

# Book Madness

## A Story of Book Collectors in America

Denise Gigante

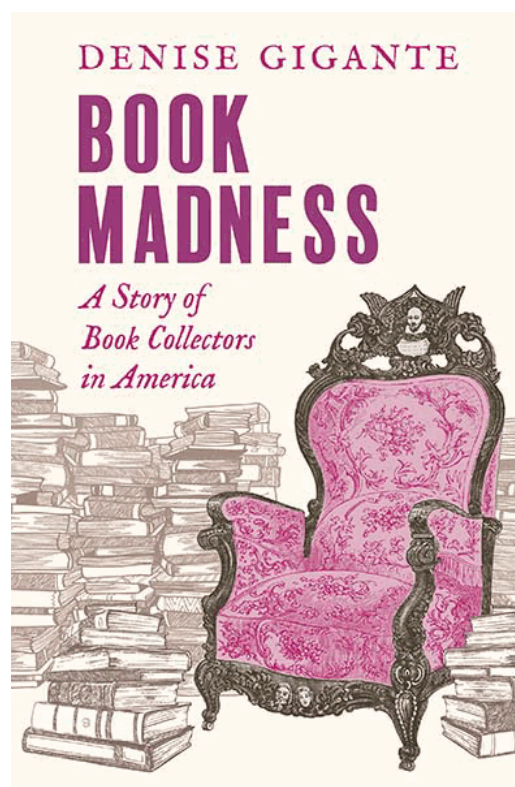
### The fascinating history of American bookishness as told through the sale of Charles Lamb's library in 1848

Charles Lamb's library—a heap of sixty scruffy old books singed with smoke, soaked with gin, sprinkled with crumbs, stripped of illustrations, and bescribbled by the essayist and his literary friends—caused a sensation when it was sold in New York in 1848. The transatlantic book world watched as the relics of a man revered as the patron saint of book collectors were dispersed. Following those books through the stories of the bibliophiles who shaped intellectual life in America—booksellers, publishers, journalists, editors, bibliographers, librarians, actors, antiquarians, philanthropists, politicians, poets, clergymen—Denise Gigante brings to life a lost world of letters at a time when Americans were busy assembling the country's major public, university, and society libraries. A human tale of loss, obsession, and spiritual survival, this book reveals the magical power books can have to bring people together and will be an absorbing read for anyone interested in what makes a book special.

**Denise Gigante** is the Sadie Dernham Patek Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University. She is the author of *The Keats Brothers: The Life of John and George* and *Taste: A Literary History*.

"Noted Romanticist Denise Gigante uses the sale of Charles Lamb's library as a hook on which to hang larger questions: What did English books signify for collectors on the other side of the Atlantic? How did public libraries and university libraries draw on, and differentiate themselves from, gentlemen's private collections? And most timely of all in the age of the ebook and the audiobook, what attaches us to particular copies of books rather than, or in addition to, the words that they contain?"—Leah Price, author of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Books*

"Absorbing and brilliant. A remarkable piece of book history and a vividly entertaining portrait of a cast of characters to whom books were, in Gigante's words, 'a real way of life'."—Seamus Perry, University of Oxford



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