

In the best-selling book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, the Japanese organizing consultant Marie Kondo urges a now-famous program of domestic decluttering, in which each possession is assessed for whether it “sparks joy.” Under this criterion, Kondo claims to have pared her own library down to some thirty essential volumes. Such minimalism (not to mention the treatment of books alongside sweaters and kitchen implements) might seem like another index of the Way We Live Now, in an era of Kindles, vanishing bookstores, and smartphone-size chunks of textual “content.” Yet it is also possible to see Kondo’s approach as reflecting an older form of book love: one that combines a reverence for books as talismanic objects with a personal devotion to the stories and characters they contain; one that is predicated not on the thrill of novelty but on the pleasure...

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***Loving Literature: A Cultural History.* By Deidre Shauna Lynch.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 352 pp.**

In the best-selling book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, the Japanese organizing consultant Marie Kondo urges a now-famous program of domestic decluttering, in which each possession is assessed for whether it “sparks joy.” Under this criterion, Kondo claims to have pared her own library down to some thirty essential volumes. Such minimalism (not to mention the treatment of books alongside sweaters and kitchen implements) might seem like another index of the Way We Live Now, in an era of Kindles, vanishing bookstores, and smartphone-size chunks of textual “content.” Yet it is also possible to see Kondo’s approach as reflecting an older form of book love: one that combines a reverence for books as talismanic objects with a personal devotion to the stories and characters they contain; one that is predicated not on the thrill of novelty but on the pleasure of familiarity, the habit of rereading, and the comfort of a bedtime ritual.

Deidre Shauna Lynch’s new book *Loving Literature* offers a rich and lively cultural history of these sentiments and practices. More precisely, it traces a

cultural history of these sentiments and practices. More precisely, it traces a post-Enlightenment history of *secular* book love, which can at times resemble older sacred rituals of textual devotion. Though it might sound strange to mention a scholarly monograph in conjunction with a self-help manual, it is very much in line with Lynch's own critical practice, which has long been engaged in studying the porous boundary between specialized literary discourse and popular readership—as well as displaying its own intellectual enthusiasm and affection.

Lynch's edited collection *Janeites* focused on that boundary, and in her introduction to that volume she wryly noted that “a customary method of establishing one's credentials as a reader of Austen has been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways” (Lynch 2000: 7). It is a habit common among academics and amateurs alike, and in her latest book Lynch broadens and deepens her investigation of such claims. Samuel Johnson serves as a particularly apt focus for her story of vexed and ambivalent love: his *Lives of the English Poets* offered intimate biographical glimpses of authors, yet to some readers, his warts-and-all portraits and critical strictures seemed bent on “throwing cold water on other readers' ardors” (46). Anna Seward accused him of having what she called “a morbid deficiency . . . in the affections” (75), and if she were alive today, Lynch suggests, she might have been a combative blogger, ever vigilant about other people's failure to show proper literary admiration (55).

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