

Dark Academia: Bookishness, Readerly Self-fashioning and the Digital Afterlife of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*

Simone Murray 

School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Dark Academia (DA) is a vibrant online subculture centred upon readers' performances of bookishness. Practitioners create audio-visual assemblages of leather-bound books, dusty libraries, (neo)gothic university quadrangles and various poetic accoutrements. The ur-text of the aesthetic is Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992), especially its idealisation of a retrograde version of Anglo-American university life. DA mimics *The Secret History's* rejection of 1980s media technologies, but this spurning of contemporary media is a ruse. DA creators display great digital savvy: manipulating images and soundtracks via video-editing, choosing tagging vocabularies to maximise discoverability, and optimising posting times in order to game a platform's algorithm. Hence digital media makes possible the existence of DA but simultaneously "dare[s] not speak its name"—a paradox here dubbed "digital denialism". The article exemplifies the potential of combining literary-studies close-reading with media-studies methods of content analysis and attention to medial specificity. It extends Jessica Pressman's concept of "bookishness" to demonstrate how English studies can adapt to engage with the life of books online.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 August 2022
Accepted 6 December 2022

KEYWORDS

Dark Academia; bookishness; TikTok; Donna Tartt; digital reading; internet

You had this feeling that life was performance art, that everybody was living in his or her fantasy.

Maura Spiegel, Donna Tartt's former writing professor, on the atmosphere of early-1980s Bennington College¹

Beginning around mid-2020, deep in the first global lockdown triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, a trickle of mainstream media articles began to appear about a curious online aesthetic being avidly pursued by Generation-Z cohorts [refer [figure 1](#)].² These reports had the quasi-ethnographic tone of an anthropologist discovering a lost tribe and parading its exotic specimens before a fascinated western audience. In reality, "Dark Academia" (DA), the loose online community that was the object of such fascinated scrutiny, had existed for some years. The characteristically platform-agnostic DA scene emerged first on blogging website Tumblr around 2014, then migrated to surging social-media rival Twitter, shifted

CONTACT Simone Murray  simone.murray@monash.edu

¹Anolik, "The Secret Oral History of Bennington."

²Edwards, "Dark Academia is the Witchy Literary"; Bateman, "Academia Lives"; and Leach, "This Dishy New Podcast."

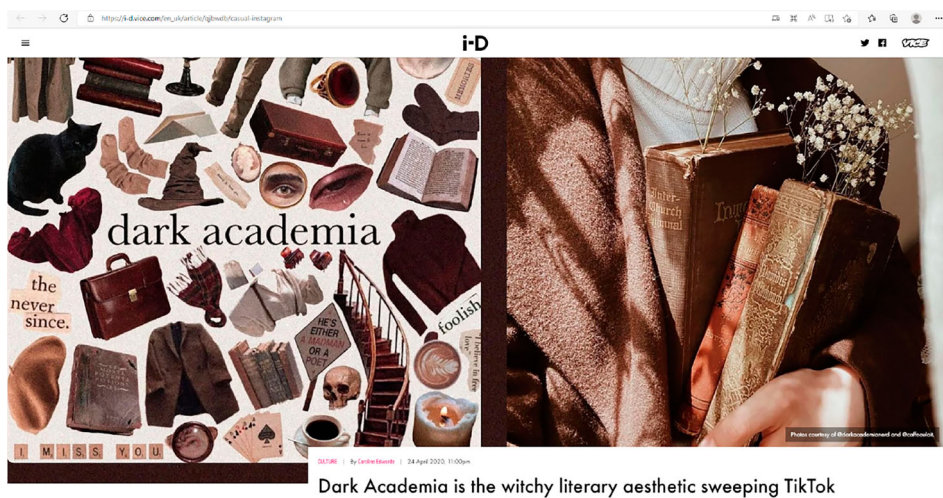


Figure 1. Screenshot of Dark-Academia montage from i-D magazine website (2020).

again around 2017 to image-centric platforms Pinterest and Instagram, before reconvening on the then-booming micro-video platform TikTok, where it was “discovered” in the digital wild.³ Less a cohesive movement or delimited subculture than a loose cluster of atmospherics and “vibes”, DA is suffused with the quality of “bookishness” that Jessica Pressman defines as “creative acts that engage the physicality of the book within a digital culture”.⁴ Crucially for DA, it is digital culture’s present ubiquity that has rendered the material affordances and cultural associations of the codex newly visible. At the precise historical juncture when the printed book is no longer the default medium for print communication, we are newly freed to look *at* it as an information architecture rather than *through* it as mere vessel for text. This process of defamiliarisation explains the appearance, in the first two decades of the new millennium, of a plethora of bookish objects spanning gallery-exhibited artists’ books at the most high-end to Penguin-cover tea towels, book-themed jewellery and codex-shaped serviette holders at the most kitschy pole.⁵ Despite these items’ wildly varying price tags, each makes some claim on the cultural status of the book object, contributing to a “proliferation of creative acts that fetishize and aestheticize the book as artifact”.⁶

Similar to the collector of such physical bookish paraphernalia, DA adherents deploy hyper-contemporary, massively popular social-media platforms to fashion, project and reciprocally reinforce digital identities as nostalgic, high-cultural and emphatically analogue booklovers in a particular doomed-gothic vein. The phenomenon, as that terse summary already begins to suggest, is shot through with deeply ambivalent attitudes towards digital media. The logic of the current article is to define, explore motivations for and criticisms of the DA aesthetic, then to trace the origins of DA’s respective obsessions and blind-spots in Donna Tartt’s foundational novel *The Secret History* via detailed

³Edwards, “Dark Academia is the Witchy Literary”; Bateman, “Academia Lives”; Chu, “The Rise of Dark Academia”; and Brammer, “A Space for Dark Academia.”

⁴*Bookishness*, 1.

⁵*Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁶Pressman, “Bookwork and Bookishness,” 60.

textual analysis. In its last section, the article shifts back towards media analysis to explore what I term the “digital denialism” prevalent in DA subculture: computer technologies are eschewed at the textual level in favour of analogue media, but this is a ruse disguising DA creators’ sophisticated proficiency with video editing, tagging protocols and ‘follower’ management. In sum, the DA phenomenon cannot be adequately grasped by attending only to the level of textual signification, as has been common in discussions of the trend to date. Rather, it is essential to bring both literary studies close-reading techniques and media studies methods of content analysis, coupled with attentiveness to the medial affordances of specific platforms, to understand fully how DA’s brand of bookishness plays out in contemporary digital environments.⁷

Defining “Dark Academia”

DA is an online phenomenon based less upon a coherent set of beliefs than a particular aesthetic: bookish; university-based; Eurocentric; and dandyish. It principally manifests through online “moodboards” which display a user’s collation of resonant still images or video snippets. Such sites of digital identity-projection constantly accrete content, instigating trends and pushing the aesthetic in new directions. In the language of cultural studies, each user upload constitutes “an intertextually legible content assemblage (a post that combines the caption, the hashtags, and the image) [which] is produced, and recognized as indexical to a self the poster in that moment identifies with or wants to identify with”.⁸ DA practice is overwhelmingly dominated by Generation Z or so-called “Zoomers” (late teens to mid-20s), consists primarily of women, and—particularly among rare male adherents—has a strongly queer flavour.⁹

A content analysis of the top 100 videos on TikTok hash-tagged with “Dark Academia” illustrates some of the movement’s prevalent subgenres.¹⁰ Most common are DA fashion tips (“looks”), hair-style inspiration (“inspo”), make-up tutorials and interior decorating “room tours” and “transformation” videos. Also common are fan-edits of dark academia-adjacent films—mostly Hollywood fare, such as *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Van Helsing* (2004) and *Dorian Gray* (2009)—or arthouse releases such as *The Dreamers* (2003), *Mary Shelley* (2017) and the Allen Ginsberg and Stephen Hawking biopics *Kill Your Darlings* (2013) and *The Theory of Everything* (2014), respectively. A further subcategory consists of montages of atmospheric DA locales (Oxford, Edinburgh, the Cotswolds, Paris, Versailles) and even specific university campuses (again, Oxford, Trinity College Dublin’s famous Long Room, the University of Chicago and the University of Toronto). A sub-subcategory of this trend is the point-of-view (“POV”) realisation:

⁷Jennifer Burek Pierce likewise models how to combine literary-critical and media-studies approaches in her analysis of John and Hank Green’s online, “story-centered community” Nerdfighteria (*Narratives, Nerdfighters, and New Media*, 7): “Academic conversations about digital humanities, new media, and contemporary reading prompted me to see Nerdfighteria not just as a community that echoed my enjoyment of the Green brothers’ sensibilities and productions but as a distinctive group whose voices contributed to how we might think about the intersections of reading, fandom, and intermediation, or the concurrent use of both old and new media” (Ibid., 3).

⁸Tiidenberg and Whelan, “Sick Bunnies and Pocket Dumps,” 147.

⁹Boffone, *TikTok Cultures*; Raphael, “A Brief History.”

¹⁰The content analysis was conducted on 21, 23 and 28 November 2022 using the search term “Dark Academia”. All videos in the sample were watched twice in full so as to minimise personalisation of results by the algorithm (Boffone, *TikTok Cultures*, 8). Video run-times ranged from a mere 6 seconds to 1.05 minutes, though the average length was between 15 and 20 seconds. The most popular video in the sample had 2 million likes and the least popular only 11.1K likes (interestingly, it was also the only one in the sample tagged as “#ad”).

often an interior of a university library accompanied by a caption describing the poster's "#studyInspo", "#academicValidation" or passing epiphany about student life. Finally, and very prevalent, is the DA reading recommendations subgenre, in which books (both classic and contemporary) exhibiting DA themes are held up to the camera in rapid sequence.

The specific mood of DA is best communicated by itemising its visual hallmarks. These convey, in the words of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*—a foundational DA text—"a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs".¹¹ Of the 100 videos in the sample, 14 explicitly referenced Tartt's *The Secret History*, whether showing the book cover in close-up, strategically displayed in the background, reading the opening sentence in voiceover, citing it in the video title and hashtags, or showing a rare television interview with Tartt.¹² Favoured DA settings include (neo)gothic architecture, university quadrangles (especially Oxbridge or Ivy League), historic country houses, art galleries and library interiors. The interior décor featured so prominently in DA posts likewise favours the atmospherics of the Oxbridge library or stately home: spiral staircases; brocade armchairs and leather sofas; pianos; antique mirrors; chandeliers; tapestries; silverware; gilt picture frames; oil paintings and sepia-toned photographs. Objects associated with analogue-era intellectualism are especially prized leitmotifs: printed, leather-bound codices; manuscripts; quills and fountain pens; ink pots; sealing wax; candles and candelabra; typewriters; antique globes; hourglasses; Ancient Greek and Latin books; Classical statuary; Venetian masks; tea- and coffee-making items; pressed flowers; chess sets ... and occasional skulls. In keeping with this evocation of inter-war Oxford comes a wardrobe selection strongly favouring an autumnal palette: tweed jackets (with leather arm patches, naturally); corduroy or velvet trousers; turtleneck jumpers; plaid skirts; silk blouses; lace collars; wool scarves; coats; capes; tooled-leather brogues or loafers; satchel bags; and horn-rim or tortoiseshell glasses. The aspirational look of distressed gentility is aptly encapsulated by one commentator as "weathered-posh fashion".¹³ When browsing DA moodboards, video compilations and soundtracks across social-media platforms, the cumulative effect is the same variety of world-weary aestheticism that first attracts *The Secret History*'s narrator Richard Pappen to the exclusive world of Hampton College as he fairly luxuriates in a university brochure: "For a long time I looked at a picture of the building they called Commons. It was suffused with a weak academic light ... a light that made me think of long hours in dusty libraries, and old books, and silence".¹⁴

Motivations

DA's transformation from a niche subculture to the subject of *New York Times* features is inextricably tied to the first phase of the COVID pandemic when all higher education abruptly shifted to become online-only. It thus provided a surrogate campus experience for students quarantined in dormitories or confined to their childhood bedrooms.¹⁵ Yet,

¹¹Tartt, *The Secret History*, 5.

¹²Donna Tartt interview (1992)—YouTube.

¹³Therieu, "The Novel of Vibes."

¹⁴Tartt, *The Secret History*, 10.

¹⁵Bateman, "Academia Lives"; Burton, "The Kind of Thing"; Horgan, "The 'Dark Academia' Subculture"; Facca *et al.*, *Academic TikTok*, 29; Brinkhof, "What is 'Dark Academia'"; Devloper, "UT Austin Professor"; and Raphael, "A Brief History."

even in its pre-pandemic guises, DA represented a nostalgic idealisation of the campus experience already jarringly out of touch with the realities of twenty-first-century university life:

[T]he cloistered campus life romanticized by Dark Academia belongs to a vanishing era. With the costs of higher education skyrocketing, the Ivies more competitive and exclusive than ever, and academic departments collapsing under bloated administration and the ever-shrinking tenure track, the sheltered college experience from the brochures looks more and more like an unattainable fantasy.¹⁶

In the view of some critics, DA represents more than a retrograde retreat into a fantasy of humanistic study and art for art's sake. Its veneration of these politically unfashionable ideas constitutes an implicit critique of the neoliberal, casualised, vocationalised university experience current students actually encounter, whether on campus or virtually: "Creating and emulating dark academia content offers students a way to fantasize about a world in which higher education isn't instrumentalized, but rather self-sustaining and inherently valuable".¹⁷ Considered in such light, DA functions as an inverse barometer of the contemporary university. As post-Global Financial Crisis and COVID-era academe is evermore characterised by austerity measures, vocational instrumentalism and public-impact mandates, DA leans ever harder in the opposite direction—into the idea of humanistic education as intrinsically valuable, an ethos of slow self-cultivation, and the atmospherics of an elite university system never designed for mass participation and entirely comfortable with that fact. Yet, if DA does stage a critique of neoliberalism's impact on higher education, it rarely moves from the implicit to the explicit. For all its fetishistic lingering over images of picturesque university buildings, it never imagines the campus as an actual workplace, only as a backdrop for aestheticized photo-shoots. It thus has a curiously semi-detached relationship with the contemporaneous campus-novel subgenre "adjunct lit", in which precariously-employed early-career researchers and would-be tenured academics wrestle with the reality of labour under the neoliberal university system.¹⁸ A besotted fascination with the accoutrements of higher learning most likely drew such authors into the citadel of the elite university in the first place, but adjunct lit is their deeply cynical, utterly disillusioned resignation letter.

Criticisms

The 2020 showcasing of DA for mainstream audiences quickly amplified a number of critiques that had long circulated about the movement, most prominently its reflexively Eurocentric and racially exclusionary conception of art and knowledge.¹⁹ DA is, in the main, as profoundly white and Anglo as an old-time Ralph Lauren catalogue. Nevertheless, defenders such as Ana Quiring note that many favoured DA accoutrements can be picked up cheaply at charity shops, which represents a partial democratising of formerly

¹⁶Gentry, "Dark Academia." Rare DA TikTokers are aware of this irony, such as @antiqueness who captioned an atmospheric University of Chicago montage with "uchicago!! its so gorgeous and theres [sic] so much ivy (but also 7% acceptance)".

¹⁷Quiring, "What's Dark About."

¹⁸Examples of "adjunct lit" include Lynn Steger Strong's *Want: A Novel* (2020), Christine Smallwood's *The Life of the Mind: A Novel* (2021), and Julia Keefer's earlier *How to Survive as an Adjunct Professor by Wrestling: A Fantasy Memoir* (2006). For critical commentary on the subgenre's emergence and its reworking of traditional campus-novel tropes, refer Doherty ("Adjunct Hell"), Linden ("The Adjunct Gaze") and Zhang ("Is There a Future?").

¹⁹Edwards, "Dark Academia is the Witchy Literary"; Burton, "The Kind of Thing"; and Facca *et al.*, *Academic TikTok*, 30.

elite educational institutions through making “their trappings and texts ... available as fashion”.²⁰ Similarly optimistic, Gunner Taylor asserts that “by creating their own Oxfords and Harvards online, dark academicians can laugh at those that still feel the need to worship at those altars in person”.²¹ Granted, there exist a number of TikTokkers, such as @cosyfaerie, who advise on how to achieve the DA look as a person of colour or while wearing a hijab, and DA bookToks in Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, French, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Arabic comprised 17% of my research sample. But even when the video is made by a person of colour (at most 20% of sampled videos) the still images nevertheless typically display white models. Self-conscious appropriation of DA norms for the purposes of explicit subversion or racial critique was absent. Hence, specious “exceptions” tend instead to reinforce the general rule that the mid-century university experience on which DA is based had no interest in including such demographics. Indeed, their exclusion was a condition of the academic community’s perceived cohesion.

A related class critique of DA reads the phenomenon as intrinsically elitist in its veneration of public/prep-school and Oxbridge/Ivy League aesthetics (and thus dramatically out of touch with the student demographics of contemporary western universities).²² Again, this general consensus is disrupted by those perceiving resistant potential in DA tropes. Olivia Stowell, for example, views this rather as a compensatory mechanism. When the economic feasibility of actually attending these institutions is vanishingly slim, why not recreate them as fantasy?: “an assemblage of dark academic images isn’t *actually* a plan for a reality (of, say, going to Oxford or Bennington ...) but rather a substitute for it in the absence of its possibility”.²³ Here, fatalistic cosplay takes the place of organised efforts to diversify such institutions’ student intake. Accusations of superficial dress-ups foreground a particular aspect of DA-style bookishness: a relative indifference to the actual *content* of those leather-bound codices which provide such alluring backdrops for displays of academic self-fashioning.²⁴ DA too often seems to posit higher education as so much set-dressing for a solipsistic performance of external styling rather than genuine intellectual labour—with its accompanying potential for philosophical and ideological transformation. In fact, the books that DA adherents actually pour over in detailed close-readings tend to be contemporary Young Adult or fantasy fiction paperback originals, despite the obvious anachronism.²⁵

²⁰“What’s Dark About.” An example of such advice on how to achieve the DA look on a limited budget is the TikTok “thrifting the dark academia aesthetic” though, notably, this was the only video with such a theme in the survey sample. By contrast, ten other videos (10% of the sample) were sponsored content for Penguin, Harper Voyager, Netflix and H&M or appeared to be paid product placement for perfume and stationery retailers or the vintage-style accessories company Ecosusi (two separate videos). The problematic issue of sponsored bookTok content is already receiving mainstream press coverage (Peirson-Hagger, “How #BookTok is Changing”; Ormonde, “Inspirational Passion”). This pattern of grassroots idealisation followed by creeping disenchantment precisely mirrors earlier debates over product placement threatening the “authenticity” of bookTube (Perkins, “The Boundaries of BookTube,” 354; Marriott, “Why Everyone’s Watching”).

²¹“Tweed Jackets.”

²²Robertson, “The Scholarship of Sexy Privilege”; Horgan, “The ‘Dark Academia’ Subculture”; Burton, “The Kind of Thing”; Facca *et al.*, *Academic TikTok*, 29; Stowell and Therieau, “Introduction”; and Taylor, “Tweed Jackets.”

²³Stowell, “The Time Warp, Again?”

²⁴Stowell and Therieau, “Introduction.”

²⁵Beyond *The Secret History*, other core DA novels include: V.E. Schwab’s *Vicious* (2013); M.L. Rio’s *If We Were Villains* (2017); Mona Awand’s *Bunny* (2019); Susanna Clarke’s *Piranesi* (2020); and Kate Elizabeth Russell’s *My Dark Vanessa* (2020). Like Tartt’s debut, these novels noticeably straddle literary/popular fiction publishing categories.

Finally, DA's key texts and imagery have been criticised for glamorising a dangerously unhealthy lifestyle characterised by over-consumption of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and illegal drugs.²⁶ Mitch Therieau justifiably skewers *The Secret History*'s "interminable scenes of aimless whiskey sipping and cigarette smoking",²⁷ while bookTuber "Slanted Spines" goes further in jocularly summing up that novel's plot as: "Smoke cigs, drink liquor, kill Bunny".²⁸ Where food is actually consumed in the book, it is either boarding-school novelty fare (cream cheese and marmalade sandwiches) or is simply provided on demand by faceless and nameless dining-hall attendants. In sum, DA reduces a narrow selection of European cultural history and literature to so many props in an alluring game of online identity-projection. At the surface level, it appears inherently retrograde in its slavish veneration of a pre-digital world: "In the halls of Dark Academia, nostalgia and a world free of modern technology reign".²⁹ But any consideration of DA subculture based solely on textual analysis of TikTok, YouTube or Instagram posts runs the same risk of reducing a complex phenomenon to so many surface impressions and atmospheric accoutrements, thus failing to examine the platform affordances and digital economies which underpin it.

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* as Dark Academia Ur-text

I have previously mentioned US author Donna Tartt's now three decades old novel *The Secret History* (1992) as a kind of DA ur-text.³⁰ The novel is universally recognised within discussions of DA subculture as playing a foundational role in germinating the aesthetic; it is hailed, by turns, as a "staple text",³¹ DA's "true bible",³² its "essential text",³³ "the inception point of dark academia",³⁴ "the trend's primal scene",³⁵ "at the center of the currently thriving online subculture",³⁶ and as "embody[ing] the entire aesthetic".³⁷ Commentator Amy Gentry, introducing a list of more than 20 "Post *Secret-History* campus thrillers", observes that the novel has spawned its own subgenre: "We are now living, belatedly, in the age of Tartt".³⁸

The Secret History was the much-hyped debut novel from then 20-something wunderkind Donna Tartt that achieved international bestseller status and translation into dozens of languages. She did not publish again for ten years until the appearance of her follow-up novel, the generally well-received southern gothic *The Little Friend* (2002). Subsequently, her third novel *The Goldfinch* (2013) won a Pulitzer Prize (2014) though the award was

²⁶Facca et al., *Academic TikTok*, 30; Brinkhof, "What is 'Dark Academia.'"

²⁷Therieau, "The Novel of Vibes."

²⁸Is it worth reading? | *The Secret History* Book Review—YouTube. She adds, wryly, "Disclaimer: I do not condone cigarette smoking, excessive liquor consumption, nor murder of non-fictional characters" (2020).

²⁹Bateman, "Academia Lives."

³⁰Adrienne Raphel employs the same, bibliographically-inflected, term: "the internet iteration of the [DA] genre officially began in 1992, with the publication of *The Secret History*, Donna Tartt's disgustingly delicious debut novel and the urtext [sic] for the next decades of meme" ("A Brief History").

³¹Robertson, "The Scholarship of Sexy Privilege."

³²Leach, "This Dishy New Podcast."

³³Bateman, "Academia Lives."

³⁴Stowell, "The Time Warp, Again?"

³⁵Therieau, "The Novel of Vibes."

³⁶Joseph, "Fooled You."

³⁷Edwards, "Dark Academia is the Witchy Literary."

³⁸"Dark Academia."

controversial, with influential critics James Wood and Francine Prose lamenting that Tartt's plotting was too implausibly infantile and her prose too generic to merit Pulitzer consecration.³⁹ *The Goldfinch* was promptly adapted for screen with the film of the same name released in 2019 (though it garnered scant critical praise and earned less than a quarter of its production costs).⁴⁰ Tartt's small oeuvre thus occupies a borderline position in US letters, being critically esteemed in some quarters and hugely popular with the book-buying public, though less often discussed by the academy than it is online.⁴¹

Her debut novel focuses on a group of six Anglophilic, young-fogeyish students studying Ancient Greek at the elite Hampden College in rural Vermont during the early-1980s. It is narrated by the lower-middle-class, Californian outsider to the group, Richard Papen, who confides in the book's opening pages that "I do not now nor did I ever have anything in common with them".⁴² The others in the group include old-money trustafarians Henry Winter (the clique's enigmatic de facto leader), orphaned twins Camilla and Charles Macaulay, effete, pince-nez-wearing Francis Abernathy, and their eventual victim, the buffoonish WASP Edmund "Bunny" Corcoran.

Key to the novel's success across different publishing categories and reader demographics is the way it fuses literary fiction's richly figurative language and range of high-cultural allusion with commercial fiction's tight plotting and drive for narrative payoff. The novel also cleverly hybridises genres, combining the satirical bent of the campus novel with the plot-twists of crime fiction. However, it also innovates in regard to both of these genres. Unusually for a campus novel, it focuses almost exclusively on students, not the more typically focalised academic staff.⁴³ Similarly, it disrupts the drip-feed plotting of the traditional crime novel by revealing the circumstances and culprits for the murder of Bunny in a two-page Prologue. It is no accident that Tartt incorporates ironic intertextual shout-outs to Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson while upending the narrative model that Conan Doyle made standard.⁴⁴ The first part of the novel then flashes back to explain the reasons for the group's killings, first of a local farmer while attempting to recreate a drug-addled bacchanalia in the woods, and also the subsequent murder of Bunny, who threatens to reveal their guilt for the initial murder. Because it inverts crime fiction's standard narrative pattern in this manner, *The Secret History* is technically more a "whydunit" than a whodunit.⁴⁵ Book II then charts the cover-up of the group's complicity for both murders, their eventual exposure and its lethal consequences.

As *The Secret History*'s knowing winks to Holmes and Watson attest, the novel is richly allusive, starting with its title, a direct borrowing from Byzantine chronicler of imperial debauchery, Procopius. Other texts either explicitly namechecked or more tangentially evoked through plot similarities or atmospheric echoes include Euripides's play

³⁹Wood, "The New Curiosity Shop"; Prose, "After Great Expectations"; see also Peretz, "It's Tartt."

⁴⁰*The Goldfinch* (2019)—IMDb.

⁴¹Joseph, "Fooled You."

⁴²Tartt, *The Secret History*, 7.

⁴³Gentry, "Dark Academia."

⁴⁴Tartt, *The Secret History*, 92, 251, 256.

⁴⁵Gentry, "Dark Academia.". In a rare interview, Tartt has described the genesis of the book's structure as partly a technical challenge: "How do you create suspense from knowing what we already know?" (Donna Tartt interview (1992)—YouTube at 5.53 mins).

The Bacchae,⁴⁶ Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,⁴⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*—praised by Richard as “one of my favorite books”⁴⁸—Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. It is especially apt, given that *The Secret History* has served as a seedbed for the profusely citational DA scene, that the novel's own rampant intertextuality was noted from its earliest reviews. For example, Michiko Kakutani opened hers in the *New York Times* by asking rhetorically: “How best to describe Donna Tartt's enthralling first novel? Imagine the plot of Dostoyevsky's ‘Crime and Punishment’ crossed with the story of Euripides' ‘Bacchae’ ... and told in the elegant, ruminative voice of Evelyn Waugh's ‘Brideshead Revisited’” [*sic*].⁴⁹

Less evident in the novel, but fecund for the novel's digital afterlife in the image-heavy DA scene, is the extent to which *The Secret History* was informed by screen culture of the 1980s. A social history of Bennington College, the formidably expensive liberal arts college in rural Vermont that Tartt attended, reveals that Granada Television's celebrated adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), which screened in the US in 1982 on PBS, was cult viewing among Tartt's coterie.⁵⁰ Likewise, the insular New England prep-school setting of Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* (1989), with its narrative of a privileged group of literary non-conformists whose skylarking in the woods has tragic consequences, seems atmospherically suggestive for Tartt. Since *The Secret History*, the visual hallmarks of these original source texts have merged for post-millennial DA practitioners with the canon of massively influential *Harry Potter* books, films and prequels (1997–) as well as the streamed television mini-series *The Queen's Gambit* (2020)⁵¹ and *The Chair* (2021)—despite the fact that the former does not take place in typically scenic university settings and the latter may be set in a “minor Ivy” college but its plot centres on a social-media scandal. Collectively, these constitute a fecund visual grab-bag of wood-panelled rooms, retro fashions and alienated, oddball, gifted-but-cursed protagonists.

The Appeal of The Secret History for Dark Academia

The Secret History's primacy in the DA canon most likely derives from the book's memorably lush and louche *mise-en-scene*. The descriptions of Hampton College and its surrounds are suffused with gothic tropes: ravens in cemeteries;⁵² full moons obscured by cloud;⁵³ a campus shrouded in uncanny fog;⁵⁴ ghost-haunted dreams;⁵⁵ flagstone paths covered with writhing earthworms;⁵⁶ and paranoid hallucinations.⁵⁷ As though to drive home Tartt's indebtedness to a lineage of American literary gothic, the book

⁴⁶Tartt, *The Secret History*, 204.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 349, 447.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁹Kakutani, “Books of the Times.”

⁵⁰Livingstone, “Did a Podcast.”

⁵¹E.g., https://www.tiktok.com/@nhi.hien.nguyen/video/7158049798174674202?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7095573698115470849.

⁵²Tartt, *The Secret History*, 68–9.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 198, 585.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 297–8, 422.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 478–9.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 552.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 553.

even contains explicit references to Edgar Allan Poe.⁵⁸ The nearby country estate that Francis's conveniently absent aunt lets the group occupy on weekends is described in "Fall of the House of Usher" terms: opulently ripe with a mahogany banquet table, decaying library, antique sleigh discovered in the cellar, and semi-neglected tennis court.⁵⁹ Thankfully, there is a skeleton staff of housekeeper and caretaker on hand to cater to the group's whims and provide transport on demand.⁶⁰

Also in keeping with the long history of the gothic genre are the complicated sexual entanglements between various members of the Greek clique: heterosexual; homosexual; incestuous; some committed during orgiastic bacchanals; some reciprocated, some not. True to the gothic genre's long interest in altered states of consciousness, *The Secret History* is, as mentioned above, equally famous for its depiction of copious drug use: near-constant performative smoking;⁶¹ health-destroying amounts of alcohol; and industrial quantities of 1980s-era party drugs—especially cocaine and speed.⁶² The scene in which the Drug Enforcement Agency descends on Hampton in an undercover sting is one of the novel's comic highlights and furthers the book's intertextual relationship with nineteenth-century accounts of opium-addled writers and poets dying destitute in garrets:

Théophile Gautier, writing about the effect of Vigny's *Chatterton* on the youth of Paris, said that in the nineteenth-century night one could practically hear the crack of the solitary pistols; here, now, in Hampden, the night was alive with the flushing of toilets. Pillheads, cokeheads staggered around glassy-eyed, dazed at their sudden losses. Someone flushed so much pot down one of the toilets in the sculpture studio they had to get somebody in from the Water Department to dig up the septic tank.⁶³

Less amusingly, *The Secret History* is also obsessed throughout with the potential of minute distinctions in fashion and interior décor to signal a person's social rank. The cloth and cut of a borrowed Brooks Brothers jacket that the gauche Richard wears early on to an upscale restaurant with Bunny assume outsized significance for the plot.⁶⁴ Such obsessive lingering over inadvertent sartorial "tells", especially their potential to unmask class interlopers and unleash attendant humiliation, would put Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist of class and culture, to shame.⁶⁵ These signifiers of WASP *habitus* are described with the gimlet eye of the outsider (both the eager-to-conform Richard and also, one infers, the small-town-Mississippi-born Tartt).⁶⁶ As the socially out-of-his-depth narrator Richard confides to the reader in rueful retrospect: "I was in fact incredibly self-conscious about these virtually imperceptible differences of dress and the rather less imperceptible differences of manner and bearing between myself

⁵⁸Ibid., 132, 200. Additionally, the story Henry tells of his time in Italy with Bunny is strongly reminiscent of the plot and paranoid atmosphere of Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" (215–16).

⁵⁹Ibid., 84–8, 99.

⁶⁰Ibid., 600.

⁶¹Ibid., 265, 518.

⁶²Ibid., 406–7, 453–4, 520–1.

⁶³Ibid., 406–7.

⁶⁴Ibid., 52, 207.

⁶⁵Ibid., 70, 99.

⁶⁶Both Donna Tartt and her protagonist Richard have a father who ran a gas station, Tartt's in the small town of Grenada, Mississippi, and Richard's in the fictional Plano, California (5). The descriptions of Richard's lower-middle-class childhood emphasise its suburban dreariness and cultural aridity—"drive-ins, tract homes, waves of heat rising from the black-top"—rendering him all the more susceptible to the old-money, leisure-class charms of his college peers (5).

and the rest of them”.⁶⁷ Everyday social encounters thus become a minefield of potentially missed cultural references or fashion blunders. It is a state of social “passing” strongly reminiscent of a comment made by novelist Jonathan Lethem, Tartt’s contemporary at Bennington College. Reflecting on his culture shock as a lower-middle-class teen entering such a socially elevated milieu, Lethem developed an acute over-compensation mechanism: “I responded to the potential humiliations of not belonging by playing at belonging totally”.⁶⁸ The fact that the class hierarchy which underpins this unspoken demand for conformity is never explicitly criticised in *The Secret History* must give us pause, casting doubt over claims that DA represents a democratising or mild satirising of mid-century Oxbridge norms. If anything, it tends in the opposite direction—aligning with Richard’s own belated self-diagnosis of “this cowardice, this hideous pack instinct which would enable me to fall into step without question”.⁶⁹

The Secret History as Source of Dark Academia’s Blind-spots

The default Eurocentrism criticised in DA subculture is everywhere apparent in Tartt’s novel. In this less positive sense, *The Secret History* is indeed DA’s true ur-text. The book admits no conception of culture outside of European high culture. No students from minority backgrounds are depicted, and the only working-class characters are walk-on figures who labour largely unseen as dining-hall staff and have at best a single line of dialogue. The book’s first mention of race comes some 460 pages in at Bunny’s funeral when a eulogist’s mention of “‘lower’ Connecticut” is translated as a euphemism for “black”.⁷⁰ As Zoe Robertson surmises of the DA canon generally, “These books have a diversity problem, undoubtedly”.⁷¹ The overall impression is of a lily-white group of protracted adolescents playacting 1890s-style Wildean decadence. The anomaly that these young American characters’ cultural reference points are all European is never explicitly addressed in the book, despite the obvious contradiction. The Greek clique’s members never seem to realise that their own brand of New England-ish high culture is—as the region’s name itself betrays—a transatlantic import of a nationally-specific, artificially constructed Oxbridge ideal. To do so would, presumably, force them to confront its manufactured nature, prompting uncomfortable questions about whose interests such an institutionalising of Culture serves. For example, when Richard, who “yearn[s] hopelessly for England”, travels to Boston for the first time late in the novel, he interprets the city chiefly as a simulacrum of a European original: “I thought it looked like the London I had never seen”.⁷² The group’s obliviousness to their status as cultural importers is most glaring in Bunny’s drawling, faux-English patois—“Damndest thing. Fact truer than fiction, boy”—a kind of Massachusetts prep-school reworking of some Old Etonian / *Tom Brown’s School Days* public-school template.⁷³

⁶⁷Tartt, *The Secret History*, 207.

⁶⁸Anolik, “The Secret Oral History of Bennington.”

⁶⁹Tartt, *The Secret History*, 550.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 465.

⁷¹Robertson, “The Scholarship of Sexy Privilege.”

⁷²Tartt, *The Secret History*, 10, 619.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 276. This slippage into a US approximation of Britishness to connote familiarity with high culture appears to be a tic of Tartt’s fiction more generally. Transatlantic critic James Wood observed of *The Goldfinch*, “throughout this seven-hundred-and-seventy-page yarn, Tartt’s American characters move through a world of cozy Britishisms, like ‘they tucked into their food’, ‘you look knackered’, ‘crikey’, ‘skive off’, and ‘gobsmacked’” (“The New Curiosity Shop”).

Cultivated insularity and an unwillingness to probe how their own idea of Culture has been nationally and institutionally constructed over centuries is most pronounced in the group's contemptuous treatment of the resident "poverty-level Vermonters".⁷⁴ The local farmer dismembered by the group when they wander onto his property during a drugged-up Bacchanalian frenzy is not even given a name for the book's first 350 pages (and then only in an interpolated newspaper article) and never any backstory.⁷⁵ The effects of his death on his family, friends and community are never considered by the increasingly unreliable narrator—a device to keep reader sympathies at least provisionally on the group's side.⁷⁶ It is a telling narrative absence noted also by Lethem: "the murdered Vermont farmer, [is] a character so beneath the regard of the book's characters that he barely registers as human".⁷⁷

Thus, much of the cultural, racial and class insularity often decried in DA subculture traces its roots directly to *The Secret History*. Yet Tartt's novel is not beyond investigating the social implications of cultural formations. At one point, Richard correctly diagnoses the patriarchal beliefs pervading Ancient Greek culture and the discipline of Classics constructed on its foundations: "in Greekdom, generally speaking, women are lesser creatures, better seen than heard . . . This prevailing sentiment . . . is so pervasive that it lingers in the bones of the language itself".⁷⁸ But Tartt's critical attitude does not extend to the cosseted, privileged world of Hampton College. Indeed, a minor character, Briony Dillard, "president of a leftist group on campus" is specifically disparaged for "always trying to mobilize the youth of Hampden in the face of crushing indifference".⁷⁹ Yes, one's privilege might be built on the back of others' disenfranchisement but, with surfaces this beguiling, it's easy to distract oneself from the fact.

Dark Academia's Paradoxical Digital Denialism

First published in 1992, *The Secret History* is set in an unspecified stretch of the early- to mid-1980s. Despite this, the forms of digital technology that were even then encroaching upon analogue media barely register in the narrative. In fact, the members of the Greek clique are explicitly hostile to modern media: "none of them were the least bit interested in anything that went on in the world" and consider television "an outrageous eccentricity".⁸⁰ Henry even "disliked electric lights", preferring kerosene lamps,⁸¹ claims not to know who Marilyn Monroe was,⁸² and responds with apparent surprise to mention of the moon landing.⁸³ The clique's charismatic Classics professor, Julian Morrow, personifies an even more extreme brand of modernity-refusenik:

Things which were odd, by Julian's definition, often turned out to be amusingly mundane. By his own choice, he had so little contact with the outside world that he frequently

⁷⁴Ibid., 194.

⁷⁵Ibid., 205, 220, 236, 350, 514.

⁷⁶Ibid., 236–7, 551.

⁷⁷Anolik, "The Secret Oral History of Bennington."

⁷⁸Tartt, *The Secret History*, 251.

⁷⁹Ibid., 351.

⁸⁰Ibid., 93.

⁸¹Ibid., 140.

⁸²Ibid., 141.

⁸³Ibid., 93.

considered the commonplace to be bizarre: an automatic teller machine, for instance, or some new peculiarity in the supermarket—cereal shaped like vampires, or unrefrigerated yogurt sold in pop-top cans. All of us enjoyed hearing about these little forays of his into the twentieth century.⁸⁴

In keeping with their mentor's cultivated Luddism, the group's members communicate by pay phones (vital for the plot), typed and handwritten letters (ditto), diary entries and, under medial duress, the occasional answering-machine message. Taylor has observed, in a study of genre in *The Secret History*, that Bunny's fondness for low-brow formats such as comics, jokebooks and pulp fiction seems almost to justify his classmates' murder of him.⁸⁵ But the Greek clique's rejection of contemporary culture is not only a matter of valuing the right *kind* of books; it extends to rejecting virtually all media technologies invented since the printed codex. The novel's only mentions of computers relate to sketchily-drawn minor characters who serve as plot functionaries, such as an airline reservations clerk with whom Richard converses via landline telephone,⁸⁶ or demonised antagonists, such as the "Philistine" FBI agent sporting a (then rare) "laptop computer" who interrogates Henry about Bunny's murder.⁸⁷ These brief acknowledgements of digital-media encroachment seem chiefly designed to betray such peripheral characters' capitulation to techno-corporate bureaucracy or state-control mechanisms—and thus their irredeemable cultural inferiority. In keeping with this general pattern, then-new media such as cable television are ruthlessly satirised throughout the novel and frequent users of them are marked out as indelibly inferior—for example, Richard's television-watching suburban parents, or Judy Poovey, a mindless Californian cokehead and dorm-mate of Richard's, whose unsavoury fate is to become an aerobics instructor on cable TV.⁸⁸

The Secret History's brand of digital denialism is, though quaint, perhaps forgivable: in the early 1990s when Tartt's debut was published, the digitisation of the book industry was as yet only partial, mostly confined to back-office production and, to a lesser extent, editorial departments. E-books did not emerge in commercially viable formats until after the turn of the millennium. Thus, in submitting her manuscript to super-agent Amanda "Binky" Urban, Tartt would not have anticipated its production as anything other than a printed codex. Yet, given the temporal gap between then and the present age of social media, the characteristic omission of digital technology from DA imagery is more puzzling. At the level of *content*, DA subculture is emphatically analogue: "Dark Academia pulls back from a life of technology and social media, foregrounding sketching, handwriting and drawing".⁸⁹ For example, of the 100 DA TikToks sampled, only one featured a mobile phone intradiegetically, as opposed to using it transparently as a means of recording.⁹⁰ Even turntables and vinyl LPs were foregrounded in the sample more commonly than digital technology. Considering that the DA phenomenon boomed during the enforced digitality of the first pandemic-era global lockdown, this apparent abjuring of

⁸⁴Ibid., 559.

⁸⁵"Tweed Jackets."

⁸⁶Tartt, *The Secret History*, 159–60.

⁸⁷Ibid., 396.

⁸⁸Ibid., 6, 625.

⁸⁹Burton, "The Kind of Thing."

⁹⁰https://www.tiktok.com/@hoangminhngoc21/video/7151622943141825818?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7179473226828514817.

the digital seems justifiable. It can be read as a principled refusal to capitulate to the ubiquity of digital culture and its erosion of domestic privacy. As one commentator diagnosed during the global pandemic's second year, DA's "return to pre-digital simplicity is a response to the uncertainty and chaos of the current moment".⁹¹

But at the level of production, circulation and consumption, DA is fundamentally dependent on the affordances of digital media. Indeed, it could never have emerged without them. The DA creators in the sample were clearly experienced and highly skilled at editing still images, film snippets, soundtracks and captions into maximum one-minute run-time TikToks. Trending songs may be chosen (and hashtagged) precisely to drive traffic to the TikToker's account; "Achilles Come Down" (2017) by Gang of Youths featured three times in the sample, likely because of the success on bookTok of Madeleine Miller's Homeric-themed novel *The Song of Achilles* (2011). Such an eye to maximising discoverability of one's content is a basic skill of social-media visibility, though DA TikTokers also make inventive play with the creative possibilities of the platform, such as lip-syncing to the chosen soundtrack, cutting between colour and black-and-white or sepia-toned footage, and precision-editing a sequence of styled outfits or books held up to the camera with various bodily flourishes or hand gestures so that the new outfit or title appears as if by magic. Modes of circulation are also conditioned by the logics of the specific social-media platform: leading DA adherents tag their posts profusely to maximise discoverability; attempt to game a platform's algorithm through scheduling optimal release times; and stoke follower engagement through direct responses to user suggestions. Moreover, in keeping with other forms of online book-talk, the DA community is highly dialogical: offering creators near real-time feedback; encouraging subscribing, liking and commenting upon new content; and evincing a degree of febrile interactivity that blurs creator and consumer distinctions. Producers may create in direct response to follower requests or based on observations of what is trending. Parodies or reworkings of existing DA tropes are common (e.g., the rival sub-subculture Light Academia, which is characterised by a paler fashion palette and the vibe of which might best be summed up as leaving the library and getting some sun for a change: "Its attitudes toward learning are more positive; the pursuit of knowledge, instead of causing us grief, can be used to make the world a better, happier place").⁹² In the comments section accompanying each TikTok, it is common to see viewers weighing in on whether particular outfit choices adhere more to dark or light academia norms.

Certain Dark Academicians moreover reveal themselves to be seasoned traversers of the digital ecosystem and alert to the ethical quandaries that digital media throws up around issues such as privacy. A recent uptick in interest in *The Secret History* has been triggered by journalist Lili Anolik's 14-part podcast *Once Upon a Time ... at Bennington College* (2021). The series centres on the famed liberal arts institution and its notoriously dissolute early-1980s alumni: Donna Tartt, her sometime boyfriend Bret Easton Ellis (to whom *The Secret History* is jointly dedicated) and the aforementioned Lethem. Its origins lie in Anolik's 2019 *Esquire* article "The Secret Oral History of Bennington: The 1980s' Most Decadent College", a rather muckraking attempt by the former

⁹¹"Dark Academia."

⁹²Brinkhof, "What is 'Dark Academia.'"

Vanity Fair journalist to cater to reader fascination with this talented, eccentric, gothic-obsessed clique and in particular the famously reclusive Tartt.⁹³ Its ratings were helped substantially by news stories that Tartt's literary agents had issued Anolik with a cease-and-desist notice and requested that Apple take the episodes off its iTunes site.⁹⁴ These appear to have been counterproductive measures; Anolik is leveraging the notoriety to adapt the podcast into a book for Scribner.⁹⁵

It seems reasonable to assume that a significant proportion of DA participants are consuming the podcast, given its central focus on Tartt, demonstrating once again the scene's platform-agnostic approach to digital content. Yet certain DA commentators call attention to the ethics of consuming online content that potentially invades an author's privacy. Canadian BookTuber "sleeptowns", in her insightful bookTube video "what dark academia gets wrong about the secret history" [*sic*] (2022), refers explicitly to *Once Upon a Time ... at Bennington College*, shows the podcast's title image from C13 Originals, and warns viewers that it "all depends on where you stand on the ethics of investigating the alumni of any school" (9.55 mins).⁹⁶ Locked-down Dark Academicians posting from their bedrooms freely blur residual pre-pandemic public/private boundaries in their intimate displays of wardrobe choices, hairstyles or desk arrangements. But they do so of their own volition, and on the understanding that such performances of bookishness are carefully staged and choreographed.⁹⁷ The ethics of having one's personal life revealed for public dissection appear, for this Gen-Z group, to hinge on whether the person was at the time aware of and inviting such publicity—much less likely in the pre-mobile-phone era. Such caveats demonstrate that DA participants themselves are conscious of how much privacy norms have shifted under the sway of digital media during the three decades since *The Secret History* was first published.

UK sociologist Sarah Burton, one of a handful of scholars to engage critically with the DA scene, correctly summarises the profound ambivalence towards digital technology pervading DA:

[its] rejection of technology is ... important given that Zoomers are the first generation that have [*sic*] really grown up with social media as an ever-present aspect. Dark Academia is a way of approaching the world that enables them to simultaneously pull back from this always-on, tech-savvy, public-facing aspect and enjoy the quiet life of books and candlelight. But it also gives them material for TikTok and connecting to a wider community and having fun.⁹⁸

DA subculture is deeply conflicted in its attitude towards digital media: at the level of content, you will virtually never find a computer (even a retro one) depicted in a DA TikTok, YouTube video or bookstagram image. On the rare occasions when one does appear, its presence seems jarringly anachronistic, even faintly ludicrous, fatally disrupting the consciously curated antiquarianism of the scene. The anomaly is emblematic of a deeper contradiction: DA owes its existence to digital technologies and its manifestations

⁹³Livingstone, "Did a Podcast."

⁹⁴Ibid.; Leach, "This Dishy New Podcast."

⁹⁵Leach, "This Dishy New Podcast."

⁹⁶what dark academia gets wrong about the secret history—YouTube.

⁹⁷Boffone, *TikTok Cultures*, 6.

⁹⁸Burton, "The Kind of Thing."

have been indelibly shaped by the affordances of specific social-media platforms, but at the surface level, DA dares not speak digital technology's name.

Conclusion: Getting Academic About Dark Academia

Why should all this amateur performance of bookishness matter? Because phenomena like DA are how conceptions of the literary world and book culture more generally are mass-cultivated and publicly circulate in a digitally-saturated age. As Pressman notes in urging scholars to combine traditional literary close-reading with media-studies methodologies, a process I also enact in this article, “a focus on bookishness illuminates where and how the literary works now”.⁹⁹ Literary studies/English academics can ill afford to wall themselves off from such developments and sneer at them as so much late-adolescent dress-ups. This is, after all, precisely the online environment native to our Gen-Z postgraduate cohort. For all of DA's diversity deficit, the scene's popular representation of avid readerly identities and bookish personae is also a key recruiting ground from which we might derive undergraduate-age enrolments. Beyond the academy's walls, popular-culture representations of bookishness inform public attitudes towards the literary studies discipline, whether supportive or dismissive.

Aside from these practical and self-interested motives for taking the phenomenon seriously, DA foregrounds how the world of books and literary culture is, by now, at every turn intermeshed with digital media. In fact, contemporary literary culture might properly be considered a subsector of an overarching online economy—one in which different formats are freely traversed in an idiosyncratic blend of old and new media, giving rise to myriad overlapping subcultural groupings. Attempts to define contemporary literariness that remain oblivious to popular online practices, or explicitly oppositional in their relationship to them, are doomed to provide inadequately print-centric and outdated explanations—of books' digital afterlives, of writers' online identity performance, and of readers' responsive self-fashioning. More self-limitingly, such a print-exclusive frame misses exactly what is fascinating and transformational about the period of literary history through which we are living: the fusion of print and digital media into a complex, hybridised, cross-platform ecosystem.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Simone Murray  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6213-2146>

References

- “Dark Academia, Gender, Intellectualism.” *Newcastle University Women blogpost*, 16 February 2021. Available from <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/nuwomen/2021/02/16/dark-academia-gender-intellectualism/>

⁹⁹Bookishness, 20.

- Anolik, Lili. "The Secret Oral History of Bennington: The 1980s' Most Decadent College." *Esquire*, 28 May 2019. Available from <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/a27434009/bennington-college-oral-history-bret-easton-ellis/>.
- Bateman, Kristen. "Academia Lives—On TikTok." *New York Times*, 30 June 2020. Available from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/style/dark-academia-tiktok.html>.
- Boffone, Trevor, ed. *TikTok Cultures in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2022.
- Brammer, Sydney E. "A Space for Dark Academia: Where Tumblr Has Faltered, Instagram Excels." *Mediacommons*, 3 March 2022. Available from <http://mediacommons.org/imr/content/space-dark-academia-where-tumblr-has-faltered-instagram-excels>.
- Brinkhof, Tim. "What is 'Dark Academia' and Why is it Trending on Social Media in 2022?" *Big Think*, 22 January 2022. Available from <https://bigthink.com/high-culture/dark-academia/>.
- Burek Pierce, Jennifer. *Narratives, Nerdfighters, and New Media*. Iowa City, IA: U of Iowa P, 2020.
- Burton, Sarah. "The Kind of Thing You See on Morse: Dark Academia, Gender, and the Aesthetic Practices of the Intellectual." Online presentation, *NU Women*, February 2021. Available from <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/nuwomen/2021/02/16/dark-academia-gender-intellectualism/>.
- Chu, Angélique. "The Rise of Dark Academia." *The Insider*, 5 November 2020. Available from <https://www.vinsider.ca/voices/the-rise-of-dark-academia/>.
- Devloper, Dave. "UT Austin Professor Kevin Dalby Discusses Dark Academia: What is it and How is it Tied to COVID-19." *Thrive*, 2022. Available from <https://thriveworld.com/stories/ut-austin-professor-kevin-dalby-discusses-dark-academia-what-is-it-and-how-is-it-tied-to-covid-19-3/>.
- Doherty, Maggie. "Adjunct Hell: The Rise of a New Kind of Campus Novel." *The Nation*, 3 May 2021. Available from https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/smallwood-steger-strong-adjunct/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Lit%20Hub%20Daily:%20May%204%2C%202021&utm_term=lithub_master_list.
- Edwards, Caroline. "Dark Academia is the Witchy Literary Aesthetic Sweeping TikTok." *I-D*, 24 April 2020. Available from https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/xgqn5d/dark-academia-is-the-latest-teen-internet-trend-on-tiktok.
- Facca, Danica, Arun Jacob, junoh kimm, J. P. King, Mujgan Ozceylan, and Sara M. Grimes. *Academic TikTok*. Toronto: Knowledge Media Design Institute, University of Toronto, 2022. Available from https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/124170/1/Academic_TikTok_Report_KMDI_2022.pdf.
- Gentry, Amy. "Dark Academia: Your Guide to the New Wave of Post-Secret History Campus Thrillers." *CrimeReads*, 18 February 2021. Available from <https://crimereads.com/dark-academia-your-guide-to-the-new-wave-of-post-secret-history-campus-thrillers/>.
- Horgan, Amelia. "The 'Dark Academia' Subculture Offers an Alternative to the Neoliberal University." *Jacobin*, 19 December 2021. Available from <https://jacobin.com/2021/12/instagram-tumblr-humanities-romanticism-old-money-uk>.
- Joseph, Richard. "Fooled You: On Donna Tartt's Genre Fiction." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2 October 2022. Available from https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/fooled-you-on-donna-tartts-genre-fiction/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Lit%20Hub%20Daily:%20October%204%2C%202022&utm_term=lithub_master_list.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Books of the Times; Students Indulging in Course of Destruction." *New York Times*, 4 September 1992. Available from <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/04/books/books-of-the-times-students-indulging-in-course-of-destruction.html>.
- Leach, Samantha. "This Dishy New Podcast Goes Deep on Dark Academia." *Bustle*, 3 December 2021. Available from https://www.bustle.com/entertainment/lili-anolik-dark-academia-donna-tartt-podcast?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Lit%20Hub%20Daily:%20December%206%2C%202021&utm_term=lithub_master_list.
- Linden, Grace. "The Adjunct Gaze." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 14 July 2021. Available from https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-adjunct-gaze/?mc_cid=3fb1a10879&mc_eid=a981eda398.
- Livingstone, Jo. "Did a Podcast About Donna Tartt Go Too Far?" *New Republic*, 22 October 2021. Available from <https://newrepublic.com/article/164092/podcast-donna-tartt-go-far-bennington-college-review>.

- Marriott, James. "Why Everyone's Watching the New Literary Stars of YouTube." *The Times* [UK], 11 August 2017.
- Ormonde, Ismene. "Inspirational Passion or Paid-for Promotion: Can BookTok be Taken on Face Value?" *Guardian*, 16 November 2022. Available from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/nov/15/tiktok-booktok-book-reviewing?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Lit%20Hub%20Weekly:%20November%2019%2C%202022&utm_term=lithub_weekly_master_list.
- Peirson-Hagger, Ellen. "How #BookTok is Changing Literature." *New Statesman*, 22 October 2022. Available from <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2022/11/tiktok-booktok-changing-literature>.
- Peretz, Evgenia. "It's Tartt—But is it Art?" *Vanity Fair*, 11 June 2014. Available from <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/07/goldfinch-donna-tartt-literary-criticism>.
- Perkins, Kathryn. "The Boundaries of BookTube." *The Serials Librarian* 73, no. 3-4 (2017): 352–6. doi:10.1080/0361526X.2017.1364317.
- Pressman, Jessica. "Bookwork and Bookishness: An Interview with Doug Beube and Brian Dettmer." In *Book Presence in a Digital Age*, edited by Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, Kári Driscoll, and Jessica Pressman, 60–7. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- . *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age*. New York: Columbia UP, 2020.
- Prose, Francine. "After Great Expectations." *Review of The Goldfinch*, by Donna Tartt. *New York Review of Books*, 9 January 2014. Available from <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/01/09/after-great-expectations/>.
- Quiring, Ana. "What's Dark About Dark Academia." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 31 March 2021. Available from <https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2021/03/31/whats-dark-about-dark-academia/>.
- Raphel, Adrienne. "A Brief History of My Dark Academia." *Literary Hub*, 28 September 2022. Available from <https://lithub.com/a-brief-history-of-my-dark-academia/>.
- Robertson, Zoe. "The Scholarship of Sexy Privilege: Why Do I Love Dark Academia Books?" *Book Riot*, 27 February 2020. Available from <https://bookriot.com/dark-academia-books/>.
- Stowell, Olivia. "The Time Warp, Again?" *Post45*, 15 March 2022. Available from <https://post45.org/2022/03/the-time-warp-again/>.
- Stowell, Olivia, and Mitch Therieau. "Introduction: Dark Academia Cluster." *Post45*, 15 March 2022. Available from <https://post45.org/2022/03/introduction-3/>.
- Tartt, Donna. *The Secret History*. [1992]. London: Penguin, 1993.
- Taylor, Gunner. "Tweed Jackets and Class Consciousness." *Post45*, 15 March 2022. Available from <https://post45.org/2022/03/tweed-jackets-and-class-consciousness/>.
- Therieau, Mitch. "The Novel of Vibes." *Post45*, 15 March 2022. Available from <https://post45.org/2022/03/the-novel-of-vibes/>.
- Tiidenberg, Katrin, and Andrew Whelan. "Sick Bunnies and Pocket Dumps: 'Not-Selfies' and the Genre of Self-Representation." *Popular Communication* 15, no. 2 (2017): 141–53.
- Wood, James. "The New Curiosity Shop." *Review of The Goldfinch*, by Donna Tartt. *New Yorker*, 21 October 2013. Available from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/21/the-new-curiosity-shop>.
- Zhang, Dora. "Is There a Future for Literary Studies?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14 March 2022. Available from https://www.chronicle.com/article/is-there-a-future-for-literary-studies?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_3878110_nl_Academe-Today_date_20220315&cid=at&source=&sourceid=.