RAVENS, OUTCASTS AND GHOSTS OF TALES PAST: *WEDNESDAY*'S INTERTEXTUAL DEPTHS

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Abstract: *The paper aims to explore the extensive use of intertextual mechanisms in Seasons One and Two of Tim Burton's 2022–2025* Wednesday*, arguing that the series constructs meaning through a dense network of literary, cinematic, musical and cultural references that go far beyond the Addams franchise, employing intertextuality as a structuring principle rather than a decorative strategy. The analysis intends to trace the script's sustained engagement with the literary canon, particularly the works and cultural afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe, William Shakespeare, Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson, and examine its unique blend of Gothic horror, detective fiction and popular culture. Through close readings of dialogue, mise-en-scène, character construction, narrative motifs, and episode titles, the paper highlights the ways in which* Wednesday *blends 'high' and 'low' cultural references to negotiate themes of identity, alterity, continuity, and belonging. Ultimately, the series' intertextual density functions both as a tribute to literary tradition and as a means of producing narrative cohesion and humour, ensuring that the Addams family can still resonate with and challenge contemporary audiences.*

Keywords: *Addams; Edgar Allan Poe; Frankenstein; Hyde; identity; Nevermore.*

The opening words of Season 2, Episode 8, the show's last to date – "*William Faulkner said, 'The past is never dead. It's not even the past.' In fact, it's all still happening.*" – capture with equal accuracy and subtlety the manifold ways in which Nevermore Academy's disquieting history permeates and shapes the protagonist's current reality and the profusion of echoes, references and quotations that pervade the script. While derivativeness is bound to be intrinsic to a narrative centred around characters belonging to a 90-year-old franchise, the full intertextual scope of the latest addition to the Addams corpus far transcends the relationships established with and among its numerous predecessors, ranging from Charles Addams's original *New Yorker* cartoons to the 1960s television series – which incidentally codified the version of the Addamses familiar to contemporary audiences (Ocker 55) – and the turn of the millennium cinematic adaptations and also comprising further small-screen productions, Broadway musicals, animations, novelisations and merchandise.

Potential viewers of the 2022-2025 streaming television series are likely to become aware of its densely allusive nature prior to deciding whether to press the play button, as the episode list reveals a considerably deeper commitment to "the child of woe from the traditional nursery rhyme" (Miserocchi and Addams 81) than the mere reminder of the inspiration behind

its protagonist's name Morticia provides, appropriately enough in an episode showcasing the very same line as its title: "Her name comes from a line from my favorite nursery rhyme, 'Wednesday's child is full of woe.'" (*W* 1.1) The construction of the remaining fifteen titles entails the insertion of the same key word in lieu of a rhyming term within a classic phrase in English – "Friend or Woe [*Foe*]" (*W* 1.3), "The Devil You Woe [*Know*]" (*W* 2.2) or Latin – "Quid Pro Woe [*Quo*]" (*W* 1.6), an idiom – "Here We Woe [*Go*] Again" (*W* 2.1), "If These Woes [*Walls*] Could Talk" (*W* 2.4), "Woe [*Show*] Me the Money" (*W* 2.7) "This Means Woe [*War*]" (*W* 2.8), a proverb – "You Reap What You Woe [*Sow*]" (*W* 1.5), a traditional collective noun – "A Murder of Woes [*Crows*]" (*W* 1.8), the full name of a children's game – "Hide and Woe [*Go*] Seek" (*W* 2.5) or a more specific cultural reference to philosophy, literature or music. The latter category includes one of Socrates' principles – "Woe [*Know*] Thyself" (*W* 2.6), the title of Jack London's 1903 adventure novel – "Call of the Woe [*Wild*]" (*W* 2.3), the opening line of Harry Nillson's "One" – "Woe [*One*] Is the Loneliest Number" (*W* 1.2), the parenthetical subtitle of Bob Gaudio's "December, 1963" – "Woe [*Oh,*] What a Night" (*W* 1.4) and the title of Harold Melvin's "If You Don't Woe [*Know*] Me By Now" (*W* 1.7).

Given the Addams family's (largely forgotten, yet by no means inconsequential) genesis "in print, a medium that, not long from now, may evolve out of our realm" (Miserocchi and Addams 13) and their love of literature, it is not merely unsurprising but indeed only appropriate that, while the intertextual interactions within the table of contents are largely confined to the realms of music and linguistics, most of the numerous references scattered across the script celebrate the literary canon. *Wednesday*'s concern with a specific member of the Addams clan and her interactions with a growing network of mentors, foes and peers takes the focus away from the family's "grand library filled with dusty tomes" (Jones 46), featured in both the comic strips and the various film adaptations, and the frequent instances of bonding over volumes ranging from the copy of *Wounds, Scars, and Gouges* Fester reads to Wednesday and Pugsley in the 1991 cinema version of *The Addams Family* to the real (and considerably less Addams-family friendly) Dr. Seuss book (*The Cat in the Hat*) Morticia reads to baby Pubert in the 1993 *Addams Family Values*. *Wednesday* may downplay the literal magic of books, yet more than compensates for the absence of such conspicuous tributes to American classics as the wild gust blasting from the pages of *Gone with the Wind* (Yee) and the radiance glowing out of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* via the various volumes guiding its protagonist down convoluted investigative paths, Morticia Addams's successful (albeit secret) career as a romance novelist and her daughter's own literary ambitions, but above all the plethora of echoes reverberating throughout the narrative.

While no other voiceover introduction displays the blatant intertextuality of "This Means Woe," the short excerpt from Faulkner's 1951 *Requiem for a Nun* is by no means the only direct quotation Wednesday employs in her musings and interactions with others. The protagonist resorts to Sartre's most recognizable pronouncement, a line from the 1944 play *No Exit* – "Hell is other people. He was my first crush." – to answer Dr. Valerie Kinbott's school adjustment question and retaliates against the suggestion that she should "become part of a larger community" by bleakly paraphrasing the opening line of John Donne's 1624 "No Man Is an Island": "I like being an island. A well-fortified one surrounded by sharks." (*W* 1.2) A year later, she rebuffs Enid's invitation to "get to know the Wolf Pack better" in the words of another French philosopher – "As Voltaire once said, 'The happiest of lives is a busy solitude.'" (*W* 2.3), inadvertently betraying through this marked shift from Existentialism to Enlightenment a considerably less misanthropic outlook on life.

The dark twists and turns taken by Season Two's meandering investigation ensure that Wednesday's inner monologues are punctuated by particularly apposite nods to twentieth-century poetry, ranging from a personalised rewording of the most frequently quoted lines of Robert Frost's 1915 "The Road Not Taken" – "*Two roads diverge in the woods. I must take the road less travelled. And that road leads to Willow Hill.*" (*W* 2.3) – to the slightly subtler but no less recognizable insertion of a memorable turn of phrase from Dylan Thomas's 1947 villanelle "Do not go gentle into that good night": "*Will Francoise keep her word and go quietly into the night? Or is she set on a darker purpose?*" (*W* 2.5) Likewise, the intertextual scope of Wednesday's sarcasm ensures that neither close family and friends nor beloved holiday classics and tragic authors' lives are spared the ravages of her vitriol as she scathingly compares her mother to "the ghost of bitchiness future" (*W* 1.5) and casually observes that Enid appears to have "gone full Sylvia Plath over a bikini top" (*W* 2.3).

Quite appropriately, the two most elusive literary quotes within the script belong (or at least purport to belong) to Edgar Allan Poe, whose poetry, prose and fictionalised personal history provide the warp and weft of *Wednesday*'s intertextual tapestry. In addition to a subtly abbreviated[1] and grimly annotated

[1] It could be in fact argued that the slight difference between the exact wording of the 1845 source – "Believe nothing you hear, and only one half that you see." (Poe 310) – and Wednesday's rendition adds yet another level of dark irony to the protagonist's tenuous grasp on the deceptive mire of reality and illusion stretching ahead of her: "and just like that I've lost the sheriff. Lost my theory. Lost everything but my favorite Edgar Allan Poe quote: *Believe nothing you hear, and half of that you see.*" (Mejia 58)

exhortation from the darkly comedic "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" – "Edgar Allan Poe said, 'Believe nothing you hear and half of what you see.' Clearly Nevermore's most famous alumni picked that up here. No wonder he became a drug-addled madman." (*W* 1.2) – Wednesday also cites a line credited to Poe but only traceable back to a Wikipedia entry itself unsure about its authenticity (Young): "*Poe said, 'I don't believe in ghosts, but they've been chasing me my whole life.' I've always believed that to be haunted is a choice. What we are really haunted by is our past. No matter how hard we try to shake it free, it has us by the teeth.*" (*W* 2.5) Regardless of the misattribution, the notion of being haunted by the past applies in equal measure to the protagonist's quest for clues and to the profusion of Poe-esque echoes and other literary ghosts populating the script.

The most prominent (not to mention ubiquitous) such tribute consists in the very name of the institution Wednesday is forced to attend after a somewhat tempestuous educational journey: founded in 1791 (18 years ahead of Poe's birth, that is) by an Outcast scholar whose name entails a fusion of literary identities (Nathaniel Faulkner), Nevermore Academy is thus implied to have prompted the hypnotically repetitive word uttered by the raven in the eponymous 1845 poem. Wednesday's gradual introduction to Nevermore's "on-the-nose, Poe-soaked-aesthetic confines" (Mejia 11) entails frequent visitations from the same shadowy figure, ranging from the head on Principal Weem's desk, the Telltale Café (*W* 2.1) in Nevermore Academy's pentagonal quad, the Poe Cup and the Rave'N to the name of the secret student society Wednesday unearths but refuses to join and that of the Jericho café and bakery where she first becomes acquainted with Tyler Galpin, to mention but a few of the most conspicuous and the most obscure respectively. The Nightshade Society is very likely to represent a reference to the title (and protagonist) of the 1935 "Morella" – the black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*) and deadly nightshade (*Atropa bella-donna*) were once known as 'Petty Morel' and 'Great Morel' among herbalists (Grieve 582) – while the latter might conceivably constitute a nod to Weathervane Books of New York, the publisher of *Selected Works: Sixty Seven Tales*, *Tales of Mystery & Imagination* and several other editions of collected works by Edgar Allan Poe.

"Part canoe race, part foot chase, no rules" and Enid Sinclair's "entire reason for living right now," the Poe Cup is revealed to have been inaugurated in 1897 "as a way to not only honor Nevermore's most famous alumni, but to celebrate those values that all Outcasts share" and requires each participating dorm "to pick an Edgar Allan Poe short story for inspiration" (*W* 1.2), row to Raven Island and retrieve a flag from a crypt without either sinking or being sunk; the team Wednesday unexpectedly decides to join and the three they eventually defeat owe their names and aesthetics to "The Black Cat" (1843), "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842), "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) and

"The Gold-Bug" (1843) (*W* 1.2). In the same episode, several of the competitors whose efforts Wednesday thwarts are reintroduced as Nightshades and the protagonist's inquiries into their activities and reading materials occasions yet another encounter with Edgar Allan Poe, this time in the form of a life-size statue with a raven perched on the left forearm and an open book inscribed with cryptic crossword clues in the right hand:

> Don't worry, Edgar Allan. I see your sanctimonious smirk. But I will get the last laugh. Your penchant for riddles was legendary. And this might be your cleverest yet. Because it's not a single riddle. Rather, each line is its own separate one.
> 'The opposite of moon.' Sun.
> 'A world between ours.' Nether.
> 'Two months before June.' April.
> 'A self-seeding flower.' Pansy.
> 'One more than one.' Two.
> 'Its leaves weep to the ground.' Willow.
> 'It melts in the sun.' Ice.
> 'Its beginning and end never found.' Circle.
> 'Every rule has one.' Exception.
> 'The answer will give a sharp cracking sound.' (*W* 1.2)

No viewer already familiar with "Spookverse's 'first family'" (Rakshit) can fail to recognize the wordless password ("snap twice") emerging from the opening letters of the consecutive riddle answers as a 21st-century avatar of the double finger snap that followed in the wake of four ascending notes and made the one-minute theme Vic Mizzy wrote for the opening credits of *The Addams Family* (1964-1966) both "infernally catchy" (Perrone) and timelessly iconic. Alongside the numerous other instances of composite intertextuality blending canonical literature and popular culture throughout the series, this seamless combination of Edgar Allan Poe fanfiction and *Addams Family* paraphernalia perfectly illustrates Rakshit's comments on the extent to which Wednesday's appeal proves that "the beauty of familiarity and nostalgia can go hand-in-hand with an original story rooted in the present."

As far as the Rave'N is concerned, not only is Nevermore Academy's Gothic-themed formal dance named after the most infamous winged inhabitant of the Poeverse, but the DJ's final shout-out incorporates its one-word catchphrase in a somewhat ostentatious display of tribute placement: "Yo! Almost eleven o'clockity, so haul it out on the dance floor one last time before the Rave'N says 'Nevermore!'" (*W* 1.4) In Season Two, the same key words (alongside the doleful leitmotif of the entire series) recur within the lyrics of the Nevermore Alma mater: "Ravens feast on all our woes / In the home of Edgar Allan Poe / At Nevermore." (*W* 2.1) This overemphasis notwithstanding, Poe's "ominous bird of yore" (71) is not the only source of inspiration behind *Wednesday*'s avian ecosystem. In fact, the raven caws punctuating Season

Two's soundtrack and the one-eyed corvid (a crow rather than a raven) constantly pursuing Wednesday are more likely to evoke Daphne du Maurier's 1952 "The Birds" (or at least Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 adaptation), particularly when they turn out to be controlled and manipulated by Judi Stonehurst, a Normie with pilfered Outcast abilities who uses her ornithokinesis to spy on and attack potential enemies.

The Raven is also posited as the dark side of the dichotomy between Morticia's positive visions and the psychic abilities displayed by characters who see the world "through a darker lens," like Wednesday, Ophelia, Goody Adams and Rosaline Rotwood: "You're a Raven. Your visions are more potent, more powerful. But without the proper training, they can lead to madness." (*W* 1.5) The coexistence of the raven and the dove within the same binary pair seems to bear some relation to the biblical episode in which, following the flood, Noah releases a raven and then a dove, receiving no news from the former and an olive branch – a clear message of hope and new life in the aftermath of despair and destruction – from the latter (Genesis 8:6-12). However, while initially construed in terms of opposition, the two birds are revealed to be more than two sides of the same coin, as the successful erasure of the Addams name from the headstone in Wednesday's vision requires the combined potential of apparently incompatible principles:

> *Doves and Ravens together ignite*
> *With wings of darkness*
> *and piercing eyes*
> *Guide us to truth*
> *through night and morn*
> *To this let our powers be sworn* (*W* 2.8)

Wednesday's emphatic "I am my brother's keeper." (*W* 2.8) uttered in the same episode seems to reinforce the notion of a deliberate rather than merely assumed Holy Book revisitation and, much like the unlikely bond between Wednesday and Enid, the Raven/Dove alliance provides further confirmation not merely of the fluid nature of symbols but also of the vast combinatory potential of intertextual writing and the enduring appeal of unexpected pairings.

The raven's centrality to the Poe canon notwithstanding, perhaps the most satisfying act of Poe-tic justice occurs once the relentless figure behind the red cloak and skull-like mask turns out to be neither the elusive Agnes DeMille nor the disquietingly self-possessed Dr. Fairburn but Judi Stonehurst. Having already described Dr. Augustus Stonehurst's confinement to his own asylum as a "plot twist worthy of Poe" (*W* 2.4), Wednesday finds herself once again facing an entirely unexpected antagonist, this time a Normie enhanced with the abilities of an Outcast rather than one merely using Outcasts for her

own nefarious ends or even an undercover Outcast trying to blend in with ordinary humans. The shift from the flamboyant "Masque of the Red Death" ensemble to standard villain garb (a plain black cloak) provides the perfect sartorial accompaniment to the somewhat anticlimactic revelation and foreshadows the failure of Judi's plans.

Quite unsurprisingly, given the significant thematic overlaps between *Wednesday* and the Shakespearean canon – magic, fate, power, ambition, justice, revenge, jealousy, insanity, appearance vs. reality, mistaken identity, to list some of the most salient ones –, their similar interest in outcast characters and, not least, the early fascination Shakespeare's works exerted on Edgar Allan Poe, the series' intertextual scope accommodates multiple references to plays ranging from three of the major tragedies (*Hamlet, Othello* and *Macbeth*) to *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While the school's name and Gothic architecture consolidate Poe's status as dominant inspiration, the names of its dormitories and towers celebrate the Shakespearean connection: upon arrival, Wednesday is assigned to her mother's old dorm, Ophelia Hall, and promptly avails herself of the opportunity to throw yet another sarcastic jab at her parents: "Refresh my memory. Ophelia's the one who kills herself after being driven mad by her family, correct?" (*W* 1.1) Several minutes later, as Enid points out the group of Sirens lounging by the reflecting pond in the centre of the Nevermore quad, the camera briefly dwells on the supine and partially submerged statue of a woman with floating hair rising out of its murky depths – a clear nod to the same character.

The true impact of this Shakespearean inspiration on the Addams-Frump family tree becomes apparent in Season Two, when Morticia is revealed to have had a sister, a Raven who abused her powers and inadvertently shared her literary namesake's fate: "You sound just like Ophelia. She was impatient and strong-willed, and allowed her ability to drive her to madness." (*W* 2.3) The cliffhanger at the end of Season Two provides a tantalizing glimpse of a still living Aunt Ophelia, who appears to be held prisoner in her mother's basement, thus reinforcing Wednesday's comments on dysfunctional family dynamics. The gauzy texture and ample silhouette of her outfit hints at a wedding dress, an impression confirmed by the headdress accompanying it, prompting interesting associations with the garment immortalised in John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* and Miss Havisham's decaying bridal finery. However, the crimson hue of gown and floral wreath alike, a perfect match for the blood-red message inscribed on the wall of her cell – "WEDNESDAY MUST DIE" (*W* 2.8), hints at a considerably less submissive and self-destructive character than Shakespeare's.

In keeping with Addams family tradition, when Pugsley joins his sister at Nevermore Academy, Gomez accompanies him to Caliban Hall, his "old stomping ground" (*W* 2.1). While regular playback speed might be somewhat

inconducive to successful identification of further intertextual details, judicious use of the pause button reveals a number of nods to *The Tempest*, from the island on the Caliban Hall flag to the phrase "BE NOT AFEARD" (3.2.141) engraved above the fireplace and the slightly lengthier excerpt – "Sweet airs that give delight and hurt not" (*W* 2.1) – inscribed on one of the walls, both belonging to Caliban's somewhat misguided attempt to acquaint Stephano and Trinculo with the beauties of his home. While the script features no mention of the inspiration behind other dormitories, the patches on the shirts, baseball jackets and beanies worn by Bianca, Bruno and Ajax reveal the existence of at least two more spaces with Shakespearean reverberations, Puck Hall and Thisbie Hall, one named after the mischievous sprite in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the other after the female protagonist of the play-within-a-play performed by Bottom and his fellow mechanicals.

The need to delve deeper into the school's secret history ensures that some of the most momentous events of Season Two take place in Iago Tower. While Wednesday's first visit is caused by Agnes DeMille's decision to lure and trap Enid, the tower is subsequently revealed to have housed both Judi's aviary and Isaac's secret laboratory and as such occasions multiple encounters with returning alumni who turn out to be just as manipulative, deceitful, cunning and entirely devoid of remorse as Othello's Machiavellian antagonist. As far as straightforward quotation is concerned, the most conspicuously dialogic interaction with the Shakespearean canon takes place in the aftermath of Wednesday's rooftop confrontation with Tyler, when Morticia reads out a text with impressive intertextual credentials[2] and Gomez provides yet another illustration of the script's playful interaction with a wide variety of sources:

> 'Double, double, toil and trouble.'
> 'Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.'
> 'Cool it with a baboon's blood.'
> 'By the pricking of my thumbs,
> something wicked this way comes.'
> 'How's our little cadaver?'
> 'The doctor suggested I read to her. I chose *Macbeth.* Nothing like death, despair, and dismemberment to try and snap her out of her coma.'
> 'Tish, come on. Denmark will still be rotten tomorrow.'
> 'Wrong tragedy, *mon chéri*.' (*W* 2.5)

The apparent disregard for bibliographic accuracy Gomez displays in this instance might seem atypical of the Addams devotion to literature and

[2] The lines Morticia selects from the witches' chant (4.1.35-37 and 4.1.44-45) inspired the titles of both Ray Bradbury's 1962 *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and Agatha Christie's 1968 *By the Pricking of My Thumbs* and were performed by the Frog Choir for the 1993 start-of-term-feast in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004).

stand out as the opposite of his daughter's attitude. Indeed, such is the extent of Wednesday's attachment to the printed word that Agnes DeMille's quest to win her idol's admiration and friendship includes an elaborate literary puzzle revolving around an impressive collection of books:

> Poe, Dante, Shelley, Dickens... […] Each stack is the collected work of a famous author. […] Proust, Tolstoy... […] The answer must be a book that's missing. […] Wells... […] *Baby-Sitter's Club?* […] But what you don't see... Of course! *The Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells! (*W* 1.2)

Marilyn Thornhill employs a similar strategy when she presents Wednesday with a volume likely to meet her interests, in a somewhat futile attempt to earn her newest charge's trust and to dissuade her from continuing her unsanctioned investigative endeavours:

> 'I saw this on my bookshelf and thought of you. Mary Shelley wrote it on a dare when she was only 19.'
> 'I know. She's both my literary hero and nemesis, and I have two years and 364 days to beat her.'
> 'Well, I think it's very smart that you're focusing on literary monsters, and leaving whatever real ones might be out there to the authorities.
> '"No man chooses evil because it is evil. He only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks." Mary Shelley wrote that line to describe people like Weems, who do bad things under the guise of protecting the greater good.' (*W* 1.5)

Given Wednesday's conflicting emotions towards her literary nemesis (and towards her own mother, for that matter) it seems strangely appropriate that she attributes a Mary Wollstonecraft line[3] to her considerably more famous daughter, even more so considering the degree to which the general public's familiarity with the content of Mary Shelley's novel has been likewise shaped and contaminated by its numerous adaptations. It is therefore equally appropriate that the script contains a fleeting but significant reference to "a top-notch electroshock therapist, Igor" (*W* 2.4) Willow Hill employed during Uncle Fester's first stint as a patient and that the character of Isaac Night, *Wednesday*'s nearest equivalent to Dr. Victor Frankenstein, appears to have been created by stitching together elements gathered from a variety of texts, much in the same way in which his original fashioned his creature by assembling materials furnished by "the dissecting room and the slaughter house" (Shelley 43).

[3] The complete (and more accurately punctuated) line Wednesday attributes to Mary Shelley reads "It may be confidently asserted that no man chooses evil, because it is evil; he only mistakes it for happiness, the good he seeks." (Wollstonecraft 85)

A staple of Gothic horror, Igor is a composite stock character traditionally associated with mad scientists in general and Victor Frankenstein in particular and owes his existence to theatre and film adaptations of the literary plot. However absurd it might seem for contemporary audiences to expect Dr. Frankenstein to have an assistant called Igor given his emphatic absence from Mary Shelley's novel, the cinematic chain-reaction leading from Bela Lugosi's character in the 1939 *Son of Frankenstein* to the Igors in the 1974 *Young Frankenstein*, the 2004 *Van Helsing*, the 2008 *Igor* or the 2015 *Victor Frankenstein* (Slor) provides ample justification for his inclusion in the Willow Hill staff roster. The narrative trajectory followed by the character of Isaac Night is similarly convoluted, taking viewers from the tale of the Skull Tree and the increasingly disquieting antics and successive metamorphoses of Pugsley's zombie friend Slurp to the surprising revelations regarding his real identity as Tyler Galpin's uncle, Gomez's treacherous friend and Thing's missing body. The revelation of his identity and plans is moreover preceded by inquiries into the activities of his similarly deranged mentor, prompting sarcastic references to several literary precedents ranging from "So you are the new face of mad doctors. You do realize that Fairburn doesn't roll off the tongue as nicely as Frankenstein." (*W* 2.4) to "This is a basement bargain attempt at Dr. Moreau." (*W* 2.4)

The most richly intertextual part of Isaac's story is the one Pugsley hears on his first night of school, a disquieting blend of Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein*, Edgar Allan Poe's 1843 "The Tell-Tale Heart", Tim Burton's 1990 *Edward Scissorhands* and possibly Damien Rochow's 2017 *The Clockwork Heart*:

> There once was a brilliant boy with a fragile heart. He spent his days in bed, drawing all the incredible machines he planned to build someday. […] Now the doctors, they only gave him months to live. So he decided to design his own heart. So that his body could keep up with his dazzling mind. […] The operation was successful. But the clockwork heart had changed the boy. He became cold, and driven by ambition. When he arrived at Nevermore, he was hailed as the greatest mind to ever walk the halls. […] But his inventions became more dangerous. Until one night… His genius cost him his life. Now, legend has it, his body is buried at the foot of the Skull Tree in an unmarked grave. But if you put your ear to the skull's hollow left eye […] you can still hear his clockwork heart. Tick, tick, tick. (*W* 2.1)

While Isaac's ambition and disregard for others – "Isaac didn't care about people, but he loved to play God." (*W* 2.6) – his close relationship with his mentor and the explosion that destroys his secret laboratory represent common tropes and his demise is preceded by what Wednesday describes as "mad scientist, cliché soundtrack" (*W* 2.8), the power surge that somehow animates his severed hand (*W* 2.8) specifically echoes the moment Victor Frankenstein's instruments "infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing" (Shelley 45) laying

at his feet. His plan to "use science to extract Francoise's Hyde ability" (*W* 2.7) on the other hand recalls yet another literary figure's endeavour to dissociate the "continuously struggling" polar twins "bound together […] in the agonised womb of consciousness" (Stevenson 53).

Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* stood out as a key *Wednesday* hypotext the moment Season One's penultimate episode added the Hyde to the panoply of Outcasts populating Nevermore's halls and grounds:

> 'It's called a Hyde.'
> 'As in Jekyll and Hyde?' […]
> 'There's never been any mention of Hydes in any outcast book. And Nevermore is reputed for having the best collection.' […]
> 'Faulkner describes Hydes as artists by nature, but equally vindictive in temperament. Born of mutation, the Hyde lays dormant until unleashed by a traumatic event or unlocked through chemical inducement or hypnosis. This causes the Hyde to develop an immediate bond with its liberator, who the creature now sees as its master. It becomes the willing instrument of whatever nefarious agenda this new master might propose. […] That means I'm not looking for one killer but two. The monster and its master.' (*W* 1.7)

As in the case of the Minotaur, *Wednesday*'s script expands the isolated outcome of a somewhat unfortunate experiment into an entire Outcast category, in this instance by adding a genetic dimension to the Hyde identity. While the idea of a controlling master and the metamorphosis into literal monster rather than monstrously evil (but nonetheless human) alter ego constitute significant departures from Stevenson's plot, one salient similarity between Dr Jekyll's delivery of the unjust "from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin" (53) and Thornhill's manipulation of Tyler resides in the method employed to unleash the Hyde: "Initially I incorrectly accused Kinbott of using hypnosis to unlock him. But you used a plant-derived chemical, didn't you?" (*W* 1.8)

The magnetic fascination Wednesday seems to exert on many of those around her ensures that the doppelgänger motif also occurs outside the Hyde paradigm. Goody Addams, Wednesday's 1600s ancestor, represents her photographic negative (being played by the same actress in blonde pigtails and pale grey clothing), Wednesday and Enid are described as "Grim Reaper Barbie" (*W* 1.1) and "Rainbow Barbie" (*W* 2.2) respectively, and Agnes DeMille, the protagonist's self-declared "number one super fan" (*W* 2.2) – or, as Enid peevishly puts it, her "fan girl mini-me" (*W* 2.2) – shows her devotion through cosplay. Her intertextual identity, predictably based on a monochromatic school uniform and raven pigtails (*W* 2.7), fails to elevate her to best friend status and it is only by shedding her cloyingly codependent attitude that she can truly befriend the "unengaged ur-goth girl" (Mangan) and

her vibrant confidante: "I just want to say that I love us. We're like the three musketeers." (*W* 2.8)

Over the course of two eventful school years, the protagonist progresses from pretend interest in unlocking her "inner Wednesday" (*W* 1.7) to giving the impression of "channeling" (*W* 2.6) her while trapped in Enid's body. Meanwhile, Enid herself seems intent on acting out the West Country variant of the "Monday's Child" nursery rhyme – "Wednesday's child is merry and glad" (Franklin 105) – by turning Wednesday (or at least her mortal coil) into a dark-haired version of herself, complete with fuzzy technicolour clothing and a manic pixie dream girl attitude. Indeed, Enid's resentment towards Agnes is primarily triggered by the degree to which the latter's behaviour mirrors her own friendship overtures; having already tried to see the world through soot-coloured glasses and come up with a personalised Gothic version of the Christian motto What Would Jesus Do? – "I just asked myself, 'WWWD?' What Would Wednesday Do?" (*W* 1.2) – she is understandably appalled to hear her words uttered by someone else: "'I just asked myself, W-W-W... What would Wednesday do?' 'That's my line, you little psycho!'" (*W* 2.2) It would therefore be quite interesting to speculate how Enid might feel about Iphigenia Jones's 2024 *What Would Wednesday Do?* potentially propelling her catchphrase into the public domain.

Wednesday's metamorphosis from death-obsessed child or preteen to high school sleuth (Hale) ensures that the compelling fusion of Gothic horror, mystery and crime is as intrinsic to Netflix's contribution to the Addams universe as it is to the Edgar Allan Poe canon. One of the first personal details viewers learn about teenage Wednesday is that she has already completed "three novels about a teen girl detective, Viper De La Muerte" (*W* 1.1) and is in the middle of writing a fourth and it gradually becomes apparent that she is just as interested in true crime as in fiction and as avid a reader as she is a prolific writer. As her investigative endeavours broaden and intensify, she progresses from giving her side of the room a makeover seemingly based on "Ted Bundy's Pinterest" (*W* 1.1), paraphrasing lines attributed to Agatha Christie – "one coincidence is just a coincidence, two are a clue and three are proof" (*W* 1.3) – almost falling victim to woefully common plot devices and enacting genre clichés – "I looked up and saw that gargoyle coming down and I thought, 'At least I'll have an imaginative death.'" (*W* 1.1); "You seriously want to split up? In here? That is literally how every best friend dies in a horror movie." (*W* 1.5) – and being dismissed as an inadequate amateur – "Listen, Velma, why don't you and the Scooby gang stick to your homework and leave investigating to the professionals." (*W* 1.4) – to successfully entrapping the "Kansas City Scalper, America's most elusive serial killer" (*W* 2.1) and examining life's frequent tendency to imitate art: "You met Alfie at an artist colony in Woodstock. He was at the forefront of something titled 'violent

expressionism,' otherwise known as 'splatter art.' Until his life began to imitate his work. What drove him to try and kill you?" (*W* 2.5); "I haven't enjoyed a mother-son relationship like this since *Psycho.*" (*W* 2.8)

While not necessarily condoning Wednesday's propensity for sleuthing, other characters nevertheless contribute to this particular intertextual corpus; Xavier is revealed to have left Nevermore for "Reichenbach Academy in Switzerland" (*W* 2.1), presumably located in the vicinity of the upper Great Reichenbach, the setting of the momentous confrontation between Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty in Arthur Conan Doyle's 1893 "The Final Problem," and Marylin Thornhill marks Wednesday's arrival and departure with darkly evocative floral gifts:

> 'I try to match the right flower to each of my girls. When I read your personal statement in your application, I immediately thought of this one.'
> 'The black dahlia.'
> 'Oh, you know it?'
> 'Of course. It's named after my favorite unsolved murder.' (*W* 1.1)

Even though Wednesday does not elaborate further, her brief retort provides one of the most salient illustrations of the intertextual mechanisms whereby life and art constantly feed off each other: Elizabeth Short, the victim of a notorious 1947 murder, probably owed her nickname to Raymond Chandler's screenplay for the 1946 film noir *The Blue Dahlia* (Erdman 214) and the account of her gruesome death in Jack Webb's *The Badge* exerted such morbid fascination on crime fiction writer James Ellroy that its echoes appear to have saturated nearly all of his writings (Mancall 39), not merely the eponymous 1987 novel. Obscure though this crime trivia item might be, the fact that Wednesday's niche preference is shared by the female protagonist of a Marvel blockbuster[4] makes it more likely to strike a chord than might otherwise have been the case. Thornhill's parting gift – "White oleander, one of nature's deadliest. It also symbolizes destiny and renewal." (*W* 1.8) – carries its own literary associations, matching the title of a 1999 novel (and its 2002 adaptation) in which oleander sap is put to murderous use.

Quite unsurprisingly, neither is *The Black Dahlia* the only example of dramatized and partially fictionalised history nor the Weird Sisters the only nod to witchcraft included in the script. The play that prompts Barry Dort to hire Arnold Hunt as the face of Morning Song – "You were in *The Crucible* at the Jupiter Dinner Theater. Your John Proctor was spellbinding." (*W* 2.7) – ties

[4] The romantic gift meant to help Peter Parker express his feelings for MJ in *Spider-Man: Far from Home* is prompted by a similarly macabre interest: "I'm gonna buy her a black dahlia necklace because her favorite flower is the black dahlia because of, well- […] The murder." (McKenna, Sommers and Lee)

in with Wednesday's favourite bedtime story – "The Salem Witch Trial transcripts. Nothing put you to sleep faster than the rantings of the condemned." (*W* 2.3) – and Dort's business model is based on the antics of a fraudulent wizard:

> You remember *The Wizard of Oz.* I'm like the guy Toto finds behind the curtain, secretly pulling the levers. You will be the great and powerful Oz, the face of our movement, the inspirational leader who touches people's souls, and persuades them to part with their hard-earned cash for a chance to be a part of something bigger than themselves. (*W* 2.7)

Arnold Hunt's cult leader alias is the name of his *Medical Affairs* character – "I played Dr. Gideon Sterling. Until my long-lost brother came back from the dead, stole my wife, and they blew me up in my Porsche." (*W* 2.7) – whose implausible fate recalls Joey Tribbiani's intermittent stint as Dr. Drake Ramoray in *Days of Our Lives*; whether accidental or deliberate, the fact that the opening of this very same soap opera famously features a metaphor for the relentless passage of time Wednesday herself employs – "*I can feel time slipping away like sand through an hourglass.*" (*W* 2.5) – gratifyingly closes yet another intertextual circle.

Considering how deeply entrenched in popular culture (Ocker 56) the Addams family is and how thoroughly postmodernity has blurred the boundaries between high and low culture and distinct genres, it is only natural for Tim Burton's "part horror story […] part murder mystery" and part "coming-of-age tale with classic tropes of high-school drama" (Mangan) to be as replete with references to cinema, music and consumer culture as it is with literary reverberations and for the categories to constantly overlap. Likewise, the boundless potential of adaptation ensures that the name of Jericho's antique shop, Uriah's Heap (*W* 1.3), for instance, is a simultaneous nod to a Dickensian character and to a rock band, that the image of the plummeting chandelier that crushes Principal Dort has been etched in collective memory by countless Broadway and Hollywood renditions of Gaston Leroux's Gothic horror novel and that Enid's back-to-school gift – a BAY-WOLF MADNESS T-shirt – simultaneously celebrates her identity and Wednesday's bookishness:

> 'I did get you a gift at Lupinpalooza in Golden Gate Park. Don't worry. It's not a snood. Get it? Like Beowulf? I thought you'd love the literary reference.' 'Nothing like a bad pun to throw dirt on the coffin of epic poetry.' (*W* 2.1)

The "Clueless/Mean Girls-style tour of Nevermore's cliques" (Mangan) Enid conducts Wednesday on sets the tone for the show's syncretic amalgam of Greek mythology, urban fantasy and teen comedy and introduces several rebranded supernatural categories:

> 'There are many flavors of outcasts here, but the four main cliques are Fangs, Furs, Stoners and Scales. Those are the Fangs, AKA vampires. Some of them have literally been here for decades. That bunch of knuckleheads are Furs, AKA werewolves.' […]
> 'I'm assuming Scales are sirens?'
> 'You catch on quick.' (*W* 1.1)

While the largely peaceful coexistence of vampires and werewolves is perhaps no more than "mildly reminiscent of the Twilight universe" (Rakshit), the tension between Wednesday and Xavier and the escalating competition with Bianca in Marilyn Thornhill's botany class echoes Bella Swan's first interaction with Edward Cullen in the science lab, even if the apple she pierces with an arrow during their brief archery lesson (*W* 1.2) is more likely to recall the legend of Wilhelm Tell than Forks cafeteria dates.

Wednesday's apparent allergy to romance, which makes her oblivious to the suspiciously triangular shape of her entanglements with Tyler and Xavier, also accounts for her reaction to *Kisses in Coffins* by Barbara Jean Day, her mother's nom de plume: "I began to profusely vomit after reading the first five pages." (*W* 2.6) As evidenced by the almost unparalleled popularity of the *Twilight* franchise, the vampire romance subgenre that Morticia seems to favour is considerably more conducive to a lucrative literary career than Wednesday's own more cerebral attempts, if quite unlikely to compromise her personal or professional standards: "Well, perhaps one day you'll appreciate the intoxicating power of weaving mystery and passion." (*W* 2.6) Indeed, Wednesday's major source of regret when the Jericho equivalent of the cruel prank in Stephen King's *Carrie* cuts short her dance with Tyler has more to do with the substandard materials employed – "They couldn't even spring for real pigs' blood. It's only paint." (*W* 1.4) – than her ruined date; likewise, their subsequent bonding over the shudder-inducing potential of *Legally Blonde* – "How do you feel about scary movies? Prepare to be horrified." (*W* 1.7) – suggests that whatever is going on between them might require a less conventional label than romance.

The gradual wolfing out of new werewolves and the existence of an Alpha constitute further nods to *Twilight*, but the lupin cages (*W* 1.5; *W* 2.6) recall the werewolf containment strategies of yet another fantasy franchise, incidentally one equally reliant on unconventional educational institutions and repurposed mythology. The sirens' beauty and shifting underwater anatomy, not to mention Bianca's amulet (reminiscent in terms of function if not in design of the shell pendant containing Ariel's surrendered voice in *The Little Mermaid*), the pattern of her prom dress and the frequent mention of scales, albeit with a double entendre twist – "a siren can never change her scales" (*W* 4.1) – place them in a different evolutionary stage from the creatures described by Homer or Hesiod. Likewise, Enid's pun – "Gorgons spend way too much time getting stoned." (*W* 1.1) – and the transient effect of their petrifying gaze

make Ajax and his peers appear considerably less daunting than their ancestors, even though Principal Weems' gorgon fireplace preserves the more formidable and shadowy form of the Medusa of Greek lore. Indeed, the eclectic combination of Gothic, Victorian, and mid-century modern elements perfectly reflects Nevermore's melting pot of different Outcast cultures and singles out Weems' office as representative of the school's "eclectic aesthetic and diversity" (Allen). Moreover, much in the same way in which Nevermore remembers and honours "the Cyclops, the Yeti, and the Minotaur, and all the Outcast tribes that no longer walk the earth" (*W* 2.5), the allusive brand of irony both Wednesday and Larissa Weems seem to favour keeps both the exploits of Greek demi-gods – "Well, if you can't bring Icarus to the sun, bring the sun to Icarus." (*W* 2.4) – and the key concepts of classical antiquity alive: "Congratulations, Miss Addams. Your hubris has yet again made you the architect of your own demise." (*W* 2.5)

As is to be expected from a spinoff featuring multiple instrumentalists, the soundtrack contributes to the series' intertextual complexity and it so happens that the song accompanying the transgression that gets Wednesday expelled in the opening scene of Episode 1 – Edith Piaf's 1960 "Non, je ne regrette rien" (*W* 1.1) – provides a likely synopsis of her views on the topic of hubris. Even normally uplifting tunes are given a lugubrious twist, as evidenced by the unexpected juxtaposition of "Raindrops on roses / And whiskers on kittens" (from a haunting cover of "My Favourite Things") and Wednesday's deadpan "I'm tied up in a serial killer's basement" (*W* 2.1) and Agnes's offer to sing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" at Enid's funeral: "Feels very Enid. I already know the lyrics." (*W* 2.3) The pieces Wednesday plays on her cello generally reflect the events in her life: the cover of the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black" (*W* 1.1) seems to celebrate the successful eradication of Enid's psychedelic aesthetic from half of the dorm, the first movement – "I. Allegro Non Molto" – of Vivaldi's "Winter" (*W* 1.3) drives the final nail in the coffin of Jericho's "Outreach Day" ceremonies and the performance of Prokofiev's "Dance of the Knights" adds a musical adaptation to the corpus of Shakespearean references and hints at the complex family drama about to unfold.

The most richly intertextual musical moment however is neither merely instrumental nor vocal but concerns the unusual choreography of the dance Wednesday performs to The Cramps' "Goo Goo Muck". Inspired in part by 1980s goth club dancing and old *Addams Family* adaptations, the dance was primarily meant to emphasise Wednesday's endearingly unique physical presence and eccentric personality (Smith). Instead, it inadvertently launched a 2023 TikTok challenge which in turn triggered a cosplaying and dancing epidemic when a reedited version in which Wednesday moves to the tune of "I'll dance, dance, dance / With my hands, hands, hands / Above my head,

head, head" became viral. True to form, Netflix acknowledged this tribute by using Lady Gaga's "Bloody Mary" in Season Two's Announcement and featuring the performer in the role of Rosaline Rotwood, Wednesday's new spirit guide. By no means the only instance of dialogic casting, this nod to public demand simply adds an interactive twist to previous strategies, such as having Christina Ricci and Christopher Lloyd (who famously played pre-teen Wednesday and Uncle Fester in the 1991 and 1993 films) rejoin the Addams franchise as Season One's main antagonist and (the severed head of) Professor Orloff. However, the most subtle instances of cast-related intertextuality revolve around Gwendoline Christie's iconic Lucifer Morningstar role in another 2022-2025 Netflix success story (the adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*) and include a self-referentially ironic retort to Wednesday's assumption that she has died – "'What ring of Hell is this?' '*Miss Addams...* This isn't Hell. But I understand the confusion.'" (*W* 2.5) – and the moment when the stained-glass window behind Larissa Weems (*W* 2.8) temporarily restores her former character's angel wings.

The fortuitous decision to use several Romanian landmarks as filming locations resulted in the creation of a particularly interesting brand of combinatory intertextual responses, including the "Ani de Nevermore" song Netflix Romania used to launch the second half of Season Two. The music and the video accompanying it entail a crossover between Tim Burton's series and a 1985-1993 Romanian film franchise in which a chorus of young performers in Nevermore uniforms deliver the original lines of the 1986 *Liceenii* soundtrack ("Ani de liceu"), punctuated by a set of new lyrics belonging to the Romanian rapper Cojo. Clearly inspired by Nevermore's celebration of Outcast identities, the song urges its listeners to stay true to themselves, to steadfastly withstand accusations of being "too quiet", "too ironic" or "much too different", to break the mould, follow their own path, choose being a freak over being a pawn, and ends by wishing them a high school year free from labels – "Un an de liceu fără etichete" (Cojo). The copy of George Bacovia's *Plumb* that can be glimpsed in the hands of one of the students represents a self-referential nod to Netflix Romania's previous such stunt, a video in which Isaac Ordonez (Pugsley Addams) and Joy Sunday (Bianca Barclay) take turns reading an English translation of George Bacovia's gloomiest text to celebrate Season Two's August 2025 premiere ("Actorii din Wednesday recită Plumb").

By weaving together canonical literature, popular genres, franchise memory, and contemporary media culture, *Wednesday* constructs a richly layered fictional universe in which the past persistently informs the present and the dead return "to reinhabit the houses in which they had lived" (Bloom 15); in so doing, it ultimately demonstrates how intertextuality can operate not merely as homage or intermedial play but as a central narrative engine. Edgar Allan Poe's spectre, Shakespearean tragedy, Gothic archetypes, detective

fiction, and modern popular culture references reinforce the series' thematic preoccupations with inheritance, duality, and the unstable boundaries between the other and the self. At the same time, *Wednesday* exemplifies a postmodern mode of storytelling in which cultural hierarchies are annihilated, while familiarity becomes a source of creative renewal and replenishment rather than exhaustion. Its success confirms that intertextual density can enhance both narrative depth and popular appeal and suggests that, much "like a monkey's paw" (*W* 1.5), Wednesday is bound to return to tempt fate anew and undoubtedly provide further illustrations of the enduring adaptability of literary traditions within contemporary media.

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