Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid

Madrid has a new second-hand bookstore thanks to three men – Michael, Corey and Craig – whose unique concept to provide insatiable readers with good books and a literary haven has already won a loyal following in Santorini, Greece, and Brooklyn, New York. Just opened in May, **Desperate Literature** comes to Madrid as a new-found treasure for tourists, expats and Madrileños alike.

> **Editor's note: in 2018 we published a new article – Desperate Literature: so much more than just a bookshop**

What's in stock?

Desperate Literature has a wide selection of **used books in English, Spanish and French**, and vinyls too. They get most of their books from library sales in New York and then ship them over, which is why half of their floor is currently usurped by boxes. The shelves are stocked with novels ranging from fiction and crime to philosophy and even *erotica*. Although they're not against best-sellers (you'll find ***50 Shades of Grey*** and ***Game of Thrones***), the space is small, so they do turn down books, aiming for quality rather than quantity. When I walked in, the first three books I spotted were by **Franz Kafka, James Joyce** and **George Orwell**, to give you an idea.

on Calle Campomanes 13, near metros Opera, Callao and Santo Domingo

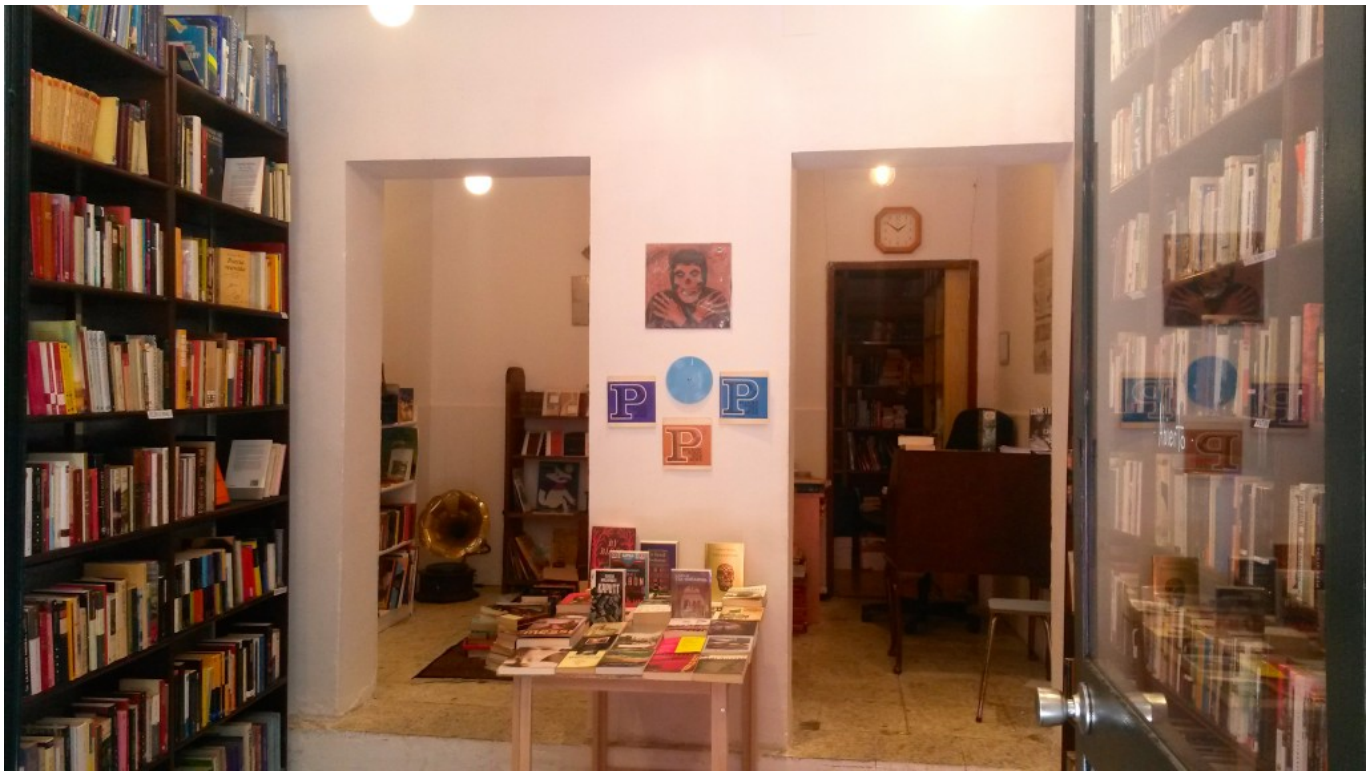
Why Desperate Literature?

As quoted by Joaquín Font on their web, there are books for all occasions—for when you're bored, sad, or calm. Whatever mood you're in, if you're passing through Madrid or live here and find yourself desperate for a good read, you can either swap the book you've just finished or buy a new one for **3-9€**. You can also say hi to Michael, the California-raised and Brooklyn-adopted owner; and Jamie, who works there and is also from Brooklyn. Plus they play good music and host events where they experiment with cocktails—one of the ways they're getting to know Madrid is by making homemade vermouth!

What’s the story behind Desperate Literature?

All three partners are avid readers and part of the so-called *international booklovers connection*. Corey had sold books on the streets of New York for many years, where he met Michael, who joined in to open used bookshops in Brooklyn. Ten years ago, Craig started **Atlantis Books** in Santorini, Greece. **Atlantis** is an international bookshop that, despite being tiny and hidden away on the island of Santorini, is quite well-known. My mother bought her favorite book there—*East of Eden* by John Steinbeck. My sister, Amanda, actually lived and worked there for a month, as did my sister-in-law, Erin. Every Summer, **Atlantis** showcases a film festival on their roof, where the projector is set up against a backdrop of red sunsets and the Aegean Sea.

Of course there’s more to the story, but the philosophy at **Atlantis Books** goes: if you’re a book-loving traveller, you can work there and in turn, live and get taken care of for free. It’s kind of like *WOOFING* for books instead of farms. It’s also a place for travellers to meet, hang out and hold book readings and concerts. Under the same joint venture, these three young partners own two locations in Brooklyn, New York: **Book Thug Nation** and **Human Relations**; and just opened **Desperate Literature** in Madrid in May.



Who came up with the whole idea?

It started with **Atlantis Books** in Santorini, opened by Craig and a bunch of friends (if you check out their **web**, Atlantis' opening involved a lot of luck and a bit of whisky). Michael says the idea is based off **Shakespeare and Company**, Paris' famous book store and writers' institution. Opened in 1919 by American expat, Sylvia Beach, **Shakespeare and Company** was frequented by the likes of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway, and became **a gathering place for literary culture**, selling high-quality English-language books, some of which were banned, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Although it was closed during WWII, it was reopened in 1956 by American expat, George Whitman, who had amassed a huge collection of English books and wanted to return the generosity he had experienced while travelling the world as a young *vagabond*, by creating a **friendly place for English-speaking expats and bohemian culture**, allowing writers to stay there if they helped out. Today, **Shakespeare & Company** is run by Whitman's daughter who continues the tradition.

Why did they open Desperate Literature in Madrid, and not… Amsterdam?

Michael says ‘it was kind of happenstance.’ He and Corey have an affinity for the Spanish language, and both knew people in Madrid. The location was perfect as it was an already-established international bookstore, Petras; and is situated a stone’s throw from the Royal Palace.

At the moment, only Michael is living at **Desperate Literature** and hopefully Corey will take his place in November. Michael says that when he visits a city, even for a day, he always checks out the local book stores. He expects that visitors to Madrid will do the same and that **Desperate Literature** will be their literary home away from home.

They’re here, so come and say hello!

Desperate Literature

- Facebook& Web
  Hours: Mon-Sat 12pm-9pm
  Address: Calle Campomanes, 13
  Metro: Santo Domingo, Opera and Callao

Please also read our 2018 article – Desperate Literature: so much more than a bookshop