

Lockdown diaries: Terry from Desperate Literature Bookshop

The amount of love the bookshop has got from the community is really sustaining. Lots of messages and lots of people ordering stock. Thank you everybody.

Terry Craven is a bookseller, painter and writer who runs [Desperate Literature](#), a community bookshop that has opened its doors every day for the past six years in the heart of Madrid. It's been tough to close, but they've also received a lot of love and support. Terry thinks that solidarity and finding gratitude during this time is very important, as are Zoom meetings, dancing, dressing like you're going on a third date...and having a cat.

Desperate Literature is now shipping books during the quarantine and you can enquire [here](#). They also run a [literary prize for short fiction](#) running until March 29th, so spread the word!

What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?



What comes to mind is the difference between the anticipation of a change and the actual change itself. We knew that the fabric of our days was set to change but we could never really know just how, and the first few days of having Desperate Literature closed were difficult, I have to say. Every day for six years we've opened our front door, so closing it was tough. Not seeing people, not running events.

But now we've settled into a new routine, finding books for people over email and WhatsApp. Our daily pilgrimage to the post office. What a godsend. What the hell will it all look like after? I do wonder if students in 2070 will be studying courses on '2020 Lockdown Literature'.

Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting things recently?

I think finding gratitude is pretty important in such times, right, so yes, today I heard a few conversations between neighbours, over the streets we were talking to the *correos* (mailmen). People who, in all likelihood, have never spoken before. Solidarity in these times is very important and it shakes me out of The Fear, absolutely. I got a big rush of happiness hearing those folks talking. A blackbird has started visiting us in the shop, and stealing my cat's food, too (I live in the same building). That's pretty joyful. Honestly, though, the amount of love the bookshop has got from the community is really sustaining. Lots of messages and lots of people ordering stock. Thank you everybody.

Have there been any comical moments in this unprecedented time?

My hair is getting pretty comical. That said, I think the Mad Max meets the 1980s German footballer look is probably a shoe-in for early summer.

How are you coping?

Dance every day. Dress like I'm going on a... mmm... third date maybe. Zoom meetings with anybody and everybody. Reaching out to people who might be in need of community or help. Trying to have a rhythm. Turning off my computer around 10pm. Calming the nervous system (without booze), because I have a tendency

to be in fight or flight in order “to survive”, but that doesn't help.

Be kind to myself when I fail to do the above, which is every day.

What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?

Honestly, I'm a tiny bit weary of being too goal-oriented during this period, both personally and politically. Sure I've a few books I'm working on and the real goal is to keep the bookshop alive, but otherwise if I can stay calm and try to be present then I'm doing ok.

How has the lockdown impacted your industry?

Enormously. So many booksellers I know have been fired, not to mention folks in publishing just deathly anxious about their positions. Any of us bookshops built around community, especially those of us without an enormous online retail presence, well, we're both financially and emotionally isolated. But I can see across the board, over in the UK as well as here in Spain, that indie booksellers are adapting. The folks at [Burley Fisher](#) in London are doing an amazing job (their podcast has the best jingle I've ever heard, not to mention the rest of the work they're doing).

Of course we (Desperate Literature) have a very specific problem: so many of the anglophones of Madrid have gone home, meaning that even when we open it will be interesting to see who's left. There's a lot of questions to be asked about the sustainability of teaching programs that can benefit from folks travelling across the world to teach, who are signed into temporary contracts with very little security and promptly dropped when things get tough.

It's a problem of precarity across the board and the whole point of working with community is to fight against it. If nothing else, we at Desperate Literature can ask ourselves how we do better, now and after. So yeah maybe that's also a goal for something to come from this period.

What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?

Sit in the sun, reading. Hug my friends. Hug my friends in the sun.

Do you have any tips for how we can help those in need?

I don't know any more than anybody else, but I'm just trying to call around and make sure we're all doing ok. If you're part of a community, there's the question of how to build up financial backstops, how to come together to stop evictions. Talk to people, I suppose I'd say. But as I've hinted, that's tough because the main thing I personally have to fight

against is my own desire to hide away and worry.

Who are you in quarantine with? Any advice for others?

At home: my cat.

My advice: get a cat.

If you could tell the government one thing right now, what would it be?

Stop rents.

What's going on in your hometown and would you like to send them a message?

The UK has just entered a full lockdown, and the only thing I'd say is that it has taken me 11 days to start to get to stability, so stick with it. That and I love them.

- *You can follow Terry on [Instagram](#) and find all of Desperate Literature's social media channels and info on [their website](#)*

- *Also read my previous article about [Desperate](#)*

[Literature: So much more than a bookshop](#)

- [Please share their Literary Prize for Short Fiction](#) across all social media channels and spread the word to anyone who you think would like to apply. The deadline is March 29th, two days from now!

Check out all [Madrid lockdown stories](#)

If you'd like to get involved and share a compelling story from this ongoing chapter of history, reach out to Daphne Binioris (daphne@veracontent.com) and Daniel Catalan (a96039@aup.edu)