

## The Timeless Readers

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Readers are a curious breed. Some read to escape, some to impress, and others to make a spectacle of their tears on TikTok. The obsessed readers, the toxic ones, the solemn ones have always been around us. It looks as though, at present, they were louder than ever thanks to social media, but this does not mean that literature is completely outdated. People are still reading, and clichéd readers have become more vivid and wistful.

Nevertheless, the “obsessive reader” syndrome is not new. Jane Austen’s Janeites formed a cult-like group, which could be considered one of the first “fandoms,” long before that word existed. Sherlock Holmes’ improper death provoked hysteria and, most appealingly, the invention of fanfiction. Even then, literature was not read in silence but performed in enthusiastic frenzies.

The twentieth century refined these outbursts into societies. Science fiction readers have built conventions, fanzines and rival sects. Romance readers, meanwhile, cheerfully ignored the sneers of critics and built a publishing empire of their own, proving that a ridiculed taste is often more profitable.

The internet merely amplified this. Harry Potter readers decided to assert their thoughts on the story, composing theories, fanfictions (most famously seen with “All the Young Dudes,” which remains one of the most acclaimed pieces of this genre within the fandom and critics), and more. Twilight was split into armies (Team Edward and Team Jacob), battling as if the fate of civilization depended on it. Film adaptations of these books of the 2000s and 2010s carried still more recruits to the cause, announcing that they liked the book better. Now with TikTok, fifteen seconds of sobbing can resurrect a forgotten novel and propel it to the category of bestseller. “Romantasy” reigns: dragons, daggers, and fairy flings are sacred, and naturally, critics complain. Books are supposedly regarded as accessories, and reading seems performative, but one may ask: what were Doyle’s furious correspondents, or Austin’s bewitched devotees, if not the BookTok of their day?

Literature is not diminished by fandoms but heartened by them. BookTok may encourage skimming over analysis, but it has also coaxed non-readers back into reading books. Some discover classic authors like Kafka while others find unknown authors who find themselves trending.

There is no place for mourning. The medium changes, the performances grow louder, but the craving for story remains the same. The compelling need for literature is testified and asserted over and over again. So the fact is that as long as readers continue to cry, argue, and posture over novels, it is a sign that literature is not dying. Moreover, hashtags and all, it is thriving!

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