

SEEKING LOVE IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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Love manifests in many different forms – friendships, romantic partners, family, pets. When a global pandemic prevents most avenues of accessing these forms of love, it is hard to remember the powerful force it possesses. For me, reading romantic, prolific novels such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* really brought me back in touch with the expressions of love that Covid-19 took away from us, even helping me to better understand my own relationships with peers, friends, family, and lovers.

Just before the announcement of a national lockdown due to the Covid-19 outbreak, I was spending my gap-year in Cairns, Australia, and having a tremendous time travelling, meeting new people, and creating memories in one of the most scenic places on earth. After the stress of my A-levels, I truly believed I needed a break from academia and full-time work, therefore I postponed university, packed my bags, and intended to have a year of well-needed rest and adventure. I certainly did not expect that no sooner than I had left, I would be returning to England, amid a global pandemic, unemployed and isolated from all my peers and friends.

Bridget Jones's Diary was the first book I read in lockdown and since finishing school. The stress of completing exams, sticking to rigid reading routines, and working consistently made me neglect my love of reading for pleasure. In lockdown, I found that I had little to do. I had suddenly become detached and isolated from society, outside relationships, activities, and hobbies. Reading became the perfect solution to the unbearable monotony which the national lockdown had created. Reading became for me a form of escapism, but also reconnection, to a world now forbidden and plagued with fear, uncertainty, and loneliness.

Bridget Jones's Diary was so special to me during lockdown as I could escape to a world within the novel that looked like my own, an imperfect yet fantastic series of unfortunate and fortunate events. Although the life I once knew was on pause due to restrictions, the novel

immerse myself in the characters which reflected my own circle of friends and peers so uncannily. Even rereading *Bridget Jones's Diary* for the umpteenth time, this romcom never fails to reduce me to tears. In school, we are taught that reading academic literature is essential, and although this is true, any literature that can move you in a humanistic way is good literature. *Bridget Jones's Diary* appeals to me through its chaotic, unapologetic, and honest energy that remains a constant theme throughout the whole novel. The talk of big knickers, seedy affairs, foul-mouthed friends, and sexually questionable bosses in the most relatable manner, kept me connected to a world of absurdity and mundanity which I took for granted and missed entirely. The likes of which novelists such as Charlotte Brontë, in my view, simply cannot replicate for the typical millennial.

Whenever anyone asks me, 'what book would you recommend to a stranger?', the answer is always *Bridget Jones's Diary*. This novel could move rock, and its popularity remains celebrated today for good reason. I owe Helen Fielding thanks for crafting such a fantastic book that homed a nostalgia for a world forgotten in lockdown. With that, I'll leave you with Bridget perfectly summarising my experience of lockdown with these sentimental words... 'Oh, God, I'm so lonely. An entire weekend stretching ahead with no one to love or have fun with. Anyway, I don't care. I've got a lovely, steamed ginger pudding from M&S to put in the microwave.'

