

A Plebeian's Guide to Dark Academia

ADHORA AHMED

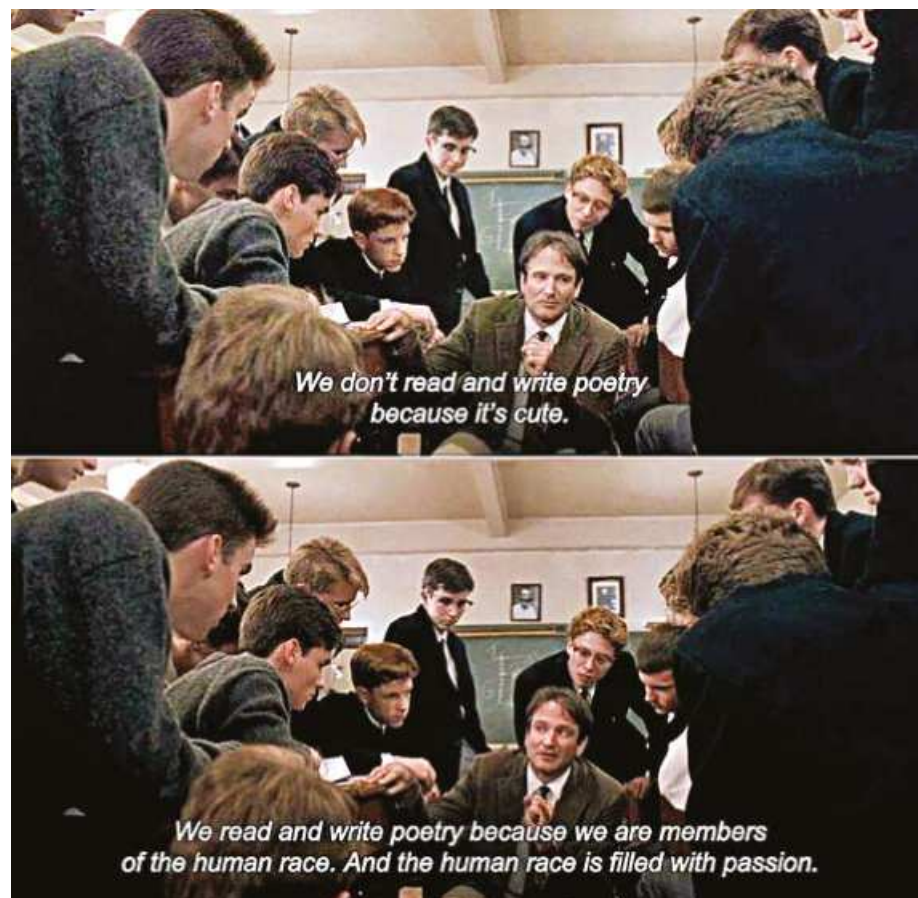
For a person who has never consciously adhered to any subculture, I sure like learning about them. One subculture that has recently captivated my attention is “dark academia”. The name may sound like it has something to do with a cult of Faust-like individuals learning about the occult, but it’s not that dark.

THEMES

Dark academia is about the idealisation of everything intellectual and scholarly: the smell of old books, candlelit libraries, classical music, fountain pens—that sort of thing. A typical dark academia fan is obsessed with classic literature and philosophy, everything from Greco-Roman scholars to modern English masterpieces. Their soul is full of wanderlust for knowledge, tormented by existential dread at times. Due to this blend of romanticism and existentialism, *Urban Dictionary* characterises a fan as “essentially a knowledgeable, vintage emo”. Above all, they have an intense passion for learning; not the nerdy aspiration to get good grades but to seek emotional fulfillment through knowledge.

STYLE

Like any other aesthetic, fashion and activities make dark academia stand out to outsiders. It is associated with dark and earthy colour schemes, with enthusiasts finding inspiration from the wardrobe of a vintage prep school student: sweater vests, dress pants, Oxford shoes and overcoats being common clothing items. Among



dark academia circles, the movie *Dead Poets Society* and Donna Tartt’s novel *The Secret History* are a few common points of reference. When it comes to their favourite haunts, fans prefer libraries, bookstores,

coffee shops and museums.

DRAWBACKS

This aesthetic seems quaint for its old-fashioned way of intellectual pursuit. However, dark academia is a bit too Eurocentric for

an aspiring enthusiast in this part of the world. Imagine wearing tweed coats in this climate; I can’t either. While there’s nothing wrong with idolising the English Romantic poets, seminal works from non-Western authors often go overlooked and are rarely discussed.

Moreover, this aesthetic predominantly consists of literature nerds. Although I can identify with that aspect to some extent, it leaves out people who are interested in other disciplines, e.g. STEM and business. If you haven’t read literary classics or know much about Greco-Roman mythology, you might feel out of place.

Some dark academia fans are aware of the lack of diversity within the aesthetic, hence they are attempting to make way for inclusion by promoting books about a broad range of subjects from writers all around the world.

HOW TO EMBRACE DARK ACADEMIA

As mentioned before, being a fan in Bangladesh is difficult, at least on the outside. With this pandemic, I can’t even suggest loitering around Nilkhet. Don’t be disheartened that you can’t wear preppy clothes all year round. If you’re a massive bookworm and are passionate about learning, then congratulations, you’ve already captured the spirit. Transform your room into a mini library. Keep a journal where you gush over the new things you’ve learned. Last but not least, stay curious.

Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her reality checks at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

About The *Someone Else Has It Worse* Card

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

When eighteen-year-old Tanha*, who has been struggling with anxiety disorder for a long time, opened up about her condition to a friend, she received with some sympathy this response: *At least this is just mental health. [Insert a name] has it way worse with her physical health problems.*

The mentioned anecdote is just not limited to Tanha and her friend or to that particular incident. A lot of time we hear people consoling someone by reasoning that someone else has it worse and so you should just stay content with our lives. Parents, peers and even teachers at times use this card in various situations without assessing whether it’s doing any good or not.

EVERYONE MATTERS

There’s really no time to remind anybody who is in some sort of difficulty that someone else, somewhere in the world, has it worse. We are all part of a society where the diversity ranges from one’s background to sensitive personal issues. Not everyone is going to have the same problems or have the same level of problems either. Just like in a class, someone is going to ace while someone is going to fail miserably. That doesn’t mean that the one who topped in the class but could not require their expected grades should be shamed if they feel awful about it just because someone else failed. Similarly, if a person is going through a difficult



phase in life because of their mental health issues can’t be in any way consoled by means of others’ distress that might seem comparatively worse to you. Though most of the time people don’t mean any harm by it and often mistake it as something that the victim can take strength from, but if anything, using this card is only belittling someone’s pain and makes them feel terrible for feeling sorry for themselves in the first

place. And that is no form of consolation and does nothing but make a person feel even more insignificant. Treating everyone’s problems as substantial is one sort of equality too.

SO WHAT TO DO

Real compassion comes in from valuing and having the mentality to try to understand everyone’s situations. If your friend is upset about something, try to listen to them. If your child seems distraught about a certain problem, do not treat it as trivial. If someone feels unproductive and is disconcerted by it, tell them that it’s absolutely okay and try to get them the help they need. Especially in these unprecedented times, we should be caring about everyone’s well-being. Dragging another’s condition to alleviate a person’s problem is unnecessary and ebbs the said person’s interest to further share anything with you. Rather, treating everyone with love and making them feel at home when they open up about something is way better.

Because at the end of the day, when we are sharing something with anyone, we don’t want an instant solution, all that we crave for is support, love and validation.

**Name of the individual has been changed.*

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