

Internet Book Clubs: How “Dracula Daily” Inspired New Digital Literary Communities

With over 252,000 subscribers as of July 2023, “Dracula Daily” has made newsletter-based Internet book clubs a growing trend. Starting in 2021, artist Matt Kirkland decided to take advantage of the epistolary nature of the beloved public domain novel *Dracula* to create an email-based newsletter that read the story in real time. On each day that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* had a letter or diary entry dated, that section of the novel would be sent straight to subscribers’ emails, as if they were getting correspondence from Jonathan Harker himself (DraculaDaily 2023). While the first year had mild success, the 2022 read through became a viral sensation that inspired a wide variety of art, memes, and spinoffs (Connors 2022). Now in 2023, “Dracula Daily” is running its third year of reading *Dracula* in chronological order and has inspired a variety of online book clubs using the affordances of public domain to collectively read classical literature via email.

draculadaily



Dracula Daily wordmark and logo. Used with permission.

Substack, the newsletter website that “Dracula Daily” used to send their emails, has become the standard for creating these online book clubs. While Substack has

been used for online versions of more traditional book clubs in the past (Substack 2023), “Dracula Daily” popularized sending out the actual content of the book through a digital newsletter. Additionally, while these older, more traditional book clubs used Substack as primarily a message board where members could comment their thoughts on that month’s reading, “Dracula Daily” and other similar projects have used Substack as the vehicle for the story while community flourished in different corners of the Internet and across social media platforms.

Schedule and Formatting

Several of these Internet book clubs, including “Dracula Daily” have taken to presenting the novels in unique ways by playing with time. The reordering of *Dracula* into a chronological format allowed re-readers of the novel to experience literary events, such as Lucy’s death, in a whole new way. In the original format, the novel goes back and forth through time, showing letters and news clippings from before and after Lucy’s unfortunate demise and leaves the fatal night to the end of that section of the novel. However, with “Dracula Daily” the sequence of events has been put back in the chronological order, allowing people to see different nuances and sympathize with Lucy more than they had in the past (Young 2023). Additionally, readers noted enjoying the novelty of reading a character mention the date and seeing the same date reflected on their real-life calendar.

The pacing required to read a novel in this format also made classical literature more accessible to people leading busy modern lives. While each day contained a different amount of text, the majority of sections fluctuated between a few paragraphs and a few pages with a notable exception in October that covers 50 pages in one day. These small, short, readings allow people to slow down and savor the suspense and occasional silliness of the novel. In a traditional reading, a reader might glance over Jon Harker’s comments about how he finds a dish with paprika “very good but thirsty” (Stoker 1897) without much thought as they read on

to the (arguably) more exciting following days where Jon meets Count Dracula. But with “Dracula Daily’s” slowed down model people had a full day to contemplate Harker’s spice intolerance, make memes, and share information about different types of paprika to add further context to the story. Similarly, when Jonathan Harker is trapped in Dracula’s castle, readers cannot quickly flip to the next page to see what happens next, but instead sit and wait in suspense for several days to receive Jon’s next email.

By the very nature of this sort of project the books must be public domain and are typically over 100 years old. Readers could very easily find a copy of the novel and read ahead, but the new pacing is half the fun. The building anticipation of waiting for your next letter is exciting. People enjoy experiencing the novel at the same pace that the characters do—or in the case of “The Woman in White Weekly,”—at the same pace that the original readers would have experienced it by receiving the newsletter in the same sections that they were originally published in a serialized literary newsletter (lavinaigrette n.d.). Beyond being fun, this also allowed readers to have a greater understanding of how serialized novels were paced with the expectation of weeklong breaks and to feel a connection with people from the past who would have waited for the next installment just like the subscribers are now.

Other Internet book clubs found interesting ways to break up the story to make new meaning as well. Some, like “Literary Letters,” (Letters n.d.) continued to choose novels that are epistolary and have dates assigned by the original authors, while others, such as “Whale Weekly,” have done their best to do a thorough close reading of the novel in advance and assign their own dates. The anonymous project runner of “Whale Weekly” crafted a timeline of *Moby Dick’s* events to determine when to send out sections of the novel over the course of three years (Weekly n.d.).

One of my personal favorite schedule adaptations is “Letters from Watson,” the account sending out Sherlock Holmes short stories with short introductions or recaps written as if they were coming from John Watson himself (Watson 2023). The regular schedule for these short stories is fairly simple; most stories are divided into three sections that are sent out every other day over the course of a week. However, after reading “The Final Problem” (the short story where Sherlock suppos-

edly dies), “Letters from Watson” took an unannounced break and acted as if the conclusion to this story was the last letter that subscribers would receive. As part of the illusion of John Watson writing the letters, the email contained no information about when the next letter would arrive, if ever. However, readers on the “Letters from Watson” Discord server who were already aware of Sherlock Holmes’ survival and the existence of further stories eagerly continued discussing their excitement for the next letter in the ‘spoilers-area’ channel. The timeline for Sherlock’s return was set for three weeks instead of the canonical three years and readers talked amongst themselves about what Watson was probably up to, how Victorian wills worked, and continued to create memes with one user writing, “please keep milk and cookies out as Sherlock prepares for his return” shortly before “The Empty House” was set to be delivered (pop-goes-the-weasel 2023). The anticipation and collective feeling of having a secret they are keeping from the fictional narrator helped bond the online community and engage subscribers as they eagerly awaited Sherlock Holmes’ reinstatement at Baker Street, an event that happened over 100 years ago.

Online Reading Communities

Like all book clubs, these Internet newsletter book clubs thrive on community and engagement with the story. “Dracula Daily” thrived on a community that built itself organically through various social media sites like Tumblr and TikTok (Young 2023). Artists drew sketches of scenes from the day’s reading, made memes based on character’s dialogue and quirks, and educated each other on historical aspects of the story such as Lucy’s comments on the Victorian ‘New Woman’ (lifeofbrybooks 2022). The project runner Matt Kirkland mentioned that people had also been replying to the emails as if Jon Harker were their personal pen pal (Substack 2022). In fact, so many people creatively engaged with “Dracula Daily” that Matt Kirkland was able to create a complete new edition of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* to include the online community’s commentary (DraculaDaily 2022).

Other book clubs have created more structured forms of community engagement. Several book clubs have created their own Discord servers to create designated spaces for discussions. “Whale Weekly” has Discord channels for ‘fan art and memes,’ ‘whale-

quotes,’ and one channel dedicated simply to ‘whales’ that included a lengthy discussion of people trying to figure out what whales Herman Melville was referring to in Chapter 32. “Cetology” (Melville, 1851) when the author created his own classifications for whales (and dolphins and manatees). Similarly, “Letters from Watson,” has a vibrant Discord server with a thread titled ‘letters-discussion’ that is sectioned off by story, so people have a place to discuss each mystery without it being buried by discussion of last week’s short story. Additionally, “Letters from Watson” includes channels about Sherlockian adaptations and discussions of

historical context where people sometimes include pictures of Sherlock Holmes related museum exhibits that they have visited for others to enjoy and discuss.

These newsletter-based online book clubs continue to grow and change as more people start their own and invite their friends to join in the fun. There are so many similar projects that it would be impossible to discuss them all in one article and new ones seem to spring up every few weeks. With more and more fantastic novels entering the public domain each year, I’m excited to see what the Internet decides to read next.

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