



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Balkin, S;Dane, A;Driscoll, B;O'Meara, R;Vincent, C

Title:

Authorship Across Media: Considering Wednesday Addams

Date:

2025

Citation:

Balkin, S., Dane, A., Driscoll, B., O'Meara, R. & Vincent, C. (2025). Authorship Across Media: Considering Wednesday Addams. *Continuum*, 39 (4), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2025.2518968>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/356982>

License:

CC BY



Continuum

Journal of Media & Cultural Studies

ISSN: 1030-4312 (Print) 1469-3666 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ccon20

Authorship Across Media: considering Wednesday Addams

Sarah Balkin, Alexandra Dane, Beth Driscoll, Radha O'Meara & Caitlin Vincent

To cite this article: Sarah Balkin, Alexandra Dane, Beth Driscoll, Radha O'Meara & Caitlin Vincent (03 Jul 2025): Authorship Across Media: considering Wednesday Addams, Continuum, DOI: [10.1080/10304312.2025.2518968](https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2025.2518968)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2025.2518968>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 03 Jul 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Authorship Across Media: considering Wednesday Addams

Sarah Balkin^a, Alexandra Dane^b, Beth Driscoll^c, Radha O'Meara^d and Caitlin Vincent^e

^aEnglish and Theatre Studies, University of Melbourne; ^bMedia and Communications, University of Melbourne; ^cPublishing and Communications, University of Melbourne; ^dScreenwriting, University of Melbourne; ^eCreative Industries and ARC DECRA Fellow (2025-2027), University of Melbourne

ABSTRACT

A storyworld across media presents scholars of authorship, creativity and cultural production with opportunities to consider how authorship and author 'brand' influence character, plot and audience interaction over time and across formats. This article explores authorship in transmedial storyworlds, employing three different but interrelated theoretical models – media franchises, artistic spawning and distributed authorship – to analyse Netflix's 2022 teen drama series, *Wednesday*, and its position within contemporary culture and the Addams Family universe. Collaborating as literary studies, screen studies, publishing studies and cultural labour researchers, we demonstrate the strength of 'close cross-disciplinarity' as a method of analysis for authorship and transmedial storyworlds.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 November 2024
Accepted 27 May 2025

KEYWORDS

Authorship; transmedia; artistic spawning; franchise storytelling; actor network theory; Addams family; interdisciplinarity

Introduction¹

To speak of the author of a contemporary cultural work often means speaking of multiple people working across multiple media. This is particularly the case for 'storyworlds' that develop over many years and lead to multiple creative outputs over time. While some storyworlds are tightly coordinated by a central group, 'there is no transmedia formula' (Jenkins 2011, 2007). and other storyworlds are developed through looser networks of producers, raising intriguing questions about decision-making and creative vision. This scenario of shared authorship also has implications for the characters that exist within storyworlds, as their role and function potentially shifts within an evolving transmedial universe (Ryan 2014, 32). Within these contexts, how are characters identified? How is consistency maintained across space and time, while preserving the intentions of the original authors – or any subsequent ones? How do characters develop across multi-media, multi-authored cultural phenomena and both connect and differentiate the individual works that they encompass?

To address these questions, we offer an extended analysis of *Wednesday*, the 2022 Netflix series that extends the Addams Family universe. We explore three theoretical models for understanding transmedia authorship and its relationship to character in *Wednesday*: media franchises, artistic spawning and distributed authorship. Drawing from our different

CONTACT Sarah Balkin  sarah.balkin@unimelb.edu.au  School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, Australia

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

disciplines, we argue that in multi-authored storyworlds like the Addams Family, certain character traits become iconic signatures or brand elements, while other traits remain fluid and changeable from medium to medium (Lamerichs 2022, 6). These fixed and changeable elements play off one another, heightening the complexity and narrative interest of a multi-authored story. The example of *Wednesday* is especially useful for considering how multi-authored storyworlds function because, in this version of the Addams Family universe, the transmedial phenomena we discuss apply to aspects of both character and production. By showing how the character Wednesday changes over time and across media, assuming authorial attributes in the process, we also demonstrate how multi-authored transmedia storyworlds respond to industry conditions and shifting social values. *Wednesday* thematizes a branded version of the Romantic individual author even as it inherits and spawns an expanded notion of transmedial authorship.

Introducing our case study and theoretical frameworks

The Addams Family was conceived by American cartoonist Charles Addams as a series of single-panel cartoons published in *The New Yorker*. Over subsequent decades, Addams' macabre but loving intergenerational family has been reimagined multiple ways across varied media. Iterations have included live-action and animated television series, feature and animated films, video games, a Broadway musical and a web series, among other outputs (Howell and Baker 2022; Miserocchi 2010).

The latest iteration in this artistic lineage is the 2022 Netflix television series *Wednesday*. Starring Jenna Ortega as Wednesday Addams, the series takes place at Nevermore Academy, where Wednesday and other so-called outcasts, freaks and monsters must navigate the social dynamics of high school. While managing a love triangle, therapy and her latest novel, Wednesday investigates a local murder, eventually learning secrets from her parents' time at Nevermore, as well as her own ancestral (and psychic) origins.

In the sections that follow, we use *Wednesday* as a lens to consider three theoretical models of authorship across media: *Wednesday* as franchise, *Wednesday* as artistic spawn and *Wednesday* as network. These models, which draw from multiple academic disciplines, differ in their emphases but are compatible in their approaches and resulting insights. For this reason, we adopt the idea of a 'close cross-disciplinarity' as a novel analytical strategy for examining transmedia authorship, which by nature encompasses considerations of form, genre, media and cultural production.

Franchise authorship

Like the *Star Wars* and *Marvel* multimedia universes, the Addams Family can be understood as franchise storytelling. Transmedia storytelling and franchise storytelling are adjacent concepts used to understand the relationships between multiple media outputs, usually sharing a larger setting or storyworld. Henry Jenkins aptly describes transmedia storytelling as 'entertainment for the age of media convergence, integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium' (2006, 97). While franchise storytelling is connected through the commercial and legal relationships of intellectual property, transmedia storytelling is often understood as being centrally controlled, with a lead author or author group that provides continuity. Parody

(2011) offers a useful definition, describing franchise storytelling as ‘the creation of narratives, characters and settings that can be used both to generate and give identity to vast quantities of interlinked media products and merchandise, resulting in a prolonged, intertextual, multimedia fictional experience’. Similarly, Murray (2012, 6–16) argues that transmedia adaptations should be understood as emerging from a transactional ‘cultural economy’, where authorial power is distributed and negotiated across a network of agents, including writers, publishers, investors and advertisers.

There are commonalities and tensions among approaches to authorship in franchise and transmedia storytelling. In her study of the commercialization of media authorship, Hilmes emphasizes the precarity, performance and management of distributed authorship on serial narratives (2013, 196). Johnson (2013, 16) frames authorship as shared, ‘often ambivalent’ social relations ‘within a wider industrial system of creative cultural production’, while Jenkins understands transmedia storytelling as a decentralized, participatory mode of cultural production, which relies on shared community practices and meanings (2006, 20–21). Despite his emphasis on community, Jenkins has also been instrumental in narrowing the conception of transmedia authorship by defining coordinated authorial design as integral to successful storytelling (2007, 2011). An emphasis on coordination (expressed as working in tandem) is also apparent in the introduction to the edited collection *Television Shared Universes*: ‘Transmedia storytelling involves a narrative spread across different media, multiple authors working in tandem, the sense that the congregation of texts builds a universe or lived fictional world’ (Reinhard and Tran 2024).

These definitions focus on the idea of a central, strategic intention to create a unified representation of a world and do not encompass the splintering and inconsistencies of a storyworld criss-crossed by multiple intentions. O’Meara and Bevan (2018) have critiqued Jenkins’ emphasis on coordinated authorship in transmedia storytelling for the ways it privileges Romantic, gendered notions of authorial practice (n.p.). As we discuss later in this article, *Wednesday* imbues its protagonist with some of these Romantic, gendered aspects of authorship. O’Meara and Bevan call for dispensing with Jenkins’ ‘restrictive definitions’ of transmedia storytelling, encouraging a turn towards what this kind of storytelling *does*. A looser approach to understanding transmedia storytelling brings into view a fuller range of authorial activities by dispersed individuals and groups.

As a dominant mode of contemporary cultural production and reception, transmedia storytelling provides a useful lens for considering textual elements, including characters, settings and plots. By framing works as existing within a broader array of texts, scholars can interpret how narrative elements evolve or change across different media iterations. For example, Uricchio and Pearson examine the varying presentations of the Batman, a superhero character that originated in comic books published by DC Comics. Across Batman’s multiple media versions, they argue that different iterations of the character were intentionally varied in order to maximize the affordances of each medium, even as the character is shaped by different authors and illustrators within the originating medium of comic books (Uricchio and Pearson 2019, 213–14). Here, Uricchio and Pearson identify an ongoing tension between character consistency and variation, with different authors encouraged to support and perpetuate the integrity of the brand while also distinguishing their own authorship and ‘take’ (2019, 211–12). In this way, we can see *Wednesday*’s distinctive dark braids as markers of character consistency across texts, and

we can interpret the school setting and social cliques in *Wednesday* as features of the teen drama genre.

Audience reception is also important in relation to characters within a storytelling franchise (Lamerichs 2022, 7). Here, the notion of authenticity or faithfulness is highly relevant: how closely does a character and storyworld need to hew to others in a franchise to meet audience expectations? This may depend on the level of trust that audiences have in the producers who are driving new interpretations within a storyworld. Highlighting screenwriters who are 'star literary adapters' (147), including Andrew Davies and Laura Jones, Murray argues that certain screenwriters are afforded a sense of 'trust' by audiences due to their track record of previous literary adaptations (2012, 150). Murray further explores the concepts of *actual* versus *ascribed* fidelity, in which the 'star adapter' operates with ascribed fidelity to the original, enabling their authorial brand to act as 'a badge which enables...radically altered screenplays to circulate unproblematically' (2012, 150). Winckler (2020, 3) presents an alternate approach, arguing that adaptation is better understood as a form of "hacking", something that is derived from the so-called source code of the original but without adhering to the 'much dreaded and condemned vertical hierarchy between source and adaptation'. Accordingly, Winckler suggests that fidelity should not function as any measure of evaluation for adapted work. Yet here, he also acknowledges that expectations of fidelity will still inevitably remain, 'if only because that connection is in fact *made* by fans or scholars' (2020, 3).

In the context of the franchise storyworld, where multiple authors have contributed to multiple texts, how then might we understand the authorial brand or 'badge' and the resulting tensions around fidelity and faithfulness that are prompted among audiences? In contemporary media studies, this is commonly framed in terms of creators courting and rewarding loyal audiences, even as producers value product differentiation (Jenkins 2006, 96–97). Thus, scholars of popular culture highlight the importance of understanding authorship of franchise and transmedia storytelling as dispersed across multiple agents and situated within a larger network of industrial and cultural dynamics.

With a focus on the franchise storytelling, it is worth noting that Miles Millar and Alfred Gough negotiated the legal rights for the Addams Family before they began work on crafting the story for *Wednesday* (Odman 2022). With a focus on transmedia storytelling, Millar and Gough stand out as producers and showrunners of *Wednesday*, writing four of the first season's eight episodes. Millar and Gough were also responsible for recruiting director Tim Burton, executive producer of the project and director of the first four episodes (Odman 2022). Burton's artistic 'brand' further shaped the promotional materials for the series, both explicitly and more tacitly. *Wednesday's* primary promotional poster, for example, leads with 'From the imagination of Tim Burton', intentionally positioning Burton as a more prominent author than Miller or Gough. Meanwhile, the gothic aesthetic of the series is consistent with Burton's established visual style, seen in blockbuster films such as *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) (Weinstock 2013).

In studying *Wednesday* as franchise storytelling, it is useful to highlight Millar and Gough's professional profile. Before creating *Wednesday*, Millar and Gough had a long partnership of writing and producing film and TV additions to well-known transmedia franchises, including the long-running teen drama *Smallville* (The WB/The CW 2001–2011), which contributed to the transmedia Superman story originated by DC Comics.¹ As experts in transmedia storytelling, Millar and Gough are adept at contributing to an

existing story in ways that both recall and extend previous versions. Their contributions to stories about iconic characters, including Superman, Herbie the Love Bug, Charlie's Angels and Hannah Montana, have shaped some of the most popular stories of contemporary culture and reached an immense audience.

Like the great genre directors of the classical Hollywood studio era, Millar and Gough are particularly skilled at extending existing material without leaving a distinctive authorial mark. Millar and Gough's authorship surely makes a significant contribution to the success of *Wednesday*, but it does not eclipse the storyworld with its own recognizable brand. As Dunleavy notes, authorship of longform stories can be especially complex in practice, even as branding of prestige television series often appeals to more traditional ideas of authorship as markers of cultural distinction (79–82). Despite this trend, Millar and Gough eschew the prestige and branding increasingly associated with contemporary television authorship, leveraging the work of previous authors of Addams Family texts to create new instalments that attract both existing and new audiences.

Artistic spawning across creative industries

Franchise storytelling is a broader view of adaptation across media formats compared to the older notion of the 'spin-off', a concept characterized by an artistic lineage that extends from an original source through subsequent iterations (Klein and Palmer 2016, 14). Examples include the character Buffy the Vampire Slayer, who appeared in the feature film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), American television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and spin-off series *Angel* (1999–2004), alongside a series of comic books published by Dark Horse Comics (1998–2018). Similarly, the crime series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–2015) saw four spin-offs: *CSI: Miami* (2002–2012), *CSI: NY* (2004–2013), *CSI: Cyber* (2014–2016) and *CSI: Vegas* (2021–2023). In both examples, these spin-offs were based on characters, concepts and settings that had been introduced in an earlier text. While *Angel* functioned as what Kilian and Schwartz term a 'generic or character spin-off', focusing on a principal character from the preceding television series, the *CSI* spin-offs were primarily 'guest-star or planted spin-offs' stemming from crossover episodes with shared personnel (40). Both series leveraged clear branding signals to establish the artistic lineage of their works to audiences: all iterations of *CSI*, for example, were produced by the franchise's original creator and branded as part of the *CSI* 'family.'

In the broader creative industries, versions of spin-offs also exist, and these have been analysed by one of this article's co-authors through the concept of *artistic spawning*. Drawing on examples including internet memes and dance works, Vincent et al. use artistic spawning to describe the generational lineage that is established when a source artwork inspires subsequent artworks, or spawns, over time. As with spin-offs in television, the relationship between an originating or 'parent' source and subsequent spawns establishes and extends a work's artistic lifespan. Each spawn comprises 'a natural step in an original artwork's evolution into something new, something rediscovered, or something newly relevant' (Vincent et al. 2018, 284). In this chain of evolution, spawns function as self-contained artistic works that are independent of their lineage but are also the 'embodiment of a specific history, origin and inspiration that can *only* be defined by its "parent" source' (285). Importantly, a key difference between a spin-off and a spawn is that a spin-off implies a lineage that is contained within a single format or medium. In

contrast, artistic spawning describes a transmedial shift between parent and spawn, in which subsequent generations of an artwork actively cross genres, platforms and media.

From a theoretical standpoint, the artistic evolution enabled through the process of artistic spawning does not require the lineage to be actively recognized by audiences or viewers. In the same way, the artistic or commercial 'success' of a spawn compared to its parent source has no bearing on its function. A spawn will still exist as part of the broader transmedial lineage regardless of how it is perceived or received by external bodies. In practice, however, when artistic spawning occurs within explicitly commercial media such as television and film, the process is shaped by its surrounding context, one that is imbued with financial priorities and an audience-driven focus. While authorship and artistic legitimacy bear little relevance to the evolutionary process itself, these considerations remain critical to the television and film industries. This, in turn, is reflected in the ways artistic spawns are conceived and ultimately produced.

In their analysis of the characteristics of successful television spin-offs, Kilian and Schwarz (2015) highlight the importance of cohesiveness between an originating source and any generative iterations as a means for ensuring commercial viability. This includes consistency of genre and character, which, by virtue of familiarity to viewers, 'induce[s] positive associations' and also 'reduce[s] the risk of selecting a series that does not fulfill the viewer's expectations' (Kilian and Schwarz 2015, 41). This strategy allows producers to tap into the fanbase of the original source, while also broadening the spin-off's audience reach. We can apply the same premise to artistic spawning, but with the added complexity that the originating parent source, as well as other familial extensions, generally exist in other media contexts. This poses a challenge to establishing Kilian and Schwarz's recommended cohesiveness from parent to spawn, with potential discrepancies emerging as spawned artworks jump across genres and platforms.

A further obstacle to cohesiveness stems from the commercial impetus to tap into an existing fanbase. While spin-offs developed within the same platform (e.g. television) can rely on viewership from original audiences, spawned artworks can have far more disparate viewership and fanbases. Consider American singer Beyoncé's 2011 music video for 'Countdown', which can be considered the artistic spawn of two dance works by Belgian choreographer Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker from the 1980s and 1990s (Vincent et al. 2018, 290). Alternatively, consider the musical performance of the alien character Diva Plavalaguna in Luc Besson's 1997 film *The Fifth Element*, which is both an arrangement and expansion of the aria 'Il dolce suono' from Gaetano Donizetti's 1835 opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Both artistic spawns are detached from their parent sources in terms of context, audience and even timeframe, with many viewers potentially having no knowledge or awareness of the artistic origins.

Instances of artistic spawning in contemporary contexts, then, can look quite similar to franchise storytelling, although artistic spawning also invites consideration of how new audiences arise and major discrepancies between artworks. This is particularly likely to occur in unauthorized or less commercially restricted storytelling environments. But in a more tightly controlled storyworld with major IP at stake (such as that of the Addams Family), the perspectives emphasizing franchise storytelling and artistic spawning are able to adopt a productively similar theoretical approach to authorship.

Wednesday presents a useful opportunity to examine the complexities of artistic spawning within this kind of commercial context. For many viewers, *Wednesday* exists

as a self-contained artwork, one specifically developed for streaming television. The eight-episode structure, narrative beats and eventual denouement of the series are clearly designed to conform with expectations of drama series on streaming platforms, as well as a binging mode of consumption. At the same time, *Wednesday* is also a spawn, the latest evolutionary outcome in a transmedial lineage that dates back to Charles Addams' original cartoon. *Wednesday* shares with other Addams spawns its deft negotiation of artistic and commercial considerations, with most other spawns within the Addams Family lineage demonstrating similar objectives linked to revenue generation and fan-base cultivation. For these artworks and their creators, the key concern is not whether spawning occurs, but *how* it occurs – and the extent to which a spawn like *Wednesday* is sufficiently cohesive with its predecessors to ensure commercial success. Here, we can refer back to Kilian and Schwarz's principles for successful spin-offs, in which consistency with the original lineage, in both genre and character, is critical for accessing existing fanbases.

Wednesday employs several strategies to establish cohesiveness with its artistic lineage, particularly through explicit ties to the films *The Addams Family* (1991) and *Addams Family Values* (1993), both of which were box office successes. But these films also changed the franchise: in particular, *Addams Family Values*—ironically, considering its title – takes the franchise beyond the family home in ways that shape *Wednesday*'s later jump to Nevermore Academy. Across these preceding spawns, *Wednesday* becomes a character whose 'family' comprises the Addamses as well as the franchise, and whose 'values' extend to critiques of settler colonialism as well as championing social outcasts. While the latter value was arguably implicit in the longstanding franchise, *Wednesday*'s alignment with Native Americans is newer, demonstrating how artistic spawning can retroactively create the lineage with which it coheres.

Addams Family Values (1993) is the first version of the franchise to be set partly outside the Addams family home. *Wednesday* and her brother Pugsley spend much of the film at Camp Chippewa, 'America's foremost facility for privileged young adults' (Sonnenfeld 1993). The camp's popular kids are able-bodied, blonde and physically homogenous; whereas its outcasts are more diverse: brunette, of different races and body types, and including a wheelchair user.

In an iconic scene from this film, the campers perform a musical featuring the American Thanksgiving story. Amanda Buckman, leader of the blonde popular contingent, is cast as the pilgrim Sarah Miller, with her friends playing the other pilgrims. The camp outcasts play the Native Americans, with *Wednesday* as Pocahontas, a casting that both racializes *Wednesday* and plays on her signature braids. Partway through the musical, *Wednesday* goes off script, detailing the injustices done to Native Americans by white settlers and ordering her fellow outcasts to burn down the 'village' (i.e. the set). Buckman is tied to a post and surrounded by wood doused with fuel. As *Wednesday* lights a match, the signature 'da-da-da-dum' of the theme from the 1960s *Addams Family* television show plays. This sonic cue aligns *Wednesday*'s mutiny with the brand as well as her family. The film thus links Addams family 'values' with transmedial spawning in ways that take those values beyond the family home.

The 2022 series *Wednesday* adapts key elements of the Thanksgiving scene from *Addams Family Values* as part of the *Wednesday* canon. In Episode 3, 'Friend or Woe,' *Wednesday* is forced to dress as a pilgrim and volunteer at Pilgrim World, the town theme

park. Wednesday's performance as Pocahontas in *Addams Family Values* also translates to an ancestral association with Native Americans in the television show, where Wednesday uncovers that she is descended from Goody Addams, a woman who lives among the Native American people of colonial Jericho, Vermont. Latinx actor Jenna Ortega plays Goody as well as Wednesday, wearing the same signature braids for both characters, though Goody is fair-haired while Wednesday's hair is black. While Goody's fair hair and name (short for 'goodwife', a polite term for a married woman in colonial Puritan culture) potentially align her with the white pilgrims, Ortega's double casting makes this racialization ambiguous. Moreover, Goody's brief backstory and dialogue align her politically with Native American people. Accused of witchcraft by pilgrim Joseph Crackstone in one of Wednesday's visions, Goody says, 'We were here before you, living in harmony with the nature and the native folk. But you have stolen the land' (Burton 2022).² Crackstone then locks Goody and other town outcasts in the meeting house and burns them alive, though Goody escapes. Where in *Addams Family Values* it is the white settlers in the Thanksgiving play who are burned, *Wednesday* reverses this narrative device while still retaining Wednesday's critique of settler colonialism.

Addams Family Values and *Wednesday* are not linear outputs within the Addams Family universe; that is, *Wednesday* is neither sequel nor prequel. But the series adapts elements from the film in ways that stage the kinds of artistic spawning we discuss in this article, not only establishing part of the ancestry that shapes the direction of the franchise but also indirectly becoming character backstory in *Wednesday*.

A networked approach

A third theoretical framework for understanding transmedia authorship and storytelling is *actor-network theory* (ANT), an approach that has been applied in humanities disciplines due to its 'postcritical' emphasis on careful, attentive description rather than ideological critique (see Felski 2015, *Limits*; Hensley 2015; Driscoll 2024). In an actor-network theory style approach, research follows actors (including non-human actors) in their processes of making or breaking connections with one another. The aim is to allow actors to describe themselves and their relations: to maintain an openness to the kinds of groups and associations that might be formed. Actor-network theory holds that 'the task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst' (Latour 2005, 23).

Traditionally, large ANT projects require extensive data-gathering. In her monograph *Hooked*, about the attachments people feel for artworks, Felski describes her approach as 'ANT-ish', seeing in actor-network theory 'a certain way of going about things rather than a theory or self-contained system of ideas' (2020 xi-xii). We follow this direction, declining to trace every connection but instead aiming for an overview of the networks created by transmedia storytelling. A networked methodology is a way to comprehend artistic works as they exist in relation to each other, as well as in relation to particular producers, institutions and audiences. Considering a given work as a node connected to earlier versions of the same story, either within or across media formats, enables understanding of how the elements of a story circulate and evolve over time. It allows us to consider forms of authority and power (such as that of the 'original' or 'parent') while also proposing a flattened hierarchy that does not frame later works as of lesser value.

A networked approach to studying storyworlds can reframe debates about authenticity and locate them within relationships among people and texts, including various cultural and industrial identities. These very debates become part of the way that people and non-human actors interact as part of a cultural network.

Our object of analysis, then, might be what Felski calls 'work-nets', the mid-level networks that surround cultural products, contributing to its production and reception (2020 123). We propose that the 'work-nets' of transmedia storyworlds encompass actors and activities that are both commercial and cultural. A new cultural work that exists in explicit relation to another is an industrial event, but also participates in cultural practices, including fannish and casual attachments. Seeing multimedia storyworlds as participants in networked culture enables us to track the way particular characters are employed by authors to create texts that respond to and intervene in their cultural moment.

Actor-network theory presents a useful lens through which to understand multiple elements of *Wednesday*. However, for the purposes of this paper, we will apply it to one aspect of the television series: its articulation of distributed authorship, and how this has been received by fans. One of the features of transmedia storytelling is that it multiplies and extends the figure of the author. An actor-network view of *Wednesday* and the Addams Family multiverse shows that individual cultural works within this network similarly depict multiple actors as authors and that multiple agents also act as creators and authors. Charles Addams is an author, but so too are David Levy (*The Addams Family*, 1964), Paul Rudnick (*Addams Family Values*, 1993) and the musical theatre team of Andrew Lippa, Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice (*The Addams Family* musical, 2010), alongside the other authors who have shaped stories of the Addams Family. In the film and television texts of the Addams Family multiverse, authorship is further distributed among cast and crew members, who contribute to shaping the characters and storytelling across writing, performance, costuming, lighting, editing and colour grading.

Authorship, genius and gender

Some Addams Family characters themselves also become authors. For example, the original television sitcom *The Addams Family* includes an episode, 'Morticia the Writer', where Morticia, Wednesday's mother, decides to write children's books. When working on her stories, Morticia is shown typing on an old black typewriter. In this instance, Morticia's authorship functions as a stand-alone character trait for a single episode and does not become an integral part of her characterization in the rest of the series.

In comparison, in *Wednesday*, the eponymous character is identified as a writer for the entirety of the series arc. In the first episode, Wednesday announces to her roommate Enid that she dedicates time every day to writing her novel, while typing on a typewriter that is remarkably similar to the one used by her mother in the 1960s television show. Wednesday's use of this anachronistic technology is one way among many that Wednesday is positioned as not only an author but a particular kind of author: a reclusive and modernist genius. The 'dark academia' internet aesthetic that characterizes the visual language of *Wednesday* is a pastiche of several historical periods, combining the early twentieth-century connection between class and liberal education, neoclassical architecture, the fashions of the 1940s, and a 'deeply Romantic undertone

that sees death, murder and destruction as just one step away from intellectual brilliance' (Adriaansen 2022, 109). As an author, Wednesday occupies the most prized position within the dark academic universe and displays the values that define creativity in the historical periods from which the dark academia aesthetic draws inspiration.

Wednesday communicates the Romantic ideals of the author and, during her time at Nevermore, embodies the values of originality, individuality and being 'ahead of [her] time' (Bennett 2005, 36). The connection between Wednesday and Romantic ideals of authorship is most evident when Wednesday speaks overtly about being a writer. In Episode 2, 'Woe is the Loneliest Number', Wednesday rejects the contemporary advice to 'write what you know' as a practice lacking imagination and, when speaking with Thing, says, 'I know I'm stubborn, obsessive and single-minded. But those are all traits of good writers. Yes, and serial killers. What's your point?' These two instances make an explicit link between Wednesday's particularities – isolated, obsessive, perhaps prone to violence – and the image of the Romantic author that evokes the dark academia aesthetic.

What is perhaps most interesting about the ways that Wednesday is cast as an author who embodies these Romantic-era values is the way that this characterization intersects with gender. Writing about the constructed ideal of the creative genius, Christine Battersby explores the inherent misogyny of 'genius', observing that 'a woman who created was faced with a double bind: either to surrender her sexuality (becoming not *masculine*, but a surrogate *male*), or to be *feminine* and *female*, and hence to fail to count as a genius' (3). Throughout the series, Wednesday is explicitly positioned as not feminine/against femininity, often in contrast to her classmates. This presentation feeds into the male/female, genius/not genius dichotomy that Battersby describes; however, it stops short of any overt experimentation with gender or gender presentation.

The male (masculine-presenting)/female (feminine-presenting)-genius/not genius dichotomy is best encapsulated by the way Wednesday and Enid are presented in the first two episodes. Enid's half of their shared room is decorated in bright pastels, while Wednesday's is muted and bare; Enid's creative writing takes the form of a blog, Wednesday's is a novel; Enid listens to pop music, Wednesday plays classical cello; Enid is socially connected, Wednesday is a loner; and so forth. This oppositional framing, steeped in the gendered tropes described above, strengthens our trust in Wednesday as a genius. But this trust is established through the trope of equating the feminine with unseriousness/frivolity/non-geniusness (Huysen et al. 2009).

Through this framing, *Wednesday's* creators invite viewers to perpetuate ideas about authorship and genius. As Wednesday writes (and narrates) her story, she is inducted into the canon of authors – writers, illustrators, show runners and directors – that constitute the Addams Family universe. These writers share a 'brand' and an aesthetic, and it is this sharing that secures audience trust in the writing. We recall here the way Murray (2012, 150) describes the *ascribed* fidelity that audiences attach to adaptations by well-known adapters, who have distinctive reputations arising from their bodies of work. With respect to *Wednesday*, the 'Tim Burton Brand' is recognizable and is consistent with the aesthetics of the Addams Family, despite *Wednesday* being the first time Burton has worked within this storyworld. Informing audiences that *Wednesday* comes from 'the imagination of Tim Burton' builds a link between the brand of Tim Burton and this new adaptation, and in doing so invites the audience to trust the genius of Burton and its consonance with the evolving Addams Family storyworld.

The distributed, networked authors of *Wednesday*, then, include Addams, Miller and Gough, Burton and Wednesday herself. Each author has a brand and aesthetic that is consistent with the broad storyworld, cementing the viability and appeal of the show. However, when the show was released, its network of authors expanded to include another, less-regulated group: writers of fan fiction. Wednesday being authorized to write her own story within the series is the lynchpin for a host of fanfiction writers who also contribute to the Addams Family universe, often focusing on Wednesday as a writer. As of May 2024, online story platform Wattpad had 3,300 stories tagged #Wednesday, while a search for Wednesday Addams in the fanfiction repository Archive of Our Own brings up 11,586 stories. Distinctive subgenres have also emerged within these bodies of works, identifiable through the ‘folksonomy’ of tags that writers have applied to their stories – such as #wenclair stories that imagine a romantic pairing between Wednesday and Enid.

One subgenre is the ‘y/n’ (your name) story, written in the second person, which emerged from an older ‘Imagine’ tradition of stories that pair the reader with a celebrity. The use of second person address invites us as academics to reimagine how we might be situated in this network of authorship. We might imagine ourselves inhabiting the world of *Wednesday* autoethnographically and see where that might lead. In other words, what if . . . y/n was an academic? In the [Appendix](#) for this article is a short fan fiction written by one of its co-authors. Writing this fanfic helped to open critical perspectives on the application of actor-network theory, including the interactions between human and non-human actors – for example, considering the ethical question of whether a fictional character can consent to an interview, and how researchers navigate a storyworld.

To expand this thinking further, we wondered if ChatGPT might be considered an author in a distributed network – a particularly poignant question in light of the 2023 strikes over the use of AI in the United States screen industry. We prompted ChatGPT to write its own fan fiction of Wednesday to align with the piece created for this article. Perhaps reassuringly, the fan fiction written by ChatGPT based on the provided prompts was neither especially interesting to read nor fun to produce. Our test as to whether the networks of authorship in the Addams multiverse could satisfyingly extend to the non-human gave the answer ‘not really’, though this may not always be the case. For now, our ChatGPT experiment suggests an ongoing distinction between ‘actors’ in the ANT sense – a category that includes myriad technologies involved in the production and circulation of *Wednesday*—and our expanded notion of authorship, which nonetheless benefits from an ANT-ish approach.

Conclusion

Different aspects of *Wednesday* as an authored work emerge using theoretical frameworks from different disciplines. In this article, we use the concept of *franchise authorship* to consider the influence of showrunners Millar and Gough, who are emblematic of this form of extended authorship in contemporary storytelling. We apply the concept of *artistic spawning* to examine the evolution of Wednesday’s cultural identity and backstory and the ways that characters can evolve, or spawn, while maintaining characteristics and aesthetics that illustrate their familial ties. We use *actor-network-theory* to examine the distributed forms of authorship that inform *Wednesday*, raising questions around canonical and non-canonical authorship and the contributions that authorial practice makes to both audience experiences and audience contributions to the storyworld.

Adopting different disciplinary perspectives to examine the nature of authorship and character in the Addams Family storyworld allows us to consider the position that *Wednesday* occupies in contemporary culture, its human and non-human network, and the definition and reception of different modes of authorship. Importantly, these different frameworks are by no means mutually exclusive. The concept of franchise storytelling, for example, clearly affects *Wednesday's* character – not least in terms of which deviations or evolutions are seen as commercially acceptable. Similarly, both artistic spawning and the notion of distributed authorship can be used to explain some of the choices made by Millar and Gough in their creative conception of the series, as well as the iterations of *Wednesday's* narrative that have emerged in 'unauthorized' contexts such as fan fiction. More accurately, then, these three theoretical models can be understood as close cross-disciplinary, with their different emphases providing a nuanced way of explicating different aspects of the same transmedial phenomenon. Together, they illustrate how *Wednesday's* Romantic individual authorship spawns *Wednesday's* expanded transmedial authorship.

Notes

1. We thank Caitlin Parker for research assistance on this article. This assistance was funded by a Research Theme Development Grant from the Head of School Strategic Investment Fund in the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne.
2. As Evangeline Bryce suggests in a popular media article about how *Wednesday* represents the Addams' Latinx heritage, 'This would indicate that while Goody Addams and her family were aligned with the Indigenous Native Americans, they were not necessarily from there themselves'. The Vermont setting does not readily support Bryce's further speculation 'that *Wednesday* seeks to connect the Addams family to Indigenous Mexican populations of land now under US control', but the show does align the Addams family politically with Native Americans through Goody's backstory, and with Latinx culture through its casting and references (see Bryce 2022).

Disclosure statement

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

References

- Adriaansen, Robert-Jan. 2022. "Dark Academia: Curating Affective History in a COVID-Era Internet Aesthetic." *International Public History* 5 (2): 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iph-2022-2047>.
- Battersby, Christine. 1989. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. London: The Women's Press.
- Bennett, Andrew. 2005. *The Author*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bryce, Evangeline. 2022. "Netflix's *Wednesday*: 7 Things in the Show That Honor the Addams' Latinx Heritage." *Game Rant*. Dec 30. <https://gamerant.com/netflix-wednesday-addams-family-latinx-heritage/>.
- Burton, Tim. 2022. Friend or Woe. *Wednesday*. Season 1, Episode 3. Netflix. www.netflix.com.
- Driscoll, Beth. 2024. *What Readers Do: Aesthetic and Moral Practices of a post-Digital Age*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Dunleavy, Trisha. 2017. *Complex Serial Drama and Multiplatform Television*. London: Routledge.
- Felski, Rita. 2015. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Felski, Rita. 2020. *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Hensley, Nathan K. 2015. "Network: Andrew Lang and the Distributed Agencies of Literary Production." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 48 (3): 359–382. <https://doi.org/10.1353/vpr.2015.0045>.
- Hilmes, Michele. 2013. "Never Ending Story: Authorship, Seriality and the Radio Writers Guild." In *A Companion to Media Authorship*, edited by Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson, 181–199. Oxford: Wiley.
- Howell, Amanda, and Lucy Baker. 2022. *Monstrous Possibilities: The Female Monster in 21st Century Screen Horror*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huysen, Andreas. 2009. "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other." In *Media Studies*, edited by Sue Thornham, et al. 124–137. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474473231-016>.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2007. "Transmedia Storytelling 101." *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. Mar 21. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2011. "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections." *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. July 31. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.
- Johnson, Derek. 2013. *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kilian, Thomas, and Tessa, Schwarz. 2015. "Spinning the Wheel: What Makes TV Series-Spin-Offs Successful?" *Journal of Media Business Studies* 10 (2): 39–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2013.11073563>.
- Klein, Amanda Ann, and R. Barton Palmer. 2016. *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots: Multiplicities in Film and Television*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Lamerichs, Nicolle. 2022. "Transmedia." In *Encyclopedia of Lucid Terms*. Edited by P. Spring Grabarczyk. <https://eolt.org/articles/transmedia>.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miserocchi, Kevin. 2010. *The Addams Family: An Eviltion*. Petulama, CA: Pomegranate Communications, Incorporated.
- Murray, Simone. 2012. *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Odman, Sydney. 2022. Jenna Ortega, Wednesday Cast on Working with 'Visionary' Director Tim Burton. *The Hollywood Reporter*. November 18.
- O'Meara, Radha, and Alex. Bevan. 2018. "Transmedia Theory's Author Discourse and Its Limitations." *M/C Journal* 21 (1). <https://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1366>.
- Parody, Clare. 2011. "Franchising/Adapting." *Adaptation* 4 (2): 210–218. <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apr008>.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2014. "Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a media-Conscious Narratology." In *Storyworlds Across Media*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noel Thon, 25–49. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Sonnenfeld, Barry. 1993. *Addams Family Values*. Paramount.
- Reinhard, CarrieLynn D., and Vincent Tran, eds. 2024. *Television Shared Universes: Expanded and Converged Storyworlds on the Small Screen*, New York, London: Lexington Books.
- Uricchio, William, and Roberta E. Pearson. 2019. "I'm Not Fooled by That Cheap Disguise." In *Many More Lives of the Batman*, edited by Roberta E. Pearson, and William Uricchio, 205–236. London: British Film Institute.
- Vincent, Jordan Beth, Caitlin Vincent, Kim Vincs, Scott Delahunta, and John McCormick. 2018. "Artworks Spawning Artworks: Trans-Disciplinary Approaches to Artistic Spin-Offs and Evolution in the Dance and Digital Context." In *Digital Echoes: Spaces for Intangible and Performance-Based Cultural Heritage*, edited by Sarah Whatley, Rosamaria K. Cisneros, and Amalia Sabiescu, 283–301. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. 2013. *The Works of Tim Burton: Margins to Mainstream*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Winckler, Reto. 2020. "Hacking Adaptation: Updating, Porting, and Forking the Shakespearean Source Code." *Adaptation* 14 (1): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apaa026>.

Appendix

Wednesday Fanfic

You hold your breath a little as the Uber drives through the tall, black wrought-iron gates and pulls up in front of Nevermore. Finally, the day has come. You're going to interview Wednesday Addams for your forthcoming monograph on contemporary subcultures. Clearing the paperwork has been a (literal) nightmare but totally worth it—Wednesday is going to bring your book to life. Not literally. Wait, could she do that?

You're not sure what you had been expecting in terms of a welcome party, but it wasn't this. Wednesday stands with her arms crossed under the stone archway of the academy's front door. "Dr y/n, I presume," she calls out. "You might as well leave now."

"Um, I thought you had consented to this interview?" you mumble.

She raises her eyebrows a millimeter. 'I did, but only to get out of class. You can't imagine I'm actually interested in someone from a "school of culture and communication.'" She turns her back on you and begins walking inside.

In desperation, you make a cunning plea. "Really? You're not interested in being immortalised in the pages of a dusty academic tome that probably no one will ever read, in languishing forever in the stacks of a neglected library ... ?"

Wednesday turns and looks at you over her shoulder. "Fine, y/n. You have ten minutes. Don't waste them."

You catch yourself smiling as you hurry after her. Best research project ever. You might even become friends.

Chat GPT Prompt

Write a 200 word story in the second person from the point of view of an academic who researches culture and communication who wants to interview Wednesday Addams.

You're an academic who studies culture and communication, and you've always been fascinated by the enigma that is Wednesday Addams. You've read countless articles and books about her family, her lifestyle, and her unique perspective on the world. And now, you have an opportunity to meet her.

You approach Wednesday with the idea of conducting an interview for your research on subcultures and the impact they have on society. To your delight, Wednesday agrees, and the two of you arrange a time to meet.

As you sit down with Wednesday, you're struck by her intelligence and her captivating presence. She speaks with confidence and poise, sharing her thoughts and experiences on everything from the macabre to the importance of individuality. You're amazed by her depth of knowledge and her insightful perspectives, and you know that this interview is going to be unlike any other you've ever conducted.

The hours fly by as you delve deeper into the conversation, and before you know it, you've hit upon a subject that Wednesday is particularly passionate about - the power of communication. Wednesday shares her thoughts on how communication can bring people together, or tear them apart, and how important it is to understand the impact of our words.

As the interview comes to an end, you're filled with a sense of awe and gratitude. You know that the insights you've gained from your conversation with Wednesday will be invaluable to your research, and you can't help but feel like you've made a friend for life. You leave the interview feeling inspired and reinvigorated, and you know that this experience will stay with you forever.