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# The Author is Cancelled, Long Live the Author(s): Alternative Authorial Authorities and Fluid Authorship in the Wizarding World

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## Abstract

Transmedia storytelling was initially theorised by Henry Jenkins with a focus on centralised authorship as a unifying catalyst for collaboratively-created hyperdiegeses (2006). Since then, discussion of trans/media authorship has tended to revolve around sameness of authorship, or around practical aspects of collaborative creation (see, e.g., the contributions to Gray and Johnson, 2013; Salter and Stanfill, 2020). Moreover, transmedia authorship tends to be described as static and studied by looking back on a completed process. This paper challenges this understanding by using the Wizarding World as a case study. Author J.K. Rowling has recently been at the centre of controversy due to her stance on trans rights, and fans of the Wizarding World who saw her comments as exclusionary have called for her "cancellation". In the context of online "cancel culture", the aim of cancellation is not only to cause financial loss, but to ignore the cancelled person's voice and ultimately bar them from public platforms as a consequence of their words and actions (Bromwich, 2018; Ng, 2020). This raises the question: if Rowling authored the Wizarding World and she is cancelled, who holds authorial authority over the expanding universe? One way to answer this question is to rethink transmedia authorship as composite and fluid, rather than centralised and fixed. Using paratext theory (Genette 1997; Gray 2010), this paper analyses the discursive practices of above-the-line creators to chart the emergence of other authorial authorities as alternatives to a central author. The research evidences changes in the universe's authorship over time and emphasises the role emergent authorial authorities have in: a. shaping the discourse around texts and universes; b. keeping an author's voice at the centre or at the side-lines of a transmedia franchise.

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## Introduction

In 2007, Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling braved her toughest interviewers while appearing on a BBC programme. The questioners were all approximately 6 to 15 years old, and the show was *Blue Peter*, one of the longest-running British children's programmes on television. The interview was recorded shortly before the last book of the Potter saga was published, so the children's questions were still anchored in the sixth volume of the series, in which, amongst other events, the wise wizard Dumbledore loses his life. After Rowling explained, in response to one boy's question, why the beloved character had to die for the story to progress, the adult presenter interjected, asking whether Dumbledore was *really* dead. Rowling's reply was resolute: "He's very dead [...] If anyone should know, I should know" (*Blue Peter*, 2007).

Rowling's sentence was meant to be taken at face value: her authority over what had happened to Dumbledore was presented as unquestionable. After all, she was the one who had written the books. Since that *Blue Peter* interview, however, Rowling's Wizarding World (henceforth WW) has expanded considerably into a large transmedia franchise, comprising books, movies, videogames and a rumoured TV series: a plethora of texts that require a collaborative process to be produced, especially when connected to one another as in the WW's case. The universe's evolution and the role that its originator played in its expansion makes the WW the ideal example to explore some little-researched aspects of transmedia authorship. In this article I use the WW as a case study to show that transmedia authorship is subject to constant change – a change not necessarily brought about by a central authorial authority, but by alternative, emergent authorial figures. While it is true that entertainment companies exploit the prestige of an established author for promotional purposes (see, e.g., Hadas, 2020), a strong corporate brand can be more sustainable in the long run compared to an author-centred universe dependent on a biological individual and their legacy. This study sheds a light on the role that alternative authorial figures can have in facilitating a shift from author-centred to brand-centred transmedia universes and consequently evidences the fluid nature of transmedia authorship.

## Context and methods

"Transmedia authorship" is a phrase that indicates two different approaches to the study of authorship: some use it to explore the mechanisms behind the creation and/or reading of transmedia universes and the texts of which they are comprised (Evans, 2011; Hadas, 2014; O'Meara and Bevan, 2018); for others, the expression designates a creator's practice across different media (Murray, 2017; contributions in Vernallis, Rogers and Perrott, 2019). The present study is interested in the former approach, and in the collaborative aspects that complicate the creation of an author-function (Foucault, 1979, p. 21) for a transmedia "hyperdiegesis" (Hills, 2002, p. 104). Academic work on collective authorship and co-production has opened a window on the creative processes behind those narratives requiring the intervention of different authorial hands to be realised, like movies, TV shows and videogames (see for example Livingston, 1997; Caldwell, 2013; O'Donnell, 2014). Within this field of investigation, increasingly numerous studies explore authorship, production and creation across different media (Stahl, 2009; Johnson, 2013; von Stackelberg, 2019). These studies acknowledge the complex interplay of authorial forces behind the production of narrative across media, contrasting current (trans)media production to the auteurist drive

leading some companies to market their product by highlighting one name (or a selected few) as the main creator(s). This same auteurist drive has led many scholars to approach the study of transmedia authorship by intertwining transmediality with sameness of authorship (Jenkins 2006; Evans 2011; Freeman 2016) or by concentrating on different types of franchise auteurism (Scott, 2012; Hadas, 2020; Salter and Stanfill, 2020).

Ultimately, however, a tension remains between the view of transmedia authorship as centralised control, and the analysis of transmedia practice as inherently collaborative. I argue that one way of reconciling these two opposing ways of studying authorship is to examine the performed relationship between authorial figures and the shifting power dynamics between them. Since Barthe's rhetorical killing of the Author (1977), to study authorship as "a function of discourse" (Foucault, 1979, p. 19) means to recognise that the author of a text is not necessarily its single creator, but rather a figure that acts as a centre of meaning and a guarantee of quality (Johnson, 2013, pp. 109-111; Hadas, 2020, p. 38). In transmedia authorship, I argue, that figure can change, become plural, and be placed at the centre or at the sidelines through its performed interaction with other creators. Following Jonathan Gray's formulation (2010) of Genette's theory of paratextuality (1997) and its application to screen media authorship, in the next pages I will analyse paratexts related to the WW franchise to determine how emergent authorial figures of the universe perform their authorship in relation to the established authorial figure – in this case, J.K. Rowling.

I will focus in particular on what I call 'official' paratexts, i.e. those produced by IP owners, such as DVD special features, official websites and social media channels, due to the high degree of control that authors can exert on these outlets. To this extent, I recognise as emergent authorial figures those who represent the franchise within such paratexts. In the case of the WW, the movies' cast and crew, as well as the videogame developers who speak of the texts they contribute to, are all alternative, emergent authorial authorities for their visibility as the outward faces of the franchise. On the same principle, branding strategies also have to be taken into consideration. Scholarship around media promotion has established a twofold relationship between authorship and branding, due to both practices acting as recognisable markers of authenticity and quality. On the one side we have the idea of the author as brand, transformed into a symbol through promotional discourse (Gardiner, 2000; English and Frow, 2006; Hadas, 2020, pp. 11-14). On the other, corporate authorship relies on "dedicated strategies of cross-promotion" (Grainge, 2007, p. 44) that establish a recognisable brand identity which in turn may or may not be tied to a biographical author: Paul Grainge, Elizabeth Evans, and Martin Flanagan et al. have explored this for Disney, the BBC and Marvel Studios respectively (Grainge, 2007, pp. 44-49; Evans, 2011, pp. 33-36; Flanagan et al, 2016). The analysis below shows how Warner Bros. positions itself as alternative authorial authority for the WW through its branding strategies.

Both authorship and branding can be understood in terms of "performance". This term, here, does not imply careful planning or a lack of truth, but is borrowed from the linguistic discipline of pragmatics: all speech acts carry a performative potential in that they all possess a perlocutionary and an illocutionary force, i.e. an intention relative to the speaker and an effect on the listener (Austin, 1975). From our point of view as industry scholars, it is impossible to prove the former, while it can be fruitful to examine the latter. In other words, while we may not know why an author chooses to present themselves in a certain manner, or to assert something relative to the texts over which they claim authority, we can certainly observe the

effects they have a) on the text b) on the receiver. This study concerns itself only with texts, looking at how extratextual performance can act on intratextual interpretation[2].

While performativity is a function of language, I follow Umberto Eco's semiotic argument that all cultural phenomena can be studied as communicative acts (1968, p. 7). The following sections, therefore, examine the official paratexts as instances in which authors take responsibility for their texts and interact with each other's claims to authorship. For brevity, I use the phrase *authorial system* to refer to the combination of the individual authorial performances and the hierarchies projected by their interactions. The analysis below identifies two such systems, characterising two different phases of the WW: the first one (2001 – 2016) relies on Rowling's centralised authorship; the second and current one opens the possibility of authorship to alternative authorial figures.

## "Everything on here was written by ME"[3]: centralised authorship

After its publication, the first new medium Harry Potter jumped to was film, as many other book characters had done before him. The eight-movie adaptation started in 2001, after it was pitched to Warner Bros. by David Heyman, the producer who would oversee the project in its entirety. Others have explored the strategies used by Rowling to make herself central to the universe as it travelled across media (see, e.g., Colbjørnsen, 2012; Russell, 2012; Brummitt, 2016; Salter and Stanfill, 2020). Therefore, for reasons of space, I shall concentrate here on the role emergent authorial authorities played (prior to 2016) in reinforcing Rowling's position as catalyst of meaning, not just for the novels, but for the universe as a whole.

The inclusion of adaptations may appear controversial in this discussion of transmedia authorship, because of its perceived relation to transmedia storytelling as a narrative strategy that favours 'expansion' over the repetition of adaptations (Jenkins, 2006; Evans, 2011; Freeman, 2016). However, transmedia is also a media strategy of "total entertainment" (Grainge, 2007, p. 54) that creates hyperdiegeses reliant on expansion, redundancy and modification alike (Thon, 2015, p. 33). Rather than distinguishing between transmedia storytelling and adaptation, therefore, this study relies on: a. Roberta Pearson's concept of "additionality" (Pearson, 2019, p. 148), which recognises the ability of a new text to add elements to a universe without there being a significant narrative expansion; b. Jan- Noël Thon's definition of "transmedial universes" as containing "noncontradictory storyworlds" in contradiction with each other (Thon, 2015, pp. 31-33). This research studies the authorship of the WW accordingly, considering the first Harry Potter movie adaptation as the inception of what would later become a recognisable transmedia universe and franchise.

With the addition of new texts to the WW, alternative authorial voices would inevitably appear, and the way in which emergent voices performed their authorial role could either challenge or support Rowling's authorial authority[4]. In the first years of the franchise, the emergent authorial figures supported Rowling's authorship, as the analysis of the WW paratexts can

[2] Audiences, in turn, may or may not engage with such performances. My concern here, however, is the analysis of what creators try to do to affect reception through their authorial performance, regardless of the effectiveness of their strategies.

[3] (Rowling, 2004: n.p., original capitals)

[4] For a discussion of authorship in adaptation, see Hutcheon and O'Flynn (2013: 79-111); in franchising, see Hadas (2020).

demonstrate. In particular, I focus on the home-video special features, because of the high degree of control that authors and studios have on what goes into a DVD. These spaces have also been privileged for the construction and study of screen authorship, because they allow authors to dictate an "appropriate" frame of interpretation (Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2002, 2005; Skopal, 2007; Gray, 2010).

The authorial figures appearing in the behind-the-scenes across the eight instalments of the movie saga are mostly producer David Heyman, screenwriter Steve Kloves, production designer Stuart Craig and the four different directors who adapted the series. In a different kind of production, one or more of these individuals would be regarded as the central authorial figure according to whose vision the whole text should be read[5]. In the Potter adaptations, instead, authorship is not constructed around any of these figures. Although, as already mentioned, the special features are the privileged place for the construction of screen authorship, the Potter filmmakers are seen repeatedly renouncing their authorship in favour of Rowling's. One of the most striking examples of this behaviour is found in the conversation between Kloves and Rowling attached to *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus, 2003). When interviewer Lizo Mziba asks the pair about the adaptation process, the exchange goes as follows:

> Kloves:     "Yeah... I mean, you know: I just steal her best stuff."
>
> Rowling:    (nodding) "That's basically it... and I don't sue!"
>
> Kloves:     "What's always been great about Jo is that from the beginning
>             she gave me tremendous elbow room, but when you're in
>             the middle of a series ... it's important that I talk to Jo along
>             the way and ask her ... am I on the right path?"
>
> (Conversation with J.K. Rowling and Steve Kloves, 2003)

Kloves' claim that he *steals* from Rowling frames his contribution to the universe as derivative, rather than creative. Moreover, while the feature places Kloves and Rowling side by side as authors, their words betray the subordination of the former to the latter: the "elbow room" that Kloves is given is not defined by him, but conceded from above.

Across the eight movies, similar instances can be found, which communicate to the viewer that Rowling was an active participant in the adaptation process, that she was at the top of the creative hierarchy for the franchise and her word was law. Over and over, it is reiterated that the filmmakers were committed to respecting the original texts, despite the challenges of the medium change, and that Rowling would be consulted for any necessary deviation from the books (see e.g. Capturing the Stone: A Conversation with the Filmmakers, 2002; Creating the Vision, 2004; A Conversation between J.K. Rowling and Daniel Radcliffe, 2011). Most interestingly to this study, when two strong author-brands came together with the third instalment, Rowling still held her position of highest authority. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* was directed by Alfonso Cuarón (2004), whose name had just started to be associated

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[5] Film scholarship has thoroughly explored the topic of screen authorship as constructed around different filmmaking roles. See, e.g., Gerstner and Staiger (2003) for a reader on the topic; Spicer (2007) and the last section in Batty (2014: 189-287) on the screenwriter's authorial role; deAngelis (2003) and Hadas (2020: 25-64) on that of the producer. See also previous footnote for authorship in adaptation and franchising.

with *auteurship* after his *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001) and its accolades (Beale, 2001; Jensen, 2003; Dargis, 2004). However, while producer David Heyman stressed that the director had to be "allowed to make this his own film" (Creating the Vision, 2004) and Rowling declared herself "completely happy" of Cuarón's interventions on the original text (ibid.), Cuarón's words in the special features also highlight what he was *not* allowed to do. He was given a detailed explanation by Rowling of why he could not place the school's graveyard where he would have wanted (ibid.), and when he tried to include little people in a sequence of his invention "Jo said no, there are no little people in this universe" (ibid.). Regardless of the actual level of agency that Cuarón had, therefore, the behind-the-scenes features show the viewer that he did not hold ultimate authority over the text and that, consequently, his authorship should not be the lens through which to read it.

Similarly, David Yates directed the most movies in the WW, and the behind-the-scenes documentaries occasionally showcase his contribution to the universe (see, e.g., The Thestrals, 2007; Trailing Tonks, 2007). However, the special features to the last three movies often celebrate Rowling and take the viewer back to her and her writing, rather than to the filmmakers' interpretation of the texts. For example, the special features from sixth movie *Half-Blood Prince* (Yates, 2009) contain the celebratory documentary "J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life" (Runcie, 2009), in which Rowling is interviewed against the backdrop of some places significant to her. At relevant stages of her account, parallels are drawn between her life and Harry's, which reinforce the relationship between author and character. Rowling mentions, for instance, the similarities between the house in which Harry grew up and her family home. Her childhood close to the Forest of Dean is said to have been the right inspiration to imagine fantastic creatures. Finally, "one of the reasons *Harry Potter* is so full of idealised father figures [...] is that Jo's relationship with her own father was far from ideal" (ibid.). This documentary was shot during the writing of the last book in the series and released after its publication, but the feature reaffirms Rowling's relevance to the universe even after her job was arguably done. The reason, in her own words, is that "I'd like my version to be the official version still, even though I haven't written it in a book, because it's my world" (ibid.). The addition of this documentary to the movie featurettes suggests a concerted effort of all authorial authorities involved (established and emergent) to reiterate Rowling's centrality for the interpretation of the movies, too. In fact, if before the adaptations she was already at the centre of the book universe, now she was also indispensable to the movie universe: all Potter-related content was to be read through the lens of her authorship.

After the completion of the movie saga, Rowling's condition as only authorial voice of the universe was reinforced by two elements: the website Pottermore and the new franchise logo. Pottermore was initially an online adaptation of the novels, enriched with original illustrations that users could explore to discover collectables and new writing by Rowling. The website would later be transformed into a container of information about the franchise, but as observed by Cassie Brummitt, both versions of the platform revolved around Rowling and the promise of new content by her hand, and her hand only (Brummitt, 2016). Although the content of the website was clearly created by a team, no other authorial name was allowed to appear as signature to the various articles (ibid.). Rather, the staff was anonymised under the moniker of "Pottermore Correspondent", a fictional character that reported from behind the platform's scenes while reinforcing the idea that the universe and Rowling stayed indivisible even after the conclusion of the books. Notably, the second version of the website promised new stories from the universe, signed by Rowling, with the aside "yes, it's canon" (Pottermore Ltd., 2015): this reaffirms on yet another platform that anything that Rowling

would say about the WW was the truth in fiction, and reiterates the identity between the universe and Rowling's imagination. Brummitt notices that the second version of Pottermore welcomes new, old and upcoming WW texts in its menu categories, and recognises it as a sign that the franchise was embracing transmedia as a marketing strategy (2016, p. 123). Another such sign was the appearance in 2016 of a new franchise identifier and logo, "J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World" (JKRWW), which started to be applied to all WW releases, reprints and official paratexts. The genitive in the franchise name, and its use across media, signals that Rowling's name *and only her name* worked as marker of authenticity for all aspects of the franchise.

## "Inspired by J.K. Rowling's original stories"[6]: towards collaborative authorship

The official paratexts released during the first phase of the franchise purposedly position Rowling at the centre of the authorial system, and they communicated to the viewers that: a. the writer was an active participant in the creation of all the texts pertaining to the WW; b. she was the custodian of the truth in fiction; c. all major decisions in the franchise would need her approval. In this section, however, I am going to explore how this centralised performance of authorship changed when the new texts of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Thorne et al, 2016) and of the Fantastic Beasts saga were added to the universe. Both these texts were released in 2016, so this is the date that I use to symbolically mark a shift that, in reality, took years to be realised and may arguably be seen as still in progress. The following pages will show that, compared to the centralised authorship of the first Potter era, this phase re-opens and renegotiates authorship, by attaching authority to names other than Rowling's. After having analysed how this manifests in the official franchise paratexts, I will add further complexity by considering how controversies around the WW franchise affected the universe's authorship.

In 2013, Warner Bros. and Rowling negotiated a new deal for "an extension of the wizarding world" (*sic*, Rowling in Cieply, 2013, p. n.p.), and the following year the Harry Potter Global Franchise Development team was founded to "develop and execute a high-level strategic vision for the Harry Potter brand and its ancillary businesses" (Barraclough, 2014): two clear signs that the brand strategy was entering a new phase of development that had transmediality at its core. In that same period, both *Cursed Child* and the Fantastic Beasts saga were announced (Shenton and Hetrick, 2013), but with almost opposite authorial performances. Announcing Fantastic Beasts, Rowling said that she had decided to join the project because "the idea of seeing Newt Scamander, the supposed author of 'Fantastic Beasts', realized by another writer was difficult" (in Reuters, 2013). These words suggest, once again, the impossibility for anyone other than Rowling to author the universe or its components. A few months afterwards, in December 2013, the revelation that a Harry Potter play was in development sent the opposite message and made it immediately clear that *Cursed Child* was going to be a collaborative effort (Shenton and Hetrick, 2013). Rowling revealed to the press that she had refused to develop Potter plays before, but that she had accepted "Sonia and Colin's vision"[7] because it was "the only one that really made sense to [her]" (ibid; *BBC News*, 2013). These words clearly position the producers as the originators of

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[6] (Portkey Games, n.d.: n.p.)
[7] Sonia Friedman and Colin Callender, who produce the plays across the globe.

the project, and while this is not an uncommon occurrence in the industry, it is a novelty in Rowling's performance of authorship as related to the WW. If previously the emergent authorial figures had surrendered their authorship to her, Rowling's words in this announcement open a new phase in which other authors are officially allowed to act as sources of new content[8]. This became even clearer once the play went into development and buzz started to be created around the new story.

When in 2015 the writer and director were confirmed to be respectively Jack Thorne and John Tiffany (Pottermore Correspondent, 2015a), the two were interviewed for Pottermore. The language used in the resulting blog post gives full ownership of the new text to the subjects of the interview, and if compared to the way in which other emergent authorial figures had previously spoken of their craft, it is clear that the authorial discourse around the franchise was changing. During the interview, director John Tiffany reminisces about the first conversations he had with Jack Thorne around the idea of the play, and says that the playwright was "very clear back then" that he "didn't want to do something historical" (Pottermore Correspondent, 2015b). Thorne confirms the spirit: "No prequels!" (ibid.) – a significant detail, considering that the press materials circulated at the time of the first announcement in 2013 had claimed that the play would "explore the previously untold story of Harry's early years as an orphan and outcast" (Associated Press, 2013; Shenton and Hetrick, 2013; *BBC News*, 2013).

The Pottermore Correspondent writes in the same post that "the three of them [i.e. Thorne, Tiffany and Rowling] set the plot that day in J.K. Rowling's writing room" (Pottermore Correspondent, 2015b). Later, in a three-way interview with Thorne and Tiffany, Rowling would reinforce the importance of her counterparts' role by saying: "it's these guys who really made it happen" (Wizarding World Team, 2020). This statement sits in stark contrast with how the authorship of emergent authorial figures had been discussed during the first phase of the franchise. In the official paratexts related to the Potter movie adaptations, statements by emergent authorial figures which may be suggestive of authorship were often mitigated by reminders of Rowling's own authorship. Thorne and Tiffany, instead, not only had enough autonomy to reframe the direction of the overall project ("No prequels!"), but they were also given plenty of space to express their ownership of the text: the language used in the interviews makes it very clear that this is *their* text just as much as it is Rowling's.

Certainly, Rowling appears as the largest name on the print edition of the play: an obvious promotional strategy, given the writer's status both as the bigger name in publishing and as the established authorial authority of the WW. At the same time, however, the writing on the cover tells the reader that the play is "based on an original story by J.K. Rowling[,] John Tiffany & Jack Thorne" and that it is "a new play by Jack Thorne". This makes *Cursed Child* the first WW book that bears authorial names other than Rowling's[9]. Marketed as "the eighth story" (Pottermore Correspondent, 2015c; Thorne et al., 2016), and with an insistence on its canonicity (Rowling, 2015), *Cursed Child* is the first canonical text that is openly shown to be a collaboration and not the fruit of Rowling's individual genius. In Rowling's words: "the story

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[8] on collaborative authorship in the WW, see also Brummitt, 2018 [addendum to the earlier version of the article]

[9] Real-life authors, that is: *Quidditch Through the Ages by Kennilworthy Whisp* and *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander* (Rowling, 2001b, 2001a) are in-world textbooks that bear the names of their fictional authors on the real-world book covers.

only exists because the right group of people came together with a brilliant idea about how to present Harry Potter on stage" (Pottermore Correspondent, 2015c).

The first obvious shift towards a collaborative portrayal of authorship in the Fantastic Beasts saga can be observed in the featurette "Before Harry Potter", included with the first movie's Blu-Ray edition (2016). After a short introduction about Rowling's Potter days, for the first time, the authorial performance of all authorial figures on camera does not put Rowling at the top of the authorial hierarchy, but they are portrayed as collaborating on an equal level. The emergent authorial authorities, in this case, are David Yates and David Heyman. Talking about the development of the movie, they and Rowling describe a creative process that is suddenly very similar to that which emerges from the interviews with Jack Thorne and John Tiffany, examined above.

> Rowling:    Steve and David and I were working on the script together. We'd be talking, and then I'd go back to my hotel and write through the night. And then we'd go in and we'd look at it...
>
> Yates:    ...and we'd play the character out together. And when you do that, the movie starts to sort of come into the room with you. And as we read together, we could discuss each moment and figure out how we would make certain things better.
>
> (Before Harry Potter: A New Era of Magic Begins!, 2016)

A screenwriter collaborating closely with a director and a producer would not be considered news, in different circumstances. In the formerly Rowling-centric WW, however, these words break the illusion of the individual genius working alone that had characterised the franchise's authorial system until that moment. As explained in the first part of this article, the filmmakers often repeated that Rowling's contribution had been invaluable to the successful adaptation of the Potter books, and that they had relied on her insights and help. In "Before Harry Potter" instead, Rowling reverses this theme of dependence and thankfulness by expressing her own gratitude for the help she received when writing the *Fantastic Beasts* script:

> "I was thrilled David Yates wanted to do it. [...]and David Heyman[...] I couldn't really imagine doing it without him.  [...] I said from the beginning that I wanted Steve involved. And while I've written the screenplay, he's been there, which has been *amazing*. Just to have him there for advice and everything."
>
> (Before Harry Potter: A New Era of Magic Begins!, 2016, original emphasis)

Crucially, the Potter and Fantastic Beasts movies differ in the fact that the former were adaptations and the latter brand-new texts. However, it is important to keep in mind that the performance of authorship and its practice may have little to do with each other. In other words, the process of adaptation was also the result of a collaborative process, like the Fantastic Beasts scripts. However, the way in which the central and alternative authorial figures performed their authorship in relation to each other was different in the two sagas. In the adaptations, even when innovations were introduced, it was strongly emphasised that they were allowed by Rowling. In Fantastic Beasts, instead, alternative authorial figures are recognised their roles as authors rather than craftspeople.

The combination of this new authorial system with the new transmedia strategy of the Harry Potter Global Franchise Development team suggests a plan to develop the WW as a brand, rather than an author-centric narrative universe, especially since Rowling had already moved on from the Potter stories and started writing adult fiction. Accordingly, the brand itself evolved in this same direction: the franchise name did away with the genitive, and the new "Wizarding World" logo was launched on March 12th 2018 as a Warner Bros. trademark representing all texts and centrally-controlled paratexts of the franchise (Pottermore Ltd., 2018). The change was not simply a redesign: while JKRWW was trademarked both in the writer's and in the corporation's names, "Wizarding World" belongs solely to Warner Bros. Entertainment[10]. The new identity, therefore, has a twofold effect: it shifts the control over what constitutes official WW material firmly into Warner Bros.' hands, and signals a decentring of the original author that contrasts what was established in the previous phase of the franchise.

Moreover, the new logo replaced the old one on book reprints, including the newest editions of the original Harry Potter saga. This means that a Warner Bros. trademark works as an additional marker of authenticity alongside J.K. Rowling's name. As mentioned above, quality and authenticity are also what the authorial name stands for; it seems therefore clear that Warner Bros. positioned itself as alternative authorial authority to Rowling through the rebranding of the franchise. In addition, in October 2019 Pottermore ceased to exist and became WizardingWorld.com, which is the online container for the franchise at the time of writing. On the platform, Rowling's writing has been relegated to the "J.K. Rowling Archive" tab. The use of the word "archive" is significant here, as it suggests that in there the user will find something that is worthy of being preserved, but that also belongs to the past.

Against this background, Rowling started undermining her own authorial authority through both her fictional writing and real-world commentary. Since after the publication of the last Harry Potter book, the WW slowly started to be perceived as an increasingly problematic franchise (Hibberd, 2020). In their chapter about Rowling's authorship, Salter and Stanfill (2020, pp. 39-59) helpfully summarise most of the key causes of controversy around the WW: from the accusations of queerbaiting, to the problematic casting of Johnny Depp (embroiled in a domestic violence case) as the main Fantastic Beasts villain, to the disrespectful portrayals of Asian characters in the universe (ibid.). Out of the numerous issues, this study concentrates on the one that caused the most stir around Rowling herself and led audiences to question her authority. If so far the article has explored the purposeful elements that affect authorial performances, in fact, it is important to remember that an authorial system is also formed and modified through emergent situations and the reactions they prompt.

In 2019 Rowling tweeted in support of self-defined "gender dissident" Maya Forstater, a former employee of a no-profit who was dismissed from her job for her deliberate misgendering of trans women on her social media profile (*Indy100*, 2018; Rowling, 2019). In June of the following year, Rowling caused further tumult by mocking the trans-inclusive phrase "people who menstruate", which is used to describe cisgender women, transgender men and non-binary people who experience menstruation (Rowling, 2020b). The resulting public uproar prompted her to share a personal essay on her platforms, in which she

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[10] This can be easily verified with the keyword search "Wizarding World" on both the UK and US governments' trademark portals: https://www.gov.uk/search-for-trademark and https://www.uspto.gov/.

expanded on her transphobic views on sex, gender and the possibility for dysphoric youths to transition (Rowling, 2020a).

As a result, members of the public who condemned her words as damaging and exclusionary called for Rowling's "cancellation". In the context of online "cancel culture", the aim of cancellation is not only to cause financial loss, but to ignore the cancelled person's voice and ultimately bar them from public platforms as a consequence of their words and actions (Bromwich, 2018; Ng, 2020). To ignore Rowling's voice means to refute her role as catalyst of meaning for the franchise the way it had been constructed through the franchise's paratexts, and this was precisely the message that some former Harry Potter actors tried to share (Lenker, 2020). In particular, Daniel Radcliffe, who had played Harry Potter across all movies, published an essay in which he encouraged audiences to ignore Rowling's voice in the WW texts, in favour of their own:

> If these books taught you [...] that strength is found in diversity, and that dogmatic ideas of pureness lead to the oppression of vulnerable groups; if you believe that a particular character is trans, nonbinary, or gender fluid, or that they are gay or bisexual; if you found anything in these stories that resonated with you and helped you [...] — then that is between you and the book that you read, and it is sacred.
>
> (Radcliffe, 2020)

The actors who spoke in support of the trans community did not only fulfil an institutional role as former affiliates of the franchise: they exercised the authority they held on characters they had embodied for the entirety of the movie saga[11]. They thus offered an alternative point of reference for meaning, one which advocates for an almost barthesian "birth of the reader" (Barthes, 1977, p. 148).

Warner Bros.' reaction to the controversy was predictably more measured, yet one that reiterated the new collaborative nature of the franchise. After a generic statement promising to foster empathy and inclusivity was released by Warner Bros. (Vary, 2020), the website for Portkey Games, the WW gaming label, was updated to include a series of F.A.Q. emphasising that "J.K. Rowling is not directly involved" in the videogames' production (Portkey Games, n.d.). This is, again, only significant if compared to the promotional discourse around the games released in the previous phase of the franchise, when Rowling was said to have had direct input during development (Casamassima, 2007; Totilo, 2007; Kelly, 2009). Similarly, it was leaked in early 2021 that players will be able to create trans-coded characters in the most anticipated game in development for the label, *Hogwarts Legacy* (Schreier, 2021). These moves have been seen as a contingency plan from Warner Bros. to protect the game from backlash (Gilliam, 2020), but, regardless of the truth of the speculation, this new information does nothing more than echo what the rest of the brand communication had been saying for years: the WW is a universe that is created collaboratively, by multiple authors. This does not mean that the franchise is ready to move on from its originator: the promotional discourse makes

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[11] It may be possible to frame the actors' contribution to the WW as authorial in nature. This aspect, however, is deserving of an in-depth analysis which the scope of this study does not afford. For discussions of the authorial role played by actors, see, e.g., Bacharach and Tollefsen (2010) and especially Hunter (2016).

it very clear that Rowling still holds a special place as the maker of the container. However, now that others are allowed to fill that container, the responsibility for its contents is shared.

## Conclusion

Almost 14 years after that *Blue Peter* interview, Rowling's authority over the WW characters is not as unquestionable anymore. This article has shown that, even in transmedia franchises that may appear to embrace the performance of singular authorship as a unifying principle, the negotiation between stakeholders generates a fluid authorial system. In the WW, this means that frames of interpretation are not *only* created by Rowling, but also by emergent authorial authorities who tapped into their own world view to make the universe come alive. In a collaborative authorial system, the space that emergent authorial authorities are allowed offers an alternative point of reference for interpretation, which is not accessible in centralised authorial systems, and which may grant a franchise a longer shelf life.

The WW is still expanding, and its authorial system could therefore still evolve. The third instalment of the Fantastic Beasts saga is currently in production and it has long been announced that its script would be co-written by Rowling and Kloves (D'Alessandro, 2019). It is impossible to say how much further the franchise will head into a collaborative authorial system, or how quickly (if ever) it will relegate Rowling's authorship to the past. This situation, however, is representative of the fluid nature of transmedia authorship as constantly open to re-discussion and re-interpretation. The emergent authorities who consolidated Rowling's authorship across media in the first phase of the franchise are now more visible as authors, rather than simply as adapters of someone else's story. This places them in a better position to continue the expansion of the universe and keep the franchise universe-centred rather than dependent on its original author.

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