



# The Shakespeare Thefts: In Search of the First Folios

*Eric Rasmussen*

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## **The Shakespeare Thefts: In Search of the First Folios** Eric Rasmussen

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

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