (possibly accidentally) put his weight against a bookcase and found that it swung back to reveal the secret chamber and the rope ladder.

It was only then, in June of 2002, that a closed-circuit television camera was installed to catch the thief red-handed. That very night, while the monks and nuns were attending a Pentecost service, the police watched as Gosse slipped into the library once again, made his selections, and filled three suitcases¹⁰⁸ with almost 300 books and manuscripts. He was strolling along, still carrying the rope he had used to climb the outer wall, when he was arrested. He immediately confessed his crimes and described how he had been entering the library.

¹⁰⁷ Jacobson, “Secret Passage Used to Strip French Abbey of Rare Books.”

¹⁰⁸ The two articles from *The Guardian* (May 24, 2002 and June 19, 2003) disagree about this detail. The 2002 article claimed Gosse used two suitcases, while the 2003 article states that he filled three suitcases. One must wonder how Gosse could have made his climb up with any suitcases at all (even if they were empty), but it seems more likely that he was only able to carry two comfortably.

When the police searched his Strasbourg flat, they found that Gosse had stolen about 1,100 books and manuscripts from the library at Mont Sainte Odile. He had stacked them neatly on shelves and organized them by subject. None of the books were damaged; in fact, it was evident that Gosse had restored some of the items and carefully placed his own bookplate over that of Mont Sainte Odile.

Later, he told the court that he was blinded by his passion for the books and that he believed he was rescuing them. “I felt the books had been abandoned,” he said. “They were covered with dust and pigeon droppings and I felt no one consulted them any more.”¹⁰⁹ Gosse never attempted to sell any of the items; even if he had, any experienced dealer would have instantly recognized them as unique items of incalculable worth.

While the maximum sentence for these crimes is five years in prison, Gosse, who had preyed on the library and driven its caretakers to distraction, received a suspended sentence¹¹⁰ of 18 months for burglary and was fined 17,000 euros.¹¹¹ The archbishop of Strasbourg and Father Donius forgave Gosse, bade him continue his teaching career, and even promised to allow him supervised access to the collection in the future.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Webster, “Mystery at the Monastery Ends as CCTV Reveals Chamber of Serets’ Daring Thief.”

¹¹⁰ Wherein a term of imprisonment is imposed, but does not require Gosse to actually serve jail time, providing he does not commit another offence for the specified period of time.

¹¹¹ A sum equal to about \$22,720.

The Library of Congress Thieves – A Criminal Legacy

In the 1890s, when the Library of Congress was almost 100 years old, it experienced the first of its more notorious security failings when two employees broke into the Librarian's office and stole priceless documents which they began systematically to sell.

Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Librarian of Congress, was responsible for the Copyright Law of 1870, which requires that all copyright applicants submit two copies of their work to the Library of Congress. After this law was put into place, the Library began to grow at an alarming rate and it was soon decided that a bigger building was necessary to house the collection. Materials would have to be moved from the old building to the new one and there were plenty of move-related issues to keep Spofford busy. So busy was he that he was not even aware that the Force collection, which was kept in his own office, was regularly being ransacked.

In 1896, Lewis McKenzie Turner was the 24-year-old clerk in charge of the Music Division of the Library and had been thus employed for eight years. Philip McElhone, 22, was a copyright clerk who had been with the Library for three years. The two were friends and both were very curious about the nature of the items that were protected jealously and locked in Spofford's office. According to later testimony, they did not intend to steal anything from the office, but merely wanted to have a peek inside.

Turner and McElhone overcame the feeble lock on Spofford's office door and found the little-known Peter Force collection inside.

The Force collection was sold to the Library of Congress in 1867 by the historian and archivist Peter Force for \$100,000. In all, there were over 60,000 books and pamphlets in the collection, scrapbooks of military and political correspondence from the Revolutionary War period, and 400 incunabula. Some of the more prized items, like George Washington's diaries, were kept in Spofford's desk drawers and were only used with his express permission. None of the items had yet been cataloged and no record of the Library's ownership had been created.

Turner and McElhone were unable to control their greed and began visiting Spofford's office early in the morning and late in the evening after working hours and on Sundays. During about 15 different trips to the collection, they stole autographs and letters of Benedict Arnold, George Washington, Thomas Paine, Ethan Allen, Benjamin Franklin, and John Hancock. They agreed they would sell the items and split the profits. They went to New York and began the lucrative task of establishing relationships with a few different dealers, namely Walter and William Benjamin, brothers who owned and operated autograph dealerships. Turner preferred that McElhone be responsible for the verbal communication and negotiations and remained a silent partner throughout most of their collaboration.

Eventually, Turner and McElhone became overly confident and attempted to sell to William Benjamin the diary kept by George Washington during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Benjamin realized the rarity of such an item and immediately questioned the two men about how they had come to own such a thing. They claimed to

have inherited the diary along with most of their other antiquities from McElhone's late father. The dealer was not convinced.

William Benjamin contacted officials in Washington and asked if the Library had suffered recent thefts, namely that of Washington's diary. If so, he said, he might be able to help bring the culprits to justice. The employees of the Library said that to their knowledge, there had not been any items stolen. They did, however, contact the Secret Service and informed them of the suspected thefts.

The Secret Service immediately contacted Spofford about the diary. Spofford was shocked to see that not only was it no longer in his office, but the Force collection was missing a significant number of items. He was the only employee of the Library that had knowledge of the collection, and his aging and taxed memory was the only source of information about what it had originally contained.

The Secret Service then contacted Benjamin and demanded the return of the stolen items. They did not, however, offer any immunity or possibility of compensation for the dealer's exhausted funds. Benjamin reluctantly turned the items over after officials promised that any items not proven to be the property of the United States would be returned to him.

Following Turner and McElhone's arrests in 1897 was a dramatic trial in which the two thieves began to turn on one another. The judge decided to try the two men separately and it was decided that McElhone would be the first in court. McElhone's attorney wished to prove that Turner had used the naïve and unaware McElhone to assist in his criminal activities. The District Attorney, however, wanted to prove that McElhone had actually been the instigator of the whole affair.

McElhone said that he'd thought the materials they'd been selling had been inherited by Turner's father-in-law, Dr. Miller, and had no idea they had been stolen from the library; he even admitted to entering Spofford's office with Turner, but said he'd believed they were simply there to collect Dr. Miller's papers.

Turner claimed he had begun the venture to support his lifelong addiction to gambling and he told the court that they had collaborated from the beginning; he even accused McElhone of stealing from the Library for profit before they ever began working together. Thus, Turner did not attempt to prove his innocence, but rather to prove that he was not the mastermind and McElhone not the innocent dupe.

In the end, McElhone was fined \$200. Turner was never even tried for his crimes.

Because the Library of Congress had no ownership records of the stolen items, they relied on the honesty of the dealers, to whom they offered no financial compensation. Many dealers, despite their bitterness over the lost time and funds, returned items as a sign of good faith and an attempt to restore the Force collection to wholeness. Walter Benjamin said that "if the \$200 fine was a precedent, he was prepared to buy government records from all thieving clerks and pay their resulting court fees and fines."¹¹²

Spofford was pressured to retire after the thieves were tried, and he willingly stepped down as Librarian of Congress. However, no significant changes in security procedures within the Library were put into place at that time or, seemingly, for the next hundred years.

¹¹² Aaron D. Purcell, "Abstractions of Justice: The Library of Congress's Great Manuscripts Robbery, 1896-1897," *The American Archivist* 62 (Fall 1999): 340.

In 1991, after an \$81.5 million renovation of the Jefferson Building, the main building housing the Library of Congress, the Library celebrated a grand opening. There followed a string of thefts that could have been prevented by tighter security and restricted access to valuable materials.

Harry Katz, a radiologist with various mental health problems, was charged with “removing, damaging, and destroying historical materials from the Library.”¹¹³ The court decided that as long as he continued his psychiatric treatment, he must only pay \$65,000 in restitution, a \$10,000 fine, and endure five years of probation.

Security guards stopped Barry Goldman, an attorney at the Government Accounting Office, on his way out of a reading room in the Library with 10 documents¹¹⁴ worth \$33,000 stuffed in his pocket. Officials later determined that in all he had stolen some \$200,000 worth of documents from the Library. Goldman was sentenced to six months in a community correctional center, two years of probation, and a \$10,000 fine.

In 1992, a Virginia books dealer, Fitzhugh Lee Opie, was arrested after trying to leave a manuscripts reading room with two stolen maps hidden under his sweater. It later came to light that he’d been stealing from the Library for 10 years, often using a razor to remove parts of volumes and plates, which he would then have rebound to look as if they’d come from his own collection. He was sentenced to six months in prison, three years of probation, and fined \$2,000.

James W. Gilreath worked for the Library of Congress for 20 years as an American history specialist. When he tried to sell items stolen from the Library to a Boston dealer, he was arrested. He claimed that his severe mental and physical health

¹¹³ Ibid., 342.

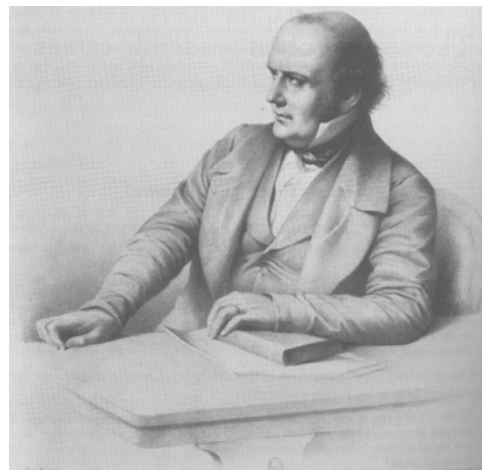
¹¹⁴ The documents included letters signed by John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

problems caused him to steal the items. On the condition that he continue with his counseling sessions, he was sentenced to only one year of home detention, 500 hours of community service, and fined \$20,000.

It was not until 1992 that the Library of Congress finally began to heighten security and move towards a closed-stacks system. Despite the protests by various researchers who felt that any further restrictions to materials would hinder scholarship, the closed-stacks system will save countless materials from the hands of future Turners, Goldmans, and Gilreaths.

Count Guglielmo Libri –The Ransacking of France’s Heritage

Guglielmo Bruto Icilio Timoleone Libri-Carrucci Dalla Sommaia was born in Florence on January 2, 1802 to an insane father and a stifling mother.¹¹⁵ His parents separated when he was young. His father’s wild activities and insane and criminal behavior contributed to a troubled



upbringing which was to haunt Libri during his early career. His paternal influences, along with the times into which he was born (during the turmoil of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars), were perhaps the main stimuli affecting his adult endeavors.

He was a “delicate child,” which strengthened his relationship with his mother.¹¹⁶ However, he showed an early scientific aptitude and flair for foreign languages. Even in youth he had a passion for printed books and manuscripts, especially autographed documents. By the age of 13 he had read a ‘Memoria sopra un nuovo elettromero’ to the Accademia d’Emulazione of Pisa, of which he became secretary at age 16. He earned his doctorate at the age of 18 and published a well-received paper on the theory of numbers. At age 21, he became Professor of Mathematical Physics at Pisa.¹¹⁷

The nineteenth century was a time of “nationalism, an antiquarian interest in the past, and the progress of science and industrial technology... On all three Guglielmo

¹¹⁵ “Libri,” *The Book Collector* 46 (Spring 1997), 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

Libri left his mark...”¹¹⁸ He became a somewhat famous and often-published polymath and throughout his life was, among other things, a scientist, a mathematician, a patriot, a scholar, a journalist, a bibliophile, a bibliopole,¹¹⁹ and a biblioklept.

Refusing to be tied to any one profession or post, he wrote papers for scholarly journals in Paris, Berlin, and Florence, sometimes on history, sometimes on the practice of mathematics. He was very active politically and his attempt to persuade Habsburg Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany to institute a constitutional government in Italy resulted in his exile to Marseille. There, he “recovered his composure in the libraries of Carpentras and Aix-en-Provence.”¹²⁰

Although he had arrived in France penniless, he was soon a naturalized citizen,¹²¹ a member of the Académie des Sciences giving lectures on the history of science at the Collège de France, and a charmer among the elite intellectual circles. The wife of astronomer and friend Augustus de Morgan remembered Libri as an entertaining and knowledgeable man, as well as “one of the noblest looking men I ever saw”; he had “the sparkling merry humour of his countrymen, and, like an Italian, was simple and affectionate, but hasty and irascible.”¹²²

Driven by a love for manuscripts and other primary documents, which became especially strong while conducting historical research for his writings, Libri began to build a personal collection of documents and books. His desires were driven partly by the bibliophile inside him and partly by a delight in participating in the rare books

¹¹⁸ Nicholas Barker, “Foreword,” in *The Life and Times of Guglielmo Libri (1802-1869): Scientist, Patriot, Scholar, Journalist, and Thief: A Nineteenth-century Story*, P. Alessandra Maccioni Ruju and Marco Mostert (Hilversum, Netherlands: Verloren Publishers, 1995), 9.

¹¹⁹ A seller of books.

¹²⁰ “Libri,” 11.

¹²¹ Libri’s allegiance to France was so strong in his mind that he wrote, “My great hope is that my bones will be buried in the soil that honoured me after welcoming me as an exile.”

¹²² Ruju and Mostert, 14.

industry. One of Libri's admirers, Paul Lacroix, "noted with surprise his delight in selling rather than keeping books. The enjoyment of the chase ended in the sale room."¹²³ Another of Libri's friends characterized him as a "bibliophile, bibliographer, and above all bibliopole."¹²⁴ He had "a legendary ability to trace lost documents" and had built business relationships in France, England, Germany, and Italy.¹²⁵

Because of his presence and expertise in the rare books and manuscripts business, Libri was hired to catalog and consign collections. He became well aware of the state of disorganization in which most of Europe's libraries existed at the time and he began to take advantage of chaos. In 1826, while he was librarian of the library of the Accademia dei Georgofili, some 300 books were found to be missing. Libri had been adding items from the library shelves to his own collection all the while, but was able to shrug off the incident, blaming the loss on the negligence of the other employees.

In 1837, he secured a position as part of a committee to review and catalog the manuscripts of all the public libraries of the Départements. He threw himself into this task, "jealously excluding his colleagues from the task whenever possible."¹²⁶ One of the librarians recalled "the long days spent alone in the stacks, meals, even a bed, brought in..."¹²⁷ Libri continued to add to his own collection, taking particularly choice items from the collections of items not yet cataloged.

In 1844, he was banned from the Archivio Mediceo and the Biblioteca Laurenziana after he was seen removing leaves from the Archivio. The pressure of being caught red-handed was enough to make Libri decide to dispose of a large part of his

¹²³ "Libri," 12.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

collection, either by gift or sale. He fled to England and did not return even after he was found guilty in 1850 and sentenced to ten years in prison for various thefts. From London, he wrote and issued articles and pamphlets in his defense. Between 1859 and 1864, he sold most of his rare books and manuscripts in a series of four sales that “changed and enlarged the pattern of book-collecting in the English-speaking world.”¹²⁸

When the heir of Lord Ashburnham, who had purchased a large portion of Libri’s collection, decided to sell his father’s antiquities, Administrateur Général of the Bibliothèque Nationale Léopold Delisle was able to prove that certain manuscripts in the collection had been torn out of volumes belonging to France. In 1888, years after Libri’s death, Delisle published his research and proved indisputably Libri’s guilt. Only then were many of the manuscripts that had been stolen returned to France.

Scholars still search for an answer to a seemingly simple question: Why did he do it? There are many theories and most likely many of them are true. Philarète Chasles claimed that Libri stole “out of cleverness and the happiness of moving in secret even more than out of greed. He was a crook for the pleasure of it and with grandeur...”;¹²⁹ but surely there was more to Libri’s life and ambitions than being a mere con artist.

Barker speculates that perhaps it was because of Libri’s “desire to make physical contact with the past through its relics.”¹³⁰ In a letter to his mother Libri, who was aware of his own combative nature (but considered it to be a positive attribute), explained that studying manuscripts helped him “to appease the pain and control anger.”¹³¹ Was his

¹²⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁹ Ruju and Mostert, 332.

¹³⁰ Barker, 11.

¹³¹ Ruju and Mostert, 333.

tendency to excel responsible for his desire to build the most extraordinary collection in Europe of rare and unique materials?

Libri was arrogant, passionate, sometimes ill-tempered, and often a liar; he was also charismatic, sophisticated, and gracious. His charisma, confidence, and success drew people to him and inspired seemingly limitless devotion. He had many close friends and admirers who protested his innocence despite all evidence to the contrary. Many who knew him were completely loyal and convinced that his many contributions to scholarship throughout his life and career were proof of his virtue. Even after his death, the legend of his nationalism and pride for his achievements lived on. In 1909, Italian patriot Antonio Favaro said:

whatever faults for which Libri could be accused in those agitated times, an exile from his fatherland following the movements of '31 and persecuted by implacable hatred, no Italian ought ever to forget all that he did for this country.¹³²

Those who knew him in life were aware of his tendency to state “quite blandly that he cared not whether he created or destroyed as long as he did something notable.”¹³³ French scholars, many of whom most likely considered his thefts to be “notable,” needed no further proof than that provided by Delisle’s investigations. Ruju and Mostert reason, “It is hardly surprising that the French should judge harshly the Italian they had convicted of rifling their heritage.”¹³⁴

Marquis Gino Capponi, a friend of Libri, said in his memoirs:

“Admirable in the salons and incomparably friendly, flexible, with gentle epigrams of sweet humour, elegant in flattery, a good writer both in French and Italian, a profound mathematician, geometer, physicist, knowing history through and through, a very

¹³² Ibid., 15.

¹³³ Ibid., 333.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

analytical and comparative mind...; more expert than an auctioneer or bookseller in the science of books, this man had only one misfortune: he was essentially a thief.”¹³⁵

¹³⁵ “Libri,” 22.

Samuel George and Elizabeth Matz – The Family Affair

Sam Matz was an ex-sailor born in Cleveland Ohio in 1918. He had an unhappy childhood, having lived in an orphanage until the age of 11, when he was “farmed out” to rural families to perform manual labor in exchange for room and board. He only went so far in school as to complete the ninth grade and enlisted in the army when he was 17. He was later discharged for hyperthyroidism.



He married Sylvia E. Roewer when he was 21 years old; he beat her often and “especially enjoyed slashing off her clothes with a razor.”¹³⁶ Matz married Dorothy Dalton in 1948 (although there’s no record of a divorce from Sylvia) and left her for a New York woman named Vera Carrano. His third and final marriage was in 1955, when he married Elizabeth. Over the course of his romantic escapades, “he sired about a dozen children, approximately one for every state where he was later wanted.”¹³⁷ Some of these he abandoned, others he abused and starved; while he and Elizabeth were living in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, they were arrested for locking their children in a room for a time without any food or water.

¹³⁶ Charles Hamilton, *Scribblers and Scoundrels* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1968), 28.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

This unsavory couple managed to steal about half a million dollars worth of rare documents from the National Archives in Washington in 1962. They also defrauded countless dealers and buyers who attempted to do business with them.

On multiple occasions and under various aliases,¹³⁸ Sam and Elizabeth Matz visited the National Archives posing as a researcher and his assistant and/or wife. While the Archives had strict policies at the time about checking any bags or items leaving the research rooms, the security guards never inspected ladies' purses for fear of invading their privacy. The Matz couple knew this and used Elizabeth's handbag often.

Despite their roaring trade in theft and fraud, the Matzes used their children to shoplift for food and always lived in cheap, temporary housing. They eagerly sold items to dealers for a fraction of their worth; the Chief Archivist of the United States at the time, Wayne C. Grover, said, "those crooks worked harder for \$300 than most honest people would."¹³⁹ Sam Matz often took pills and used IV drugs; the need to support this habit likely explains the rate at which the family's income disappeared.

In September, 1962, Elizabeth Matz walked into the rare books and manuscripts dealer Charles Hamilton's shop and attempted to sell him three items.¹⁴⁰ Hamilton was on his lunch break and she was told to come back later. Hamilton had already been

¹³⁸ Some known aliases used by Sam and Elizabeth Matz are: Colonel Andrew and Ruth Barnett of Kansas City; John and Louise Adams of Adams Art Imports; Wayne and Helen Martin of the Martin Pen Co.; Dr. J. Webster and Elizabeth Kane (his assistant); Bradford and Rachel Armstrong; Robert and Elizabeth Benson; Robert J. and Betty Arlene Williams; Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Novak; Mr. and Mrs. Manuel C. Weigel; Mr. and Mrs. Barbara Palmer; Dr. and Mrs. R. McClaferty; and Dr. Robert Bradford Murphy and his assistant.

¹³⁹ *New York Times* (New York), 14 October 1963.

¹⁴⁰ The items were: an 1821 letter by Andrew Jackson to Secretary of War John C. Calhoun complaining that he had not received his army pay and had had to borrow money; an 1866 letter from General Ulysses S. Grant to President Andrew Johnson asking for the pardon of a Confederate soldier and which had Johnson's signature at the bottom; and an 1864 letter to the provost marshal general which discussed the disposition of the Confederate troops. Elizabeth Matz sold the letters for \$350 to Hamilton when he knew them to be worth at least \$500.

swindled once by the Matzes years earlier and was working with the FBI to try to bring them to justice. An agent from the Bureau was at Hamilton's shop when Elizabeth came back, but the couple managed to narrowly escape when the agent hesitated because he had not been able to positively identify them.

After that, FBI agents and United States postal inspectors raided the Matzes' homes on various occasions, always to find the couple had just fled with their children, leaving the hotel room, furnished apartment, or other temporary quarters in the chaos of hasty abandonment.

Their repeated escapes are remarkable given the fact that the family was somewhat conspicuous. They always traveled with at least five children, one of which was an infant. The wanted posters said that Sam "dresses well, talks big, smokes cigars."¹⁴¹ Elizabeth's face was covered with warts (which she later had removed by electrolysis in order to avoid recognition) and she looked "beaten" and "pathetic."¹⁴² She was said to have "a high-pitched voice" and was "untidy in personal appearance."¹⁴³

Soon after their visit to Hamilton's shop, Sam and Elizabeth Matz entered the Detroit Public Library as Dr. and Mrs. McClaferty. "Mrs. McClaferty" was negotiating the sale of some documents to the library when "Dr. McClaferty" began to make a fuss about not being granted access to some valuable and restricted materials. The librarians began to suspect the two were not authentic and contacted the FBI. The librarians then told the McClafertys to come back later, at which time the library would purchase the materials and grant Dr. McClaferty the access he desired. FBI agents, armed with a search warrant, then trailed the couple back to their apartment and arrested them.

¹⁴¹ Hamilton, 42.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

During their trial in 1964, Sam Matz insisted on acting as his own lawyer, calling witnesses whom he had previously defrauded and whose testimonies were ultimately very damaging to his case. The judge sentenced them each to 10 years in prison, saying, “In all my years on the bench, I have never seen such a despicable pair as you two!”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Hamilton, 46.

Mimi Meyer – Revenge on the Ransom Center

In the early 1990s, Mimi Meyer was in her mid-40s, a “stocky little woman with thick red hands.”¹⁴⁵ She had been working as a volunteer at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin since 1989.¹⁴⁶ The Center trained her to perform minor conservation tasks and she was allowed to wander the rare book area; she was given these privileges by an unnamed Ransom Center employee with whom Meyer was romantically involved.¹⁴⁷ It was when her boyfriend was dismissed that Meyer became angry and decided to get back at the library in her own way.

Meyer began stealing items from the rare books stacks. She sometimes took things because they looked valuable or important; other times she stole things simply because they looked interesting. She would pass the security guard many evenings while carrying a bag of stolen books. She often managed to hide larger items under her dress and leave unnoticed. Eventually, she would pilfer almost 400 rare and valuable items from the library’s million volume collection of rare books, including a quarto edition of Audubon’s *Birds of America*, Japanese art books, and works by Lewis Carroll.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Lisher, Mark. “Book Bandit Rocked Ransom.” *Austin American-Statesman* 1 Feb. 2004. 18 March 2005 <<http://www.newslibrary.com/sites/aasb/>>.

¹⁴⁶ Blackburn, Elliot. “Stolen Rare Books to Return to University: Former Volunteer at Ransom Center Admits to Taking Italian Volume.” *The Daily Texan* 18 Nov. 2003. 10 March 2005 <www.dailytexanonline.com/news/2003/11/18/University/Stolen.Rare.Book.To.Return.To.University-560734.shtml>.

¹⁴⁷ Lisher, Mark. *Austin American-Statesman*.

¹⁴⁸ “University of Texas Rare-Book Thief Sentenced.” *American Libraries Online* 6 February 2004. 18 March 2005 <<http://www.ala.org/ala/online/currentnews/alnews2004/february2004/ransom.htm>>.

She continued to steal items from the collection until September of 1992. Meyer made the mistake of keeping a book from the rare books stacks in her office; she had not checked the item out and it was well beyond the library's secure area. A member of the library staff found the book and Meyer was dismissed for violating the Ransom Center's security policies. After Meyer's departure, the library conducted some routine inventories and found many items missing. The library staff immediately suspected Meyer but they had no way to be certain that the books had not simply been mis-shelved.

In 2001, a librarian in New York contacted officials at UT after seeing a copy of "Il Petrarcha" advertised in Swann Galleries' auction catalog. The book, a collection of poetry published in Venice in 1514 by Aldus Manutius, had vellum pages and was bound in dyed red Italian goatskin. While the opening bid was listed as \$5,000, the Ransom Center's director estimates its value to be at least 10 times that amount.¹⁴⁹ "Il Petrarcha" had been marked missing in the Center's catalog since soon after Meyer was dismissed.

When librarians contacted Swann Galleries, they were told that the book had been sent to them by Mimi Meyer and that she had sent 46 other items over the years, of which 34 were sold. Later, the FBI found that Meyer had sold another 57 books through Heritage, Pacific Book Auctions, and Sotheby's in New York, some of which went to overseas buyers. Meyer made about \$400,000 from the sales of the items stolen from the Ransom Center.¹⁵⁰ The FBI contacted Meyer and she immediately cooperated.¹⁵¹ However, many of the books she returned to the library were damaged and mutilated as a result of attempts to remove ownership stamps and bookplates.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Eberhart, George M. "Texas Rare-Book Thief Gets Probation." *American Libraries* 35 (2004), 14.

¹⁵¹ Lisher, *Austin American-Statesman*. At this time, Meyer not only handed over the 300 books still in her possession, but she also typed a complete inventory of all the books she had stolen from the Center.

Her lawyer told the court that Meyer never intended to sell any of the books she stole, but did so while facing some financial difficulties. He also said that she was “about to come into some family money,” and should be able to make restitution despite the fact that she was, as of the trial, unemployed.¹⁵²

Despite the fact that her crimes were punishable by up to 10 years in a federal prison and a \$250,000 fine, prosecuting attorneys told the court that if Meyer plead guilty and continued to cooperate with officials, they would recommend she receive only probation. At her trial, the judge sentenced her to three years of probation and \$381,595 in restitution fees, as well as requiring her to continue with various alcohol and mental health programs.¹⁵³

Meyer spoke only briefly to the director of the Ransom Center at her trial. She told him that she felt “a real sense of shame” because of what she had done.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Charles Merrill Mount – The Edwardian Gentleman from Brooklyn

Charles Merrill Mount was born Sherman Suchow in 1928 in Brooklyn. He grew up to be known as “proud and eccentric” and had a great interest in art history.¹⁵⁵ He eventually changed his name to Charles Merrill Mount, possibly because of his interest in William Sydney Mount, a nineteenth-century American portrait and genre painter. Mount pictured himself as a “perfectly normal Edwardian gentleman” and started carrying a walking stick, speaking with a British accent, and regularly wearing three-piece suits.¹⁵⁶

Mount lectured on art history in Europe and the United States and was a European agent for the Corcoran Gallery of Art. By the time he was in his mid-twenties, he had published a well-received biography of the artist John Singer Sargent (along with two other books on art history) and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to pursue his study of Claude Monet. He flew to Paris where he began using primary documents and started to build a manuscript collection of his own. At this point, he later claimed he was able to buy various letters of Sargent and James McNeill Whistler cheaply. Until 1961, he traveled around Europe adding to his manuscript collection and working as a portrait painter.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Theresa Galvin, “The Boston Case of Charles Merrill Mount: The Archivist’s Arch Enemy,” *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 443.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 443-444.

In 1961, Mount moved to Ireland, where he met and married a Dublin woman named Sara Long; they had four children. He said later that, while in Ireland, he became close friends with a priest named Father Grogan, from whom he acquired a collection of American Civil War papers. He and Sara separated by the end of the 1960s and Mount returned to New York City. Throughout the next decade he was tormented by marital and custody problems and made several trips back to Ireland in attempts to resolve matters. He lived with one of his sons in Washington, D.C. for a short time, but by 1980 he found himself alone and troubled.

During this period, he moved frequently from apartment to apartment. He had donated his files of notes, photographs and personal research materials to the Library of Congress. He was later evicted from his house in Virginia and put most of his belongings (file cabinets full of notes and about 300 of his own paintings) into storage and much of his manuscript collection went to safety deposit boxes. He lived with an artist friend in Massachusetts until 1984.

When Mount decided to go back to his study of art history, he was determined to produce an expanded revision of the Sargent biography that had earned him so much attention in the 1950s. This was when he began his visits to the Library of Congress and the National Archives.

Mount requested that the Library return his research materials for a time so that he might use them on a daily basis without the bother of routine check-out procedures. Eventually, through the intervention of Senator Ted Kennedy, Mount and the manuscripts librarian came to an agreement whereby the papers stayed in the Library of Congress's custody and Mount was to be given temporary access to "a private locked space in the

administrative offices...equipped with bookshelves and file cabinets.”¹⁵⁸ From this office, Mount was able to work unhindered by the watchful eyes of the security guards who policed the reading rooms. He was also seen to be working with Library-owned manuscripts while working with his own documents.

The security officers were confused and frustrated by Mount’s privileges and the fact that the librarians waved him through security checkpoints without subjecting him to normal procedures. They did not understand that Mount’s donations had bought him certain freedoms.¹⁵⁹ Galvin states plainly, “The Library of Congress was too liberal and open in their accommodation of Mount.”¹⁶⁰

Mount favored one particular work station while working in the reading room of the National Archives, and when Peter Joseph Capelotti, another researcher, unknowingly sat down there to work in July of 1987, he found Archives documents in the desk drawer. Later, when Mount arrived to find Capelotti working at “his desk,” he became very agitated, “caused quite a commotion and attempted to have the supervisor in the Central Search Room remove Capelotti from the space.”¹⁶¹

Mount was arrested on August 13, 1987 after he tried to sell 158 Civil War documents stolen from the National Archives to Goodspeed’s Bookshop in Boston. Claire Rochefort, the expert in charge of buying and selling old and rare autographed manuscripts, was suspicious of the self-titled “Civil War buff” and contacted the FBI. Until this point, the National Archives was not aware any items had been stolen.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 444.

¹⁵⁹ Nelson, 46-47.

¹⁶⁰ Galvin, 449.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 449

When he was arrested, Mount was carrying a razor blade in a small plastic case. Agents later found more stolen documents in Mount's safety deposit boxes. In his apartment, agents found 14 loose manuscripts pressed between blotter paper; all showed signs of attempts to remove ownership marks. In all, the documents he stole were worth some \$150,000.¹⁶²

In court, Mount damaged his own testimony by his frequent contradictory statements and emotional outbursts (which eventually led to contempt of court charges). For example, he claimed to have received a box of documents in the mail from a man named Rendell, whom he did not know; the prosecution later produced a letter from Mount to Rendell which proved they had corresponded. Mount also entered a photograph of himself taken alongside some documents; he claimed the documents in the photograph were those he'd been accused of stealing and that the picture had been taken while he was living in Ireland. However, Mount's own book on Monet revealed in a footnote that the photograph was of Mount standing next to a display of Monet letters at the Marmottan Museum in Paris.¹⁶³

The National Archives had very well-documented records of accession and ownership of the items Mount was accused of stealing, including microfilm copies and purchase receipts. Mount was convicted of theft, along with interstate transportation of stolen property, and sentenced to eight years in prison.

While National Archives and FBI officials believe Mount used the desk in the reading room as a holding station for the materials he stole, there has never come to light any solid evidence explaining exactly how Mount managed to steal so many documents

¹⁶² Nelson, 47.

¹⁶³ Galvin, 448.

from a seemingly secure institution. One FBI agent declared, “This is basically an intrusion into the history of this country.”¹⁶⁴

If Mount had not been given special privileges and exemption from security checks, would the thefts have occurred at all? It is possible that Mount would have found a way to take the records he wanted. David Wigdor, assistant chief of the Library of Congress manuscript division told the New York Times, “Perhaps our people haven’t been attentive enough...but there is a balance between security and access. We are not here just to protect these materials as relics; we are here to see to it that they are used.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ L.R. Pearson, “Scholar Accused of Stealing Rare Docs from LC, Archives,” *American Libraries* 18 (September 1987): 634.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

MORE THIEVES

The following section consists of 28 short entries devoted to thieves whose careers were short or about whom relatively little information exists. The entries provide only the highlights of the thieves' careers and what facts are available concerning their methods, motivations, and the consequences of their actions. The entries are arranged alphabetically according to each thief's surname.

ALEXANDER, CARL – In the early 1990s, Alexander was working on contract with a collectibles dealer. He constructed a shopping list of *Time Magazine* issues whose covers he wanted to find. He was caught walking out of the library at the University of California/San Diego with 34 *Time Magazine* covers he had removed from issues from 1953-1960. He was made to make restitution of \$2,616 for damages to the bound periodicals.¹⁶⁶

ANASTASIO, JOSEPH – While working as a security guard at the University of Bridgeport library between 1991 and 1993, Anastasio stole several documents, including some Abraham Lincoln letters. The University began trying to retrieve the items and found they had been scattered to collectors in Texas, Missouri, and Philadelphia.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ "Theft Reports 1987-1996," *Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries*. 19 March 2005 <www.rbms.nd.edu/committees/security/theft_reports/theft_reports_1987-1996.shtml>.

¹⁶⁷ "Theft Reports 1987-1996."

BARROIS, JEAN-BAPTISTE-JOSEPH – Barrois, born in 1784, was a well-educated and – traveled French gentleman as well as “one of the greatest robbers of French libraries in the nineteenth century,”¹⁶⁸ which was not proven until after his death when 64 French medieval manuscripts belonging to the Bibliothèque Nationale were found in his impressive collection. Because he was a bibliophile at the same time and his collection was purchased by the same buyer, Barrois’s name is almost always mentioned in the shadow of that of Guglielmo Libri. Barrois, however, had much more discriminating tastes. Because he was never tried in life, the details of his activities are unclear. It is said that because he believed King Louis Philippe to be a usurper of the throne, he decided that the absence of his true monarch, Henri V, “legitimized the possession of books stolen from the national library.”¹⁶⁹

BERMEO, ROBERT– Bermeo was hired as a special collections processor and student assistant at the University of California in Los Angeles in 1990. Before he was discovered and fired in June of 1992, Bermeo stole over \$1 million worth of materials (mostly film, theater and TV archival materials, by which he was fascinated) from the special collections and general collections of UCLA. Bermeo’s previous criminal activities did not come to light until his trial, and despite his attorney’s attempts for a ruling for probation, Bermeo was sentenced to three years and four months in the state prison.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Hugh Collingham, “Joseph Barrois: Portrait of a Bibliophile XXVI,” *The Book Collector* 33 (Winter, 1984): 431.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

¹⁷⁰ “Ex-worker Sentenced in UCLA Thefts,” *American Libraries* 27, (April 1996): 25.; Brooke Olson, “Material Stolen from Archives,” *Museum Security Network*. 15 March 2005 <<http://www.museum-security.org/bermeo.html>>; William Spain, “Probation a Common Punishment,” *Museum Security Mailinglist Reports* (22 June 2000). 15 March 2005 <<http://www.museum-security.org/00/095.html>>.

CAMPBELL, SHEILA MARIE MAUREEN – Using at least 30 different aliases, Campbell, 45, checked out and never returned about 700 books from the library in Springfield-Greene County, Missouri.¹⁷¹

CAPMAN, JOHN HARTER AND THE SAN FRANCISCO THEFT RING – Capman, owner of The Writer's Bookstore in California, was found to be the leader in a theft ring that had in the past decade stolen more than \$6 million worth of books from dealers in the San Francisco area. Capman, 50, together with flea-market book merchant John James Gundlach, had established relationships with local shoplifters, who knew what kind of merchandise he wanted and how much he would pay for it. Capman then sold the books to dealers and libraries at a discounted rate. Bill and Elaine Petrocelli, owners of the Corte Madera bookstore Book Passage, became concerned when they found they had lost more than \$100,000 in one year to shoplifters. They hired private detectives and off-duty police officers who eventually caught the shoplifter who led them to Capman.¹⁷²

COLLVER II, DOUGLAS DALE – When Collver, 33, was sentenced to six years in prison and \$25,000 in restitution for stealing books from the library at the University of Oregon and selling them on e-Bay, he asked to be sent to the state's boot camp program. He said, "I am missing a few pieces of the puzzle... I think it's the way I think. It's discipline."

¹⁷¹ "Theft Reports 1987-1996."

¹⁷² Elizabeth Bernstein, "Multimillion-dollar Book-theft Ring Cracked with Booksellers' Help," *Publisher's Weekly* 243, (Sept. 2, 1996): 23.; Chandler B. Grannis, "'Sting' Traps S.F. Stolen Books Dealer," *Publisher's Weekly* 227, (March 22, 1985): 13.; Norman Oder, "CA Book Theft Ring Cracked," *Library Journal* 121, (Nov. 1, 1996): 12-13.

It's accountability." The judge did not believe the discipline of the state's boot camp was appropriate given Collver's long criminal history.¹⁷³

DE MARCATELLIS, RAPHAEL – Marcatellis, born in 1437, was a French medieval bibliophile on the edge of the Renaissance world.¹⁷⁴ He entered the church at a young age and built a huge private library while abbot of St. Bavon's in Ghent, on which he spent copious amounts of money. He had an aversion to the printed book and preferred large scale, hand-copied affairs, presumably because of the prestige they afforded him. Although most accounts gloss over this detail, Marcatellis was fond of supplementing his prominent collections with choice volumes from the abbey library.¹⁷⁵ There is no account of any consequences of his actions.

FREY, EMIL – Frey, the director of the Moody Medical Library at the University of Texas, resigned in 1989 when he was suspected of being involved in the disappearance of some 80 of the library's rare books. He was indicted on charges of stealing five books valued between \$750 and \$20,000.¹⁷⁶

HAYNES, BYRON – Haynes, 36, walked out of the Bird Library at Syracuse University with five books dealing with Judaism. The alarms sounded and he ran to his car to speed away. A police officer saw him run a stop sign and gave chase. Soon, ten different

¹⁷³ "Man Who Stole Books from U. of O. Library is Headed for Prison," *KATU News* 30 June 2004. 13 March 2005 <www.katu.com/news/story.asp?ID=68758>.

¹⁷⁴ Albert Derolez, *The Library of Raphael de Marcatellis: Abbot of St. Bavon's, Ghent 1437-1508* (Ghent: E Story-Scientia Ltd., 1979), vii.

¹⁷⁵ 195. K. Lesley Knieriem, *Book-Fools of the Renaissance*, University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science Occasional Papers (Champagne, Ill: University of Illinois, 1993), 31-33.

¹⁷⁶ Gordon Flagg, "Librarian Resigns: FBI Probes Missing Rare Books at U. of Texas Medical Library," *American Libraries* 20, (July 1989): 626.; "Theft Reports 1987-1996."

cruisers were involved as Haynes led them through parking lots, over sidewalks, and against traffic for close to ten minutes. He threw the bag of books from his car window and the police assumed it contained drugs or guns. Officers caught up with him after a short chase on foot and used police dogs to search his car, but found nothing. He was charged with petty larceny, reckless endangerment, reckless driving, and various traffic violations.¹⁷⁷

HEYNEMAN, ERNEST – Heyneman, 85, stole more than 3,100 books and video tapes from the Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks libraries in California by removing the security strips from the items after checking them out, then returning them to the library; he would later come back to retrieve the desensitized materials. Because of his age and lack of a criminal record, Heyneman was sentenced to three years probation. The real punishment, however, was banishment and the loss of library privileges for the formerly upstanding citizen. He is no longer allowed to visit any library and authorities maintain the right to randomly search him or his home for stolen materials. Heyneman was remorseful in court and his wife apologized on his behalf.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ “Alleged Library Book Thief Sparks Chase,” *RedNova News* 19 July 2004. 1 March 2005 <<http://www.rednova.com/news/display/?id=72838>>; “Book Theft leads to Car Chase,” *ABCNEWS.com* 22 July 2004. 1 March 2005 <http://www.abclocal.go.com/wls/news/strange/072204_sn_caper.html>.

¹⁷⁸ “84-year-old Californian Faces Library Theft Charges,” *American Libraries* 21 Jan. 2002. 13 March 2005 <http://www.ala.org/al_onlineTemplate.cfm?Section=janeary2002&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=7651>; “85-year-old Thief Loses Library Privileges,” *American Libraries* 18 Nov. 2002. 13 March 2005 <http://www.ala.org/al_onlineTemplate.cfm?Section=november2002&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=12074>; “Elderly Book Thief Banned from Libraries,” *CourtTV.com: Stupid Crimes & Misdemeanors* 21 Nov. 2002. 13 March 2005 <http://www.courtTV.com/people/scm/scm_112102.html>; “Is It Possible to Love Reading Too Much?” *CBS New: The Odd Truth* 13 Nov. 2002. 13 March 2005 <<http://cbsnews.cbs.com/stories/2002/11/14/national/main529380.shtml>>.

JEVONS, DUNCAN – Over a period of 30 years, the Suffolk, England man stole 42,000 books from libraries, churches and academic institutions, including the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Chelmsford Cathedral. He was caught in 1994 when he tried to sell a book that still carried a library’s ownership marks. Police found the stolen items, along with 10,000 of Jevon’s own books, at his home, where they had been meticulously organized. Officials determined that the collection did not contain items of significant value. Jevons was sentenced to 15 months in prison.¹⁷⁹

KEEN, RONA – In Christchurch, New Zealand, Keen, 48, together with her two sons and her daughter-in-law obtained more than 30 library cards by using false identifications. Together, they stole 660 books worth \$30,000 from local libraries. She claimed that her sons manipulated her and was sentenced to only 200 hours of community service and 12 months of supervision while her family members went to jail.¹⁸⁰

LAWSON, PETER – A trainee bookbinder with “an obsession for books” admitted to stealing three books from a shop in London. He was sentenced to two years of probation as long as he promised to stay away from bookshops. Lawson, 44, said “I don’t miss them as long as I don’t get a whiff of them.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ “42,000 Books Thief Jailed,” *Library Association Record* 96, (July 1994): 357.

¹⁸⁰ “Guilty Plea Over Library Books,” *One News* 25 Aug. 2004. 13 March 2005 <http://tvnz.co.nz/view/news_national_story_skin/443852%3fformat=html>; “Mother Sentenced Over Book Scams,” *One News* 11 Nov. 2004. 19 March 2005 <http://tvnz.co.nz/views/news_national_story_skin/458289%3fformat=html>.

¹⁸¹ “Theft Reports 1987-1996.”

MANSKI, DWAIN EDGAR – Manski stole historic documents from the Marfa (Texas) Public Library and from the Presidio County Courthouse. He tore pages out of books and stuffed them into his pockets and socks. Officials found more than 100 documents when searching his car.¹⁸²

MCCALLUM, WILLIAM – A former New Hampshire assistant attorney general and Yale graduate, McCallum was disbarred in 1998 after being accused of stealing items from Dartmouth University, Boston College, Boston University, and Colby-Sawyer College. In court, he pleaded not guilty due to his various mental disorders, including bipolar disorder, severe depression, and kleptomania. McCallum proudly displayed his stolen items in his home and at his office. He was sentenced to six years in prison, having escaped the maximum sentence of 15 years in prison and a \$4,000 fine.¹⁸³

MISTRY, VIJAY – Mistry, an accessions assistant at Walsall public libraries in Britain, stole £50,000¹⁸⁴ of new books over a five year period. Officials found his home filled to the brim with the books, which had been cared for and neatly stacked and cataloged. Coworkers described Mistry as “a quiet, unassuming person who just got on with his work.” He was sentenced to three years of probation with a condition of psychiatric treatment.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² “Theft Reports 1987-1996.”

¹⁸³ “Ivy League Notebook,” *Yale Herald Online* (13 Feb. 1998). 15 March 2005 <www.yaleherald.com/archive/xxv/2.13.98/news/features.html>; Dan McGuire, “NH Attorney Stole Dartmouth Art,” *The Dartmouth* (12 Aug. 1998). 15 March 2005 <www-tech.mit.edu/V116/N33/student.3n.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Over \$94,000.

¹⁸⁵ “Assistant Borrows Library,” *Library Association Record* 97, (July 1995): 357.

MOFFATT, PATRICK – When he was arrested, Alaska native Patrick Moffatt was carrying “one of the most sophisticated sets of lock-picking tools the San Diego police officers had ever seen.” He had stolen \$11,000 worth of books from Parker Brothers booksellers in New Mexico. Before the theft, he spent \$700 buying books from the store.¹⁸⁶

PAPANASTASSIOU, JOHN – Papanastassiou, 34, used the age-old ploy of making a significant donation to a university library (in this case, Columbia University) in order to gain access to a restricted collection. The donation was a 300-year-old stolen manuscript. He was arrested in October, 1981 when he attempted to sell several stolen items for \$11,000 to a New York Dealer who was working with U. S. Customs agents. Papanastassiou sold books he’d stolen from rare books collections in London and mail stolen from his neighbors was found in his home. He was convicted of 28 counts of mail fraud, foreign transportation of stolen goods, sale of stolen property, and mail theft. He was sentenced to three and a half years in prison and a \$28,000 fine.¹⁸⁷

PARFITT, DONALD – A “decent, hard-working”¹⁸⁸ employee of Clays, the British company responsible for printing millions of copies of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, was sentenced to 180 hours of community service and a fine of £55¹⁸⁹ after he was arrested for trying to sell a copy of the not-yet-released book to The Sun newspaper

¹⁸⁶ “Theft Reports 1987-1996.”

¹⁸⁷ Slade Richard Gandert, “Greeks Bearing Gifts and Other Sad Tales,” *Library and Archival Security* 4 (1982): 39-40.; *New York Times* (New York), 3 September 1982.

¹⁸⁸ “Harry Potter & J.K. Rowling Round-up,” *The Alien Online News Archive* (21 June 2003). 13 March 2005 <http://www.thealienonline.net/ao_060.asp?baa=1&tid=1&scid=2&iid=1697>.

¹⁸⁹ About \$104.

for £25,000.¹⁹⁰ He said he'd found the pages in the parking lot and was remorseful for his spur-of-the-moment imprudence.¹⁹¹

SHERIDAN, WILLIAM H. – Sheridan stole from several libraries in England in the 1880s using many different aliases. He claimed that he “was compelled by a passion which he could not resist to steal books” and that “the librarians were careless, and thus put temptation in the way of weak men.” He was arrested by an eager and affronted librarian who urged his fellow victims to help in the prosecution. Sheridan was sentenced to one year in jail.¹⁹²

SIMPSON, LEE JOHN – Simpson, 44, was believed to be the ringleader in a group of 10-12 people who for a period of ten years stole rare books (including the Diaries of Captain Cook) from libraries all over New Zealand. He removed the library ownership labels from the stolen books and used a stamp to remark them with his father's name in the hopes that they would look as if they'd come from the family library. He sold the materials to support his gambling habit and police caught him when he tried to sell items to undercover officers. Simpson led them to his home and to the Waimakiriri River, where he'd buried valuable books in a pit under a tarpaulin. He was sentenced to five and a half years in prison.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ About \$47,270.

¹⁹¹ “Potter Book Thief Punished by Court,” *BBC Newsround* (4 June 2003). 13 March 2005 <www.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/uk/newsid_29630000/2963362.stm>.

¹⁹² S. Green, “Capture of a Notorious Book-thief,” *The Library Journal* 5 (1880): 48-49.

¹⁹³ Monique Devereux, “Book Thief Who Pillaged Libraries Gets 5 ½ Years,” *The New Zealand Herald* (22 Jan. 2005). 13 March 2005 <<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/index.cfm?ObjectID=10007568>>; “Rare Book Thief Pleads Guilty,” *TVNZ* (25 Nov. 2004). 13 March 2005 http://www.tvnz.co.nz/view/news_national_story_skin/460900%3fformat=html>.

STRICH, MARTIN – After he was arrested, Strich said he'd had a conversation with a stranger one day about how easy it would be to steal something from the library. In order to test this theory, Strich posed as a researcher and managed to build up friendly relations with the staff at the New York Public Library, who came to greatly respect him as a serious scholar. His first theft was carried out by slipping some letters into a folder and simply walking out with them. Later, he took advantage of the trust he'd gained and stole some Thomas Jefferson letters the librarians didn't even realize existed or were missing. He was finally caught after a manuscripts dealer, Charles Hamilton, became suspicious about the origins of the letters he'd bought from Strich. Hamilton said of Strich, "He was obviously well educated. In the afternoon sun that poured through my window and gilded his features, he seemed almost like some ancient Aztec god."¹⁹⁴ One of the manuscripts librarians, feeling that she was responsible for letting the letters be stolen and overcome with anguish, committed suicide shortly thereafter.¹⁹⁵

TORRES-CARBONNEL, JOSÉ – Torres, 34, a Spanish national, first came under suspicion at Harvard University libraries when he attempted to leave with an item he had not checked out and was revealed by the alarm system. He initially admitted to stealing 41 items from the library, but when officials raided his apartment, they found about 1,500 items belonging to Harvard that had been packed up for shipping to Granada. He had sold many items and had already managed to ship about 200 books overseas. Torres's

¹⁹⁴ Gandert, *Protecting Your Collection*, 17

¹⁹⁵ Kristin M. Janus, "Securing Our History," *Library & Archival Security* 17, no. 1 (2001): 3-15.

plans to move to Spain in the next few days were thwarted and he was sentenced to three to four years in prison, 10 years of probation, deportation, and fines of \$601,987.¹⁹⁶

WEMYSS, STANLEY – Wemyss was arrested in 1936 by the Newark Public Library's Special Investigator for the theft of three pamphlets valued at \$50. Having systematically stolen books from public, academic, and institutional libraries all over the country for a period of eight years (including 20 books from the Library of Congress), Wemyss was so distressed upon his capture that he tried unsuccessfully three times to end his life while being held in jail.¹⁹⁷

WILLINGHAM, ROBERT "SKEET" – After an inventory at University of Georgia's Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library in the 1980s revealed that almost a third of the collection was missing, Willingham, who was the library director and rare book curator at the time, was arrested. His home was searched and while some of the stolen items were found, many were never recovered. Willingham was sentenced to 15 years in prison, 15 years probation, and a \$45,000 fine.¹⁹⁸

WINSTANLEY, NEIL – While working as a paper conservator between 1997 and 2000 at Middle Temple law library in London, Winstanley began stealing books and maps dating back to 1595 (including the first Bible ever printed in Spanish). He was fired after librarians became suspicious when "he browsed through antique works and then took

¹⁹⁶ Christopher Reed, "Biblioklepts," *Harvard Magazine* (March-April 1997): 38-55.

¹⁹⁷ "Notorious Book Thief," *The Library Journal* 61 (1936): 859-860.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas M. Gaughan, "15-year Jail Sentence for Georgia Rare Book Thief," *American Libraries* 19 (Nov. 1988): 840.; Lee Shearer, "Classic Places: A Little-known Treasure," *OnlineAthens* (22 Nov. 2005). 13 March 2005 <<http://www.onlineathens.com/>>.

special editions into an office for no reason.” While authorities were able to recover some items from his home, many were too damaged to be restored. Others were likely sold to support his £60¹⁹⁹ a day heroin habit.²⁰⁰

YAKUBOVSKY, DMITRY – Yakubovsky was sentenced to five years in prison and confiscation of his property after being found guilty of stealing medieval manuscripts from the Russian National Library in December of 1994.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ About \$112.

²⁰⁰ “Library Book Thief Jailed,” *The Guardian* (8 Feb. 2003). 13 March 2005 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,891345,00.html>.

²⁰¹ “Theft Reports 1987-1996.”; Yakubovsky’s sentence was more severe than any that might be handed down for the same crimes in the United States.

CONCLUSION

Who are book thieves and why do they steal? As one can see from the results of this research, book thieves do not always wear black hats or ride black horses. They are gamblers. They are heroin addicts. They are scholars. They are collectors. They are police officers. They are parents. They are children. They are scientists. They are greedy. They are passionate. They are the victims of unhappy childhoods. They are, in short, the guy in the next carrel. There is often little that distinguishes the book thief from any other patron or customer who walks through the door. In 1920, Gaillard wrote that “the criminal is no one in particular—that every man is a potential criminal—that every man has his breaking strain physically, mentally, or morally.”²⁰²

While this may be true, if every librarian, archivist, and bookshop owner were to view each person who walked through their doors as a criminal in an innocent reader’s body, the quality of customer service would drop considerably. If libraries and archives are to continue to exist and function, they will continue to be victimized. There will always be someone willing to take advantage of the privilege of access to shared knowledge by attempting to make himself the sole beneficiary of a valuable commodity.

Galvin says that “there is no easy way for an archives or manuscript repository to protect itself against a resourceful and determined thief without inhibiting legitimate access.”²⁰³ Because times are changing, and so are the methods thieves use to filch

²⁰² Gaillard, 249.

²⁰³ Galvin, 450.

national treasures and the latest bestseller from libraries, vigilance, awareness, and a proactive attitude toward theft are essential to protecting cultural heritage.

It would be too simple to say that our nation's cultural institutions need better security and more vigilant librarians. As we have seen particularly in the case of Stephen Carrie Blumberg, might we assume that almost any security measures can be overcome by a determined and knowledgeable thief? Added security means added costs; many libraries and archives struggle with the funds they have and would rather spend in other areas, such as acquisitions. Another possible security measure is more extensive marking; however, "to many librarians this practice is repugnant, the equivalent of stenciling PROPERTY OF THE LOUVRE across the Mona Lisa."²⁰⁴

Or one might say that harsher sentencing for convicted book thieves is the answer to all of our problems. Many government officials will ask, "Is it ethical to spend tax money locking away book thieves, who are often scholars, when there are rapists and murderers to punish?" Is there any sentence that would scare a fanatical collector away from what could be the prize jewel in his collection? Most librarians are willing to settle for short prison sentences in cases where the thief returns or helps to find the stolen items.

It seems there is, and will continue to be, a battle of the bibliophiles: librarians on one side seeking to protect materials and free access to them and biblioklepts and other thieves on the other side seeking to procure items for themselves. Many librarians are just as passionate about their collections as are the drooling biblioklepts, and are willing to fight for them. After librarians realize they've been robbed, they are often shocked and angry. A librarian at Northwestern University, just one of the institutions hit by map

²⁰⁴ Harvey, "Mr. Bland's Evil Plot."

thief Gilbert Bland, said, “If that man gets in front of my car, I’ll run him over – but in a nice way. Oh, and then I’ll back over him again.”²⁰⁵

Many people who do not devote their careers to libraries and archives (and some who do) do not understand the seriousness of book and manuscript theft. These crimes do not only affect the librarians or the other library users. When rare and unique items are stolen or mutilated, there is often no way to replace what was lost. Crimes against libraries are crimes that affect the future of scholarship and humanity’s collective knowledge.

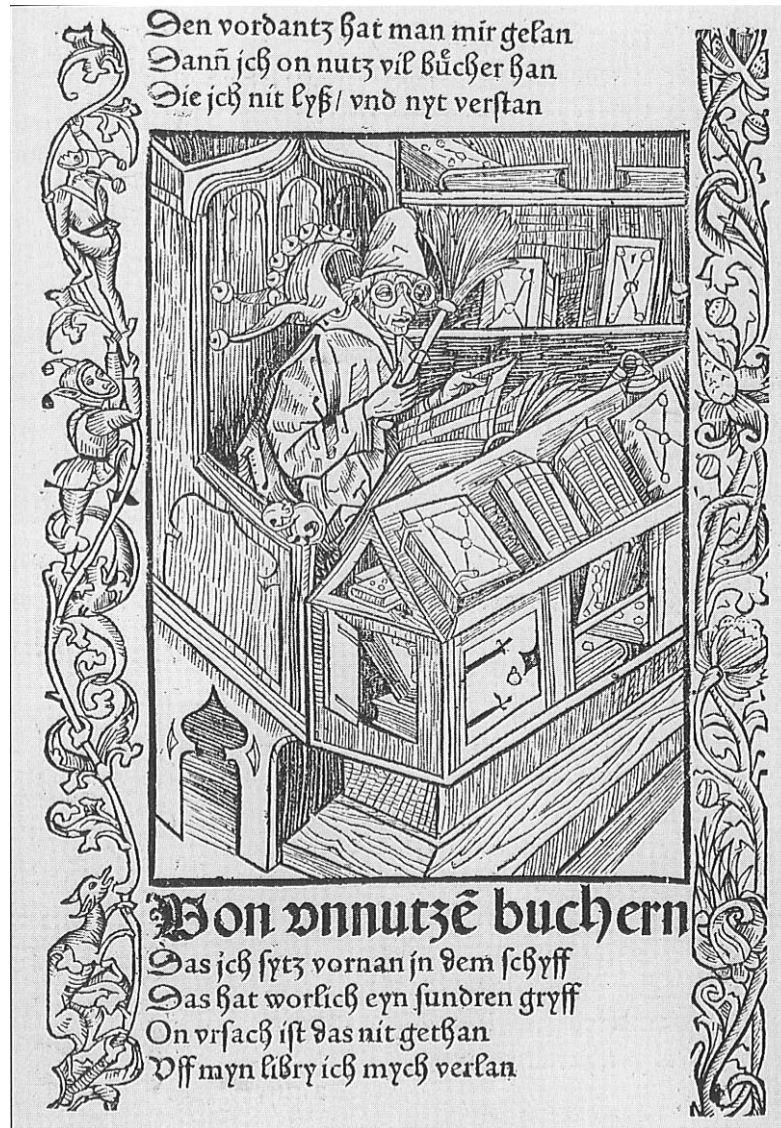
Any thief who steals a unique document or destroys a book risks obliterating a piece of history from all memory. Fraser Cocks, the curator of special collections at the University of Oregon, from which Stephen Carrie Blumberg stole 20 linear feet of manuscript materials, said, “These materials constitute the information from which histories are written. Histories don’t just appear. The people who write them get their insights from archives like this.”²⁰⁶

Many people think that the misadventures of biblioklepts are quirky and even amusingly idiosyncratic. Some believe that bibliokleptomania is a disease and that the sufferers cannot help their yearning hearts and sticky fingers. This research suggests that bibliokleptomania is not a disease. It is a menace. It is the name for a weakness and a lack of moral fortitude. Some book thieves steal for financial gain, others for personal satisfaction. For whatever reason, book thieves and biblioklepts haunt the stacks, the reading rooms, and sometimes the elevator shafts. They have long hovered there and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

²⁰⁵ Harvey, “Mr. Bland’s Evil Plot.”

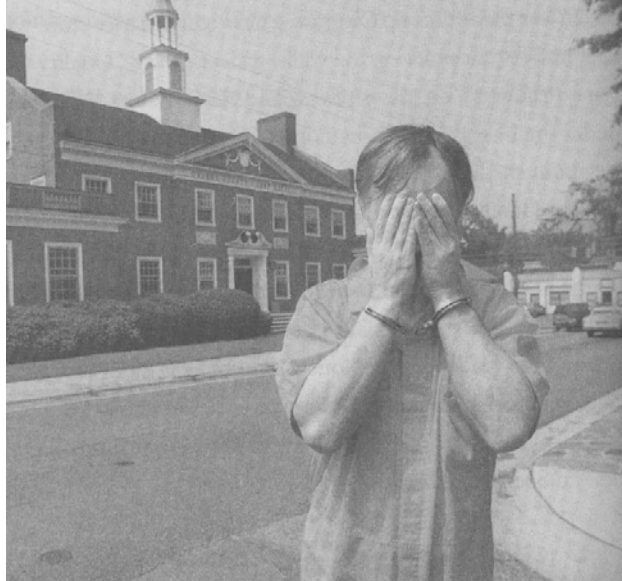
²⁰⁶ Basbanes, 474.

APPENDIX – THE ROGUES’ GALLERY



The Book Fool, by Albrecht Durer, for Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff* (The Ship of Fools), Basel, 1494.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Basbanes, illustration 1.



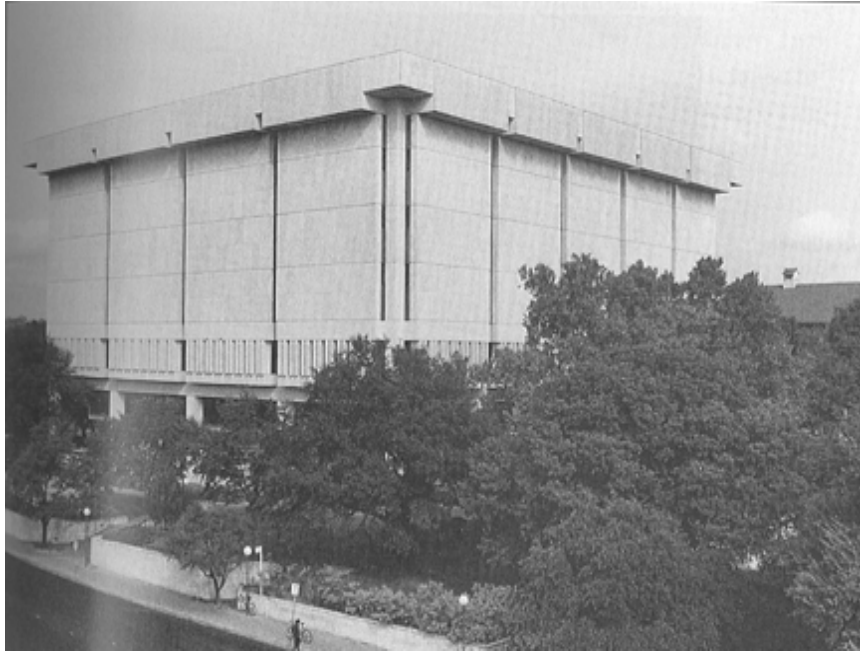
Gilbert Bland outside the courthouse in Hillsborough, North Carolina, on July 1, 1996.²⁰⁸



The George Peabody Library where Gilbert Bland was finally caught in the act.²⁰⁹

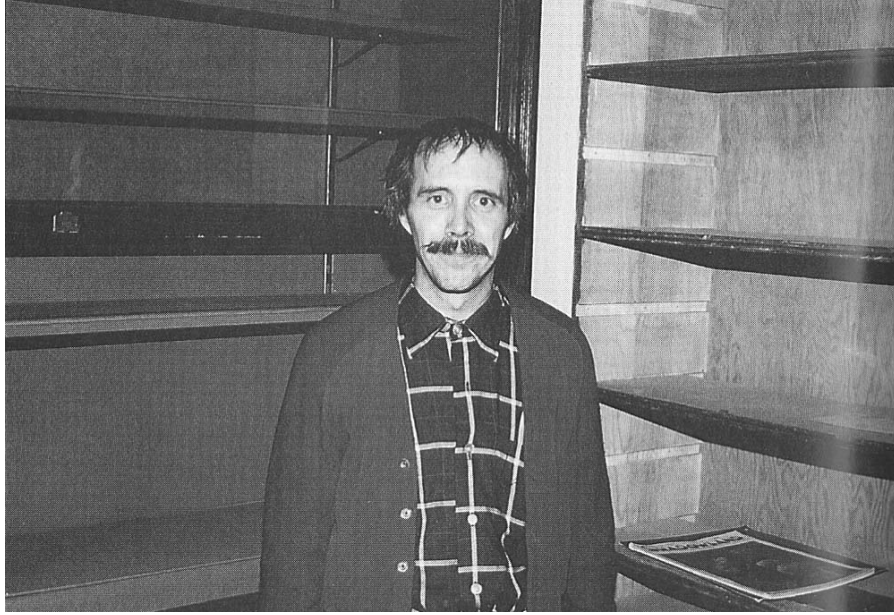
²⁰⁸ Harvey, 304.

²⁰⁹ *The Gazette Online* January 13, 2003. 13 April 2005 <<http://www.jhu.edu/~gazette/2003/13jan03/13books.html&h=380&w=300&sz=69&tbnid=SuLeBKuAiZMJ:&tbnh=118&tbnw=93&start=4&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dpeabody%2Blibrary%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D>>.



The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas²¹⁰ from which Mimi Meyer stole.

²¹⁰ Basbanes, illustration 25.



Stephen Carrie Blumberg in the “California Room” of his Ottumwa house after it had been emptied of his stolen books.²¹¹



Stephen Carrie Blumberg engaging in one of his favorite pastimes, “dumpster diving.” He felt this gave him the opportunity to “rescue a treasure” from other people’s garbage.²¹²

²¹¹ Basbanes, illustration 51.

²¹² Ibid., illustration 54.

PLEASE POST
Case No. 22523-F
October 31, 1962.

Post Office Department
Inspection Service
Office of the Inspector in Charge
Philadelphia 1, Pennsylvania

(Fingerprints and Classification on reverse side)

WANTED—FOR MAIL FRAUD






Samuel George Matz
(Applicant's Signature)

Irene Elizabeth Wilson
(Applicant's Signature)

SAMUEL GEORGE MATZ: White; age 44, born 1-10-18; 5'8"; 165 lbs.; brown eyes and hair; dark complexion; dresses well; talks big; smokes cigars.
ALIASES: Uses numerous aliases

IRENE ELIZABETH WILSON: White; age about 33; 5'4"; 140 lbs.; brown eyes; brown or black straggly hair; dark complexion; high pitched voice; untidy in personal appearance.
ALIASES: Uses numerous aliases

Since 1957 this couple has used the mails to defraud persons in transactions involving collector items such as rare documents, coins, stamps, guns, etc. They are accompanied in their travels by several of their small children. They rent inexpensive furnished apartments for periods of one to four months and, occasionally, stop at hotels. Between cities they use trains and buses. Within cities they use taxis. They usually open bank accounts in cities visited. They have been indicted for mail fraud. The U. S. Marshal at Newark, N. J., holds warrants for their arrest. If these persons are located please cause their immediate arrest, and notify the undersigned or nearest POSTAL INSPECTOR by telephone or telegraph collect.

Telephone: EVergreen 2-5200, Ext. 418

POSTAL INSPECTOR IN CHARGE
PHILADELPHIA 1, PA.

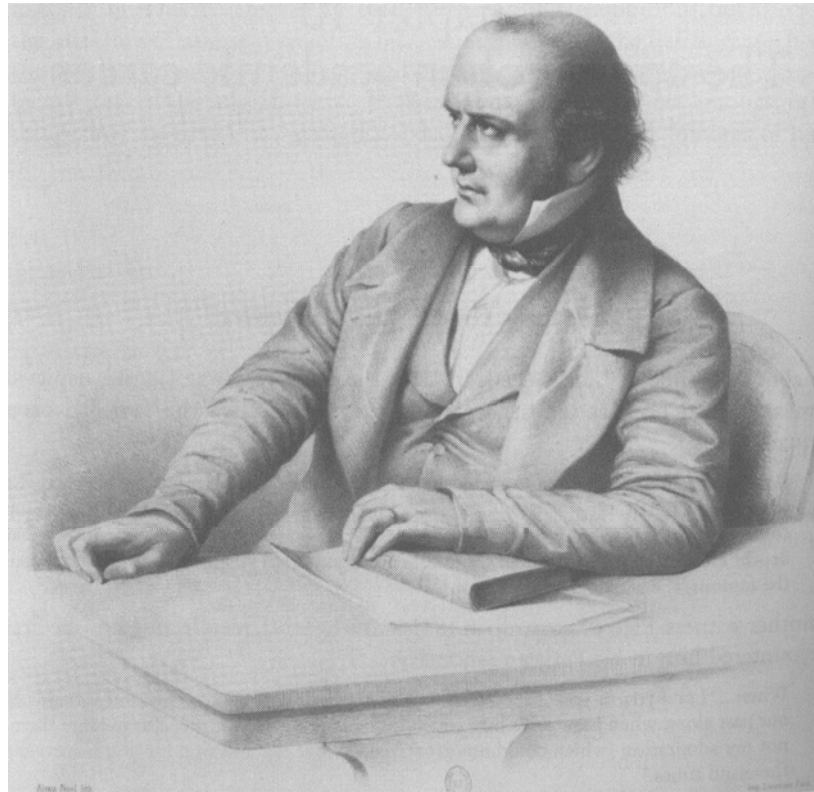
The poster displayed in post offices around the country in an attempt to find Samuel and Elizabeth Matz.²¹³

²¹³ Hamilton, 32.



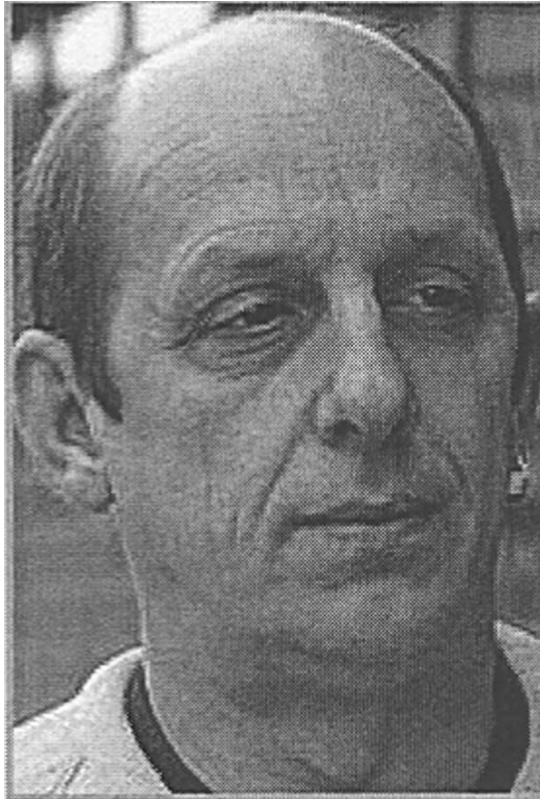
Martin Strich, handcuffed and seated in a police van, talks to a detective.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Hamilton, 159.



Lithograph of Guglielmo Libri by A.N. Noël.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Ruju, 134.



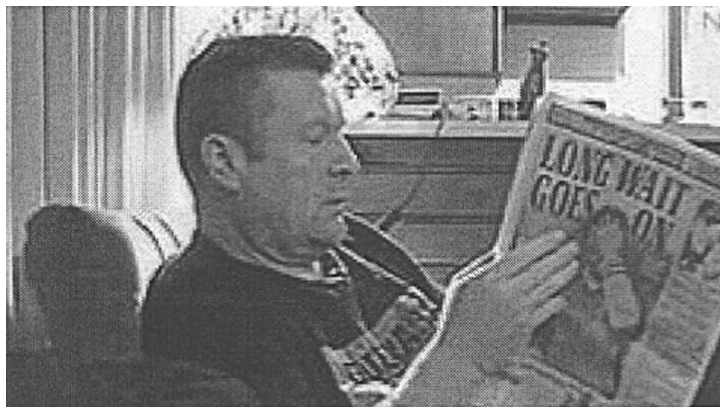
Donald Parfitt, who attempted to sell a stolen copy of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ *BBC Newsround*.



John Charles Gilkey, who swindled rare books dealers around the country out of at least \$100,000 by making purchases with stolen credit cards.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Sanders.



Lee John Simpson,
who stole books from libraries all over
New Zealand in order to support his
gambling habit.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ *TVNZ News*.



View from within the walls of the convent at Mont Sainte Odile, where Stanislas Gosse stole over a thousand centuries-old items.²¹⁹



View of the monastery at Mont Sainte Odile²²⁰

²¹⁹ Le Mont Sainte Odile. 13 March 2005 <<http://www.chez.com/tzundel/alsace/stodile/stodile.htm>>.

²²⁰ Mystery in Monastery, photo essay by Gary Knight. 13 March 2005 <http://www.viipphoto.com/detail-story3.php?news_id=312>.

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