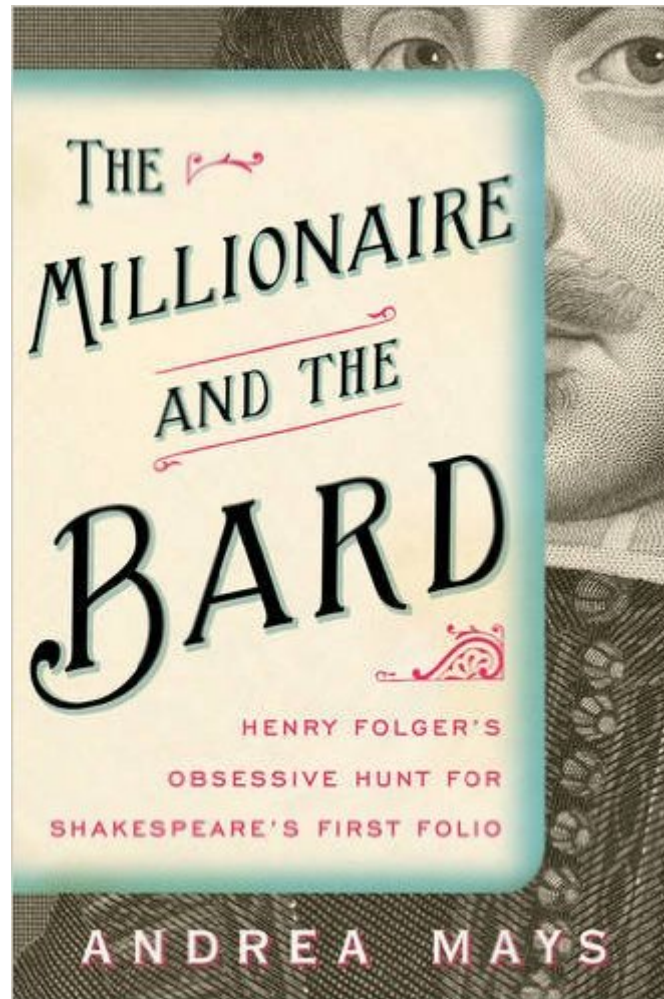


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# The Millionaire And The Bard: Henry Folger's Obsessive Hunt For Shakespeare's First Folio



## Synopsis

Today it is the most valuable book in the world. Recently one sold for over five million dollars. It is the book that rescued the name of William Shakespeare and half of his plays from oblivion. The Millionaire and the Bard tells the miraculous and romantic story of the making of the First Folio, and of the American industrialist whose thrilling pursuit of the book became a lifelong obsession. When Shakespeare died in 1616 half of his plays died with him. No one— not even their author— believed that his writings would last, that he was a genius, or that future generations would celebrate him as the greatest author in the history of the English language. By the time of his death his plays were rarely performed, eighteen of them had never been published, and the rest existed only in bastardized forms that did not stay true to his original language. Seven years later, in 1623, Shakespeare's business partners, companions, and fellow actors, John Heminges and Henry Condell, gathered copies of the plays and manuscripts, edited and published thirty-six of them. This massive book, the First Folio, was intended as a memorial to their deceased friend. They could not have known that it would become one of the most important books ever published in the English language, nor that it would become a fetish object for collectors. The Millionaire and the Bard is a literary detective story, the tale of two mysterious men—a brilliant author and his obsessive collector—separated by space and time. It is a tale of two cities—Elizabethan and Jacobean London and Gilded Age New York. It is a chronicle of two worlds—of art and commerce—that unfolded an ocean and three centuries apart. And it is the thrilling tale of the luminous book that saved the name of William Shakespeare— to the last syllable of recorded time. •

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It was 11:00 pm and I was sitting up in bed reading, unable to put the book down, biting my fingernails in anxiety. I was not reading a thriller. No character was in a life or death situation. I had to laugh at myself. I was reading to see if Henry Folger's quest to purchase a rare Shakespeare First Folio was successful. *The Millionaire and the Bard: Henry Folger's Obsessive Hunt for Shakespeare's First Folio* by Andrea Mays was an informative and interesting read. Mays "tells the miraculous and romantic story of the making of the First Folio, and of the American industrialist whose thrilling pursuit of the book became a lifelong obsession." In Shakespeare's day plays were not published. The theater was about as well respected as network television is today. Paper was expensive and publishing was a long process. Plays were not 'set in stone' but adapted and altered and improved constantly. Without legal protection of intellectual rights a theater troupe's repertoire was jealously protected. Actors were given their lines, but no complete script circulated. Shakespeare wrote plays for twenty years then returned to Stratford where he died in 1616. It was seven years after his death that his business partners in the theater, John Hemings and Henry Condell, gathered all of his work to publish thirty six plays--the First Folio. The book took years to print, one page at a time, 750 copies, and took nine years to sell out. With each new publication of the Folios changes were made. Plays were added that were not by the Bard. Older folios were discarded, replaced by the new. The books ended up in personal libraries across Britain, often forgotten or unidentified. One of the Gilded Age's nouveau riche industrialists was William Clay Folger, who worked with Standard Oil. He didn't make unlimited money like his employer John D. Rockefeller. Folger and his wife Emily agreed in their early marriage to live frugally, keep their lives private, and to spend all their money on Henry's dream of building a world-class collection of Shakespeareana. Mays chronicles Folger's life long quest for all things Shakespeare with particular consideration on his First Folio acquisitions. He ended up with a third of the surviving, known First Folios. Folger was lambasted by the Brits for taking their native son's legacy out of country. The Folgers put their collection away in warehouses across New York City, unseen for years, until in 1932 the Folger Shakespeare Library was built in Washington, D.C. Mays points out that Folger is an example of hoarding 'done right'. The Folgers' ashes reside in the library along with their collection. I enjoyed reading about Shakespeare's career, how books were published, the early collecting by Folger, and the building of the library. Because he bought so many First Folios it would get tedious reading about each sale, but the lesser important Folios are quickly noted. I also found interesting

the viewpoint on the Standard Oil antitrust act and Ida Tarbell's journalistic attacks--a far cry from how things were perceived in *The Bully Pulpit* by Goodwin from the perspective of Teddy Roosevelt and the McClure's magazine staff. I received a free ebook from the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a fair and honest review.

With painstaking scholarship and attention to detail, Andrea Mays effortlessly captures the largely untold story about how one man, Henry Folger, and his passion for Shakespeare and the publication of the First Folio, grew into a lifetime quest. In this, her first book, Ms. Mays, transforms a rather mundane story of acquiring 82 copies of this monumental Shakespeare publication in the history of printing, into a compelling account of an obsessive book collector's pursuit of the seemingly impossible. Ms. Mays devotes many of her opening chapters to Shakespeare's life, his times, and his writings, as well as the publication of his plays " years after his death. She takes both readers new to Shakespeare's story, and those with much knowledge, on the journey which fast forwards to the arrival of Henry Folger, and other American collectors who elevate Shakespeare enthusiasm in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. Ms. Mays not only establishes herself as an unquestionable Shakespeare scholar, but also demonstrates an uncanny ability to capture the spirit of bookbinding, book collecting, and antiquarian book selling the world over. Her book is highly recommended for both students of Shakespeare, and for those who are interesting in an extraordinary book collector during the age of the "robber-barons" who devoted his time and money to lay the foundation for the creation of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

I couldn't put this down. I dropped it once, but that was by accident. Mays has taken a story about an eccentric, publicity - shy, hard-working, happily married, obsessive compulsive man and turned it into a ripping yarn. While her scholarship and meticulous research is evident, the minutiae never bogs down the narrative. I learned something in spite of myself.

Being passionate about Shakespeare and an European transplanted to the States, I was curious about Folger and his library, so I decided to order the book. I really enjoyed every page of it! The first chapters are mostly about how the First Folio was conceived and published, with lots of interesting technical details and historical information. Homage is duly paid to Heminges and Condell, the two fellow-players and close friends of Shakespeare to whose loyalty and insight we owe the survival of the Bard's works today. Even if you are not particularly interested in history,

these pages are easy to read,informative and interesting. The rest of the book is about Henry and Emily Folger's obsession for everything Shakespeare. The purchases of real treasures, like the Vincent First Folio, are described as a gripping tale of suspense... However, part of me could not help but feel sorry for England, depleted of so many precious books that are now only available in Washington. I had the impression that the author was a bit biased in favor of Folger, who was certainly a great business man but who was perhaps a little too possessive with his books. Still now, it seems, his wife Emily is the only person who was allowed to actually borrow from the library. In conclusion, the book was a very interesting and informative read, and you don't need to be a scholar or a student to enjoy it. It made me even more eager to see the Folger Shakespeare Library.

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