Abstract

MERRILL, ASHLEY CHRISTINE. The Evolution of Nancy Drew, Cultural Icon: Readers, Writers, and Fanfiction Authors. (Under the direction of Mary Helen Thuente.)

Nancy Drew is widely recognized as an influential American cultural icon. In this paper I make a detailed examination of Nancy's initial characterization as girl sleuth in the first ten books of the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, published in the 1930s. I spend another chapter examining the initial volumes of later Nancy Drew series books, specifically the 1960s rewritten texts, the 1980s-90s *Nancy Drew Files* series, and the contemporary *Girl Detective* series. My penultimate chapter discusses Nancy Drew as realized in fanfiction, or stories written by readers and fans. My emphasis is on explaining Nancy's appeal as a cultural icon and the ways fanfiction authors reinvent and appropriate that icon for their own purposes in stories. To this end I cite fanfic writers and readers' response to why they read and write Nancy Drew fanfiction, and I analyze the content and function of a sample of stories written by Nancy Drew fans. I conclude that Nancy's appeal and the basis of her status as cultural icon is due to her unique nature as a figure frozen in transition between adolescence and adulthood, along with her more conventionally admirable traits. Her Everygirl appearance when removed from that unique matrix makes her extremely adaptable to readers for their own purposes, both within the context of fanfiction and without.

THE EVOLUTION OF NANCY DREW, CULTURAL ICON: READERS, WRITERS, AND FANFICTION AUTHORS

by

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Biography

Ashley Merrill is a longtime Nancy Drew fan, who hopes to be a Carolyn Keene one day.

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List of Abbreviations

(in order of their appearance)

fanfiction (also abbreviated "fic") - At its simplest level, fictional stories written by fans.

fandom - A contraction of "fan" and "kingdom" which generally refers to the group of people who are more than casually interested in a given television show, book, or movie. For ease of understanding, I'll use a *Hamlet* metaphor: if I wrote fanfiction based on *Hamlet*, I would consider myself a part of the *Hamlet* fandom. If I wrote *Hamlet* fanfiction which dealt solely with the Kenneth Branagh movie version, I would still be a member of the *Hamlet* fandom, but only in the subgroup of Branagh-movie fans.

BNF - Big Name Fan. A fan who has gained some measure of status in his or her fandom.

Fanfiction.net (or FFN) - http://www.fanfiction.net; also referred to as the "Pit of Voles" or simply "Pit."

badfic - Bad fanfic.

WIP - "Work in Progress;" unfinished story.

ship - Contraction for "support a relationship between." The slash between the two names indicates the pairing (but this is not to be confused with the term "slash"). In *Hamlet* terms, the notation "Hamlet/Ophelia" would refer to a story including a romantic relationship between those two characters.

slash - Homosexual pairing. "Hamlet/Laertes" would be a "slash" (homosexual) relationship.

OTP - An "OTP," or "one true pairing," is a fan's favorite pairing, and is limited to one (overall or per fandom). However, many writers and readers support multiple pairings in a given fandom, and may even read and write stories endorsing different pairings for the same character (Hamlet/Ophelia and Hamlet/Laertes).

canon - Legitimate information in a fandom. The *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, Nancy Drew Files, Nancy Drew On Campus* books, and *Nancy Drew: Girl Detective* stories are all "canon," but a fanfic author can choose which series to include or ignore as background for her story. Nancy/Frank is "canon" only in that Nancy and Frank admit a mutual attraction for each other in the *Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys SuperMysteries*. A *Hamlet* canon pairing would be Hamlet/Ophelia; a non-canon pairing

would be Ophelia/Rosencrantz.

AU - Alternate Universe. This label applies to stories which do not fit into the canon as written. AU stories can split off from a point within or after canon (for instance, if a story presented Nancy as having joined the American forces going to World War II after *Quest of the Missing Map*, that story would have "gone AU after" that book). An AU *Hamlet* fanfic could find Hamlet committing suicide in the third act, marrying Ophelia and running away to another country, or being revived after his death scene at the conclusion of the play.

crossover - Crossovers are stories where characters or settings from other series overlap. If Hamlet found himself in Verona with Romeo and Juliet, or if Miranda walked into Hamlet's castle, such a story would be considered crossover because it combines elements from separate series. This term isn't limited to connected series; Hamlet could also walk onto the bridge of the starship *Enterprise* in a crossover fic.

universe - The name for a particular series of fanfiction stories. An AU *Hamlet* "universe" (series) could start with a story where Horatio defends the castle against siege forces, followed by a story where Horatio takes over the kingdom and sets about finding himself a consort. A given story may be AU (non-canonical); a series, is not necessarily non-canonical (AU). The "universe"/series could also deal with exploring each character's psychological state within canon: Ophelia's thoughts just before drowning herself, Gertrude's thoughts when she realizes Claudius's complicity.

reviews - Feedback on a story. Positive reviews usually include some emotional response ("I really loved that scene where Hamlet punched out Laertes") and can also include constructive criticism ("...but you also ended a lot of your sentences with prepositions"). Most constructive criticism is accompanied by praise for a particular aspect of the story. "Flames," or negative feedback, can be nonconstructive criticism ("this story sucks") or an attack on the author ("you suck as a writer"). In an attempt to reduce flaming (the act of being "flamed" or attacked), some authors choose to only receive "signed," or non-anonymous, reviews. Flames in the Nancy Drew fic community, in general, seem to be attacks on perceived deficiencies in writing style, or on the endorsement of a pairing which the "flamer" does not support.

OOC - "Out of character," a subjective term indicating character behavior which is not endorsed by or reflected in the original work. A story which included Carson physically abusing Nancy

would be considered OOC, unless justified by the piece (and even then, some readers would still reject it). Hamlet deciding to become Claudius's adoring stepson/nephew would probably be considered OOC.

in-jokes - A joke which is understood only by a subset of all potential readers. A character could make a throwaway (unimportant to the plot) reference to "that time we met Dracula," which would confuse some readers but be recognized by those familiar with the 1970s television series or the novelization *The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew Meet Dracula*.

character death - A warning given for a story which includes the death of a major series character.

retcon - "Retroactive continuity," the act of reconciling contradictory information presented within a single canon and eliminating all evidence that such a paradox ever existed.

Mary Sue - A specific type of original female character in a fanfiction. "Mary Sues" tend to upstage the traditional heroes of a story or become romantically involved with them, and are sometimes wish-fulfillment characters, representing the desires of the author. The term "Mary Sue" is perjorative, and most readers do not appreciate "Mary Sue" stories. The original male character counterpart is called some variation of "Mary Sue;" for example, "Gary Stu."

fanon - Fan-determined canon, which is not endorsed by the original text. "Elizabeth" is widely accepted in Nancy Drew fanfic as the name of Nancy's mother, and is therefore called fanon. A less widely accepted piece of "fanon," especially among Nancy/Ned supporters, is the same name as Nancy's middle one, thus making her initials NED.

UST - "Unresolved sexual tension." UST is a classification used more specifically in *X-Files* fanfiction, but is still applicable to any other fandom.

RST - "Resolved sexual tension." See above.

songfic - A fanfic which incorporates lyrics from a (sometimes) popular song into a story; the song often helps a character through a time of particular crisis or to a moment of emotional realization.

Introduction

As I write this, Nancy Drew is about to turn 77 years old. In last year's USA Today "101 Most Influential Fictional People" list, Nancy is number 62, after Uncle Sam and Santa but before Superman and her fictional godfather, Perry Mason. This year, 2007, Nancy is scheduled to have a doll (the second) and a movie (the fifth) released in her image. The seventh annual Nancy Drew Sleuths convention is scheduled for this summer. Nancy's seventh literary incarnation is currently in print.

2007 seems to be Nancy Drew's lucky year.

Since 1930 Nancy Drew has been created and recreated, censored and emboldened, by a host of authors using the name Carolyn Keene. The unprecedented popularity of the series meant that those creators could not stay hidden forever, and during a court battle over the once and future profits of the Nancy Drew series in the early 1980s, the truth came out. "Carolyn Keene" was really Edward Stratemeyer. And Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, his daughter. And Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson. And Walter Karig, George Walker Jr., Margaret Scherzo, Wilhelmina Rankin, Alma Sasse, Charles Strong.[1]

Any girl could read a Nancy Drew mystery and pretend she was Nancy Drew. But, more importantly, any girl (or boy) can *be* Carolyn Keene.

From the beginning, Nancy has never belonged to any one person. Edward Stratemeyer may have penned the outlines for the first three books, but Mildred Augustine (later Wirt, then Benson) wrote the stories. Harriet Adams took the Nancy Mildred created and turned her into another person altogether. Yet she somehow remained Nancy, possessing that unquantifyable "Drewness" which enabled her to break all records in juvenile publishing, shattering preconceived notions about the marketability and sales power of female series heroines. But for all that power, the magic formula began and ended with her. Ask any girl in my generation about the Dana Girls, Ruth Fielding, or Judy Bolton, and the response will probably be a blank stare. Annie MacLeod's chapter on those illustrious sisters-in-sleuthing is fittingly titled "Nancy Drew and Her Rivals: No Contest."[2] As far as her current readers are concerned, Nancy never had any rivals.

Nancy Drew mystery stories were commonly banned from libraries, while her censor-librarians

[1] Farah, p.154-155.
[2] *American Childhood*, p.30.

espoused the same arguments that had kept pulpy dime novels from their shelves. In Russel Nye's *The Unembarrassed Muse*, the author echoes their justification when he calls some of Stratemeyer's pre-*Nancy Drew* works "watered-down popular [adult] pulps, geared to the adolescent mind" (77), while Representative Joseph Minish told the House of Representatives in 1980 that "'Nancy Drew... [is] an unflinching character of solid moral fiber'" (qtd. in Nash 41), now freely and readily available in public and elementary school libraries. Where did the change come in, if ever? Why, if the books are of such questionable literary merit, do aunts, cousins, and mothers pass their Nancy Drew books to the next generation?

Nancy, since her birth, has always been owned by a corporation; Henry Jenkins calls fanfiction a way to repair the damage done to a myth by its owning corporation. At last count, there were more than 500 stories on the Internet featuring Nancy and/or her literary brothers and occasional co-conspirators, the Hardy Boys. Fanfic authors are finding a way to be Carolyn Keene without hiding behind the layers of silence and anonymity that Nancy's "legitimate" authors do.

Due to the sheer number of "authorized" Nancy Drew stories, fanfiction authors have a wide range of source material to explore or reject as they see fit. In this paper I study the first ten books of each series: the original 1930s Nancy Drew stories, the late 1950s-1960s revisions of those stories, and the *Nancy Drew Files*. The first ten books in these series set up familiar scenarios used by authors: the identities and character traits of Nancy's friends and boyfriends, her relationship with her father, the limited iterations of her mysteries and the main players involved. The first ten books also serve to demonstrate updates and changes in Nancy's character, introduced by the appropriate Carolyn Keene. The ages of most fanfic writers dictate their choice of source material: college-age Nancy Drew fans usually focus on the *Files*, but the roots of her character are firmly located in the original stories. Although most scholarly research has been done on the first two series, the *Nancy Drew Files* are important because they bridge the gap between original and present Nancy, reflecting the tastes and preferences of those readers who went on to become her authors.

Through the exploration of two generations of "authorized" and "canonical" Nancy Drew stories in the first two chapters of this paper, I build the background which serves as a landscape for the "unauthorized" Carolyn Keenes, the fanfic writers, in the third chapter. These writers take the icon of their childhood and place her within a new matrix, through which she can serve a variety of

purposes: Nancy, through appropriation, can move from representing Everygirl to representing the wishes and dreams of her illegitimate "authors." Fanfic authors choose Nancy for a reason, which speaks not only to her enduring popularity but her status as a cultural icon. For her eight to eighty year old readers, Nancy represents what girls want to be. Pop culture has adopted Nancy to represent the innately inquisitive, the impulse to seek truth and resolve conflict. For Nancy, all conflicts can be resolved in under three hundred pages. For her readers, life is not always so simple. Sometimes that tension, between the simplicity of Nancy's life in her hometown of River Heights and the chaos of reality, drives her older readers to write, to answer the question: what if Nancy found herself in a world more like our own, and what if the problems confronting her were more serious than a missing jewel box or a kidnapped heiress? What if everything *didn't* have to wrap up neatly in under three hundred pages? What if Nancy, the perpetually inquisitive, polite, and brave teenager, found herself an adult, after spending more than seventy-five years as a child? Arguably Nancy's appeal lies in her very tenuous state between the endless possibilities of late adolescence and the weighty responsibilities of adulthood, but to make sense of her, to enable her to grow with her readership, fanfic authors collapse some of those possibilities and envision her as a fully developed member of society, reinterpret her childhood, explore her relationships with her family and friends, and give her new mysteries to solve. Through these stories, we can see the way some authors want Nancy to be, the limitations they stretch or break, and the qualities they keep, change, or disregard altogether.

What has been stripped away, through the years and through the generations of legitimate and illegitimate authors, is part of a rich canonical tapestry which can be embraced or rejected, depending on the agenda of the author. What is left, is the essence of Nancy, the inherent Drewness that has stayed strong since Edward's first outline, Mildred's first word, and through the fanfic author's wildest dreams. Nancy is timeless, intelligent, brave, and determined; she's attractive, possesses the skills of a veritable Renaissance woman, and functions with the level-headed serenity of an adult even while fulfilling her role as the eponymous girl sleuth. What makes her a cultural icon is more than that. She's just this side of superheroine, while just imperfect enough to keep her human. She moves in her world as an adult without any of adulthood's inherent complications. She lives fully within the moment her young readers wish to achieve and her adult fans wish to relive. To understand how she achieves such a tenuous balance, we must go back to the way she began.

Chapter I: The Original Nancy Drew

Nancy Drew appeared in April 1930, one of the last in a long line of Edward Stratemeyer creations. Her literary brothers and sisters were the Hardy Boys, the Bobbsey Twins, Honey Bunch, Bomba the Jungle Boy, Tom Swift and Ruth Fielding. Nancy was created to exploit a gap in the market: girls' series, while not as popular as boys' series, had no counterpart to the Hardy Boys, and the runaway success of books by authors such as Agatha Christie and Erle Stanley Gardner in the 1920s led Stratemeyer to consider expanding into that market. The girl detective, her hardback books covered in eye-catching and colorful dust jackets and priced at a mere fifty cents, was born. That low price, combined with the shelf appeal, meant that children could buy Nancy Drew books with their allowances or pocket-money, circumventing parental involvement in the transaction and, consequently, their judgement on the quality of the books.[1]

The original Nancy Drew is sixteen, her hair a bob of golden curls, her eyes a serene blue. The only daughter of Carson Drew, former district attorney turned criminal lawyer, Nancy lost her mother at an early age (three or ten) and has been running the household ever since, employing only a housekeeper/cook named Hannah Gruen to assist her. Nancy drives a blue roadster and possesses all the autonomy any girl (or boy) could want: she has no mother clucking or fretting over her, an indulgent father who obviously adores her while simultaneously treating her like a peer, and a housekeeper to relieve her of the drudgery of cooking and cleaning. Nancy is free to obey her own desires, and her main desire, her defining desire, is to solve mysteries.

Nancy isn't gorgeous or even described as beautiful. She's an "unusually pretty girl;"[2] her features are distinctive, reflecting perhaps her personality more than the aristocratic ideal of ethereal beauty her family circumstances would otherwise suggest. "People declared that she had a way of taking life very seriously without impressing one as being the least bit serious herself"; [3] Nancy may take her efforts toward her chosen profession quite seriously, but she is a responsible, courteous member of society, and her maturity makes her charming where a lesser girl would come off as spoiled, brash, and bossy.

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[1] These generalizations, as most others made in the course of this chapter, come from Melanie Rehak's *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her.*

[2] *The Hidden Staircase* (1930), p.11.

[3] *Secret of the Old Clock* (1930), p.13.

In the first book of the series, *Secret of the Old Clock* (1930), Nancy starts off the volume by declaring that the Tophams, a *noveau riche* River Heights family whose spoiled daughters attended school with Nancy, don't deserve the Josiah Crowley inheritance, despite their being named as sole benefactors in his surviving will. Nancy decides that she will right the injustice of Topham inheritance, and her first mystery is born.

Nancy is uniquely suited to the task not only by her sheer determination, but her father's indulgence: Nancy has been present at interviews Carson has held with detectives, and Carson routinely discusses puzzling court cases with his daughter. He "had taught her to think for herself and to think logically".[4] Since he agrees that the Tophams don't really deserve the Crowley inheritance, he supports her decision to find a (legal) way to break the will.

When Nancy goes on a shopping trip (as she does often during the first books of the series), she runs into Ada and Isabel Topham, her former classmates, who are older than her but were in her same class at school. Nancy "had found them stupid, as well as arrogant."[5] Where Nancy was almost universally popular with her classmates, the Topham sisters never had as many friends. Ada takes a chic gown the saleslady offers her, drops it on the ground and steps on it; Nancy is disgusted by this display. When their same saleslady waits on Nancy, she calls Nancy a pleasure to serve.[6]

Not only does Carson take Nancy's suggestion that he contact Rolsted, the lawyer friend who might have drawn up the will, but he also invites Nancy along to the lunch he has with the man. Because Nancy has consistently proven herself worthy of the respect and freedom granted by her father, she is fully endorsed by the patriarchy represented by her father, and that alone sometimes serves to protect Nancy even when her father isn't present.[7]

During a heavy downpour Nancy encounters while on the way back from doing an errand for her father, Nancy takes shelter in a barn and meets the girls who will be the primary benefactors of her effort to break the present will, should she succeed. Allie and Grace Horner are sisters, relatively recently orphaned, who manage an existence by selling chicken eggs and making dresses. Their good manners and Nancy's immediate affection for them are devices which come up again and again

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[4] Ibid., p.6.
[5] Ibid., p.15.
[6] Ibid., p.17.
[7] Ilana Nash practically belabors this point in her chapter on Nancy Drew as a literary heroine in *American Sweethearts*..

in the series: bad men (and women) have bad manners and shifty faces Nancy immediately suspects, while good, deserving (and temporarily poor) people have good manners and honest faces. While Nancy consistently claims that logic informs her claims to a person's guilt or innocence, this propensity to judge and harbor suspicions based on first impressions is a constant theme in the 1930s versions of the stories. James P. Jones reads Nancy as biased against the *noveau riche* and underclass,[8] while Sally E. Parry sees Nancy as restoring wealth to the deserving.[9]

Another theme in the earlier stories is also played out: Nancy, seeing how poor Allie and Grace are, offers them money, which they refuse. The "good" poor don't accept charity,[10] so Nancy usually finds another, more "legitimate" way to provide it.

The stakes are clear. The Horner sisters are destitute, and Nancy is the only one who can help them secure the promised piece of the inheritance. If Nancy fails, the sisters' fate is grim. To reaffirm the Tophams' undeserving qualities, Nancy goes shopping again and witnesses an incident wherein Ada knocks over a vase and pretends it was a shopgirl's fault, to avoid paying the $50 price tag on the vase. When the manager is called over, Nancy intercedes on the shopgirl's behalf, providing a witness against Ada's version of the story and further inciting the sisters' ire. Ada tries to trade on her father's name,[11] but fails when the manager says that her father doesn't own the store and he won't be cowed. Nancy approaches merely as an innocent bystander who happened to witness the event and is "determined to see justice done."[12] Nancy unwittingly follows the Topham girls into the park, and "involuntarily" overhears their conversation, which indicates that while they suspect the existence of a later will, they have not yet been able to find and destroy it. Nancy doesn't seek to follow or eavesdrop, she just happens to catch a few words and then waits to hear more, crouching cautiously closer "with the instinct of a detective";[13] such an instinct of Nancy's is never due to anything so easily dismissed as feminine intuition.

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[8] "Nancy Drew: Wasp Super Girl of the 1930s," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Spring 1973 (709-717).
[9] "The Secret of the Feminist Heroine: The Search for Values in Nancy Drew and Judy Bolton," from *Nancy Drew and Company.*
[10] Many critics attest that Nancy and her unfortunate "clients" uphold the conservative status quo: she may offer charity, but they always refuse it.
[11] 1930s Nancy often trades on her father's name, to the desired effect: whatever authority figure hears her (father's) name almost always becomes at least deferential to her, even if they don't agree to her request.
[12] *Secret of the Old Clock* (1930), p.56.
[13] Ibid., p.58.

Nancy, hoping to pick up a clue, interviews the other three sets of inheritors under the missing will. While all these parties are deserving (though perhaps not so deserving as the younger Horner sisters), Abigail Rowen is in need of immediate medical attention due to a fall, and is so depressed over her state that she's practically lost the will to live. Nancy's insistence that she find and pay a doctor to examine Abigail is met with more protests against that kind of charity; instead, Nancy settles for stocking Abigail's bare larder and bandaging up the woman herself, without accepting any money to do so. This is acceptable for a number of reasons: Nancy has no intentions of ever being a nurse, though she proves quite proficient at performing such duties; the old woman is in a lot of pain, which Nancy seeks to relieve; and Abigail, in what can be seen as a form of repayment for that freely offered service, tells Nancy that the location of the missing will has something to do with a clock and a notebook.[14]

Nancy then runs into her first true social peer of the series,[15] Helen Corning, who is selling tickets to a charity ball before taking off for a girls' camp at Moon Lake. Helen is described in no way other than as a "chum." Nancy takes Helen's remaining charity tickets off her hands, struck by the sudden inspiration that she can use them to get into the Tophams' home and possibly locate the clock. The Tophams, however, will not be foiled so easily: Mrs. Topham doesn't want any charity-ball tickets, and her daughters advise her not to take them based on their grudge against Nancy, but Mr. Topham buys the tickets from Nancy for $12 more than their worth, saying that she should donate the rest to the charity in his name and telling his wife (in front of Nancy) that such a donation will look good for them when published in the newspaper. When Nancy casually inquires after the clock, she finds it has been sent to a vacation bungalow on Moon Lake. Nancy chuckles to herself when she leaves the house.

> "The Tophams may be old schemers, but this time they weren't so clever! Unless I am mistaken those tickets will prove the most expensive ones they ever bought! Before they get through it may cost them the Crowley fortune!"[16]

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[14] I call this act "acceptable" because it does not undermine Nancy's career as a detective. While Nancy proves time and time again to be proficient at nearly anything she tries, that proficiency and easy adaptability are used solely to facilitate her investigations. Other characters declare Nancy fit for nearly any career; Nancy herself only seems interested in seeing her name on her father's shingle.

[15] Ada and Isabel Topham, of course, don't count, since their wealth is subject to the soon to be broken Crowley will and they are insolent snobs.

[16] Ibid., p.101.

Richard Topham's charitable contribution is canceled out by his selfish motives, and Nancy, seeing the Tophams' ostentatious wealth compared to the reduced circumstances of the Horner sisters and Abigail Rowen, could never be convinced that the spoiled and selfish Tophams deserve the fortune.

When Nancy makes her way to Moon Lake in pursuit of the clock, she finds that a band of robbers has stolen most of the contents of the Topham bungalow, and hides in a closet when they return. Her sneeze alerts the leader of the gang, who locks her in the closet to starve. After succumbing briefly to despair[17] (and bruising and bleeding her fingers while pounding them against the door, calling for help), Nancy first attempts her escape via hairpin, but lacks the necessary skill to wield it. She takes the clothes hanging rod and tries to force the door open, and has partially succeeded by the time Jeff Tucker, the black caretaker, finds her. He doubts Nancy's identity, and she screams to prove she's female; only then does Jeff let her out of the closet. He explains that the thieves plied him with alcohol and left him passed out in a hotel while they went back to plunder the bungalow, and Nancy takes Jeff with her to track down the police in the next city (Jeff provides directions, as he's stayed in the jail before). Ilana Nash, in her chapter on Nancy in *American Sweethearts*, describes the interactions between Nancy and Jeff as shockingly and blatantly racist, and unequaled in any of the other volumes, with Jeff serving as a caricature and minstrel-character.[18]

The marshal and his officers follow Nancy to the road she believes the robbers have taken, but when they split up to cover more ground, Nancy elects to take the more likely route and finds the robbers at a roadhouse. She sneaks into their truck (which they have hidden in a barn), finds the clock, and manages to hide it before the robbers make their getaway with the rest of the Tophams' belongings. Perhaps because of her bias against the Tophams, although the text frames this decision as resulting from Nancy's impatience to solve the mystery, Nancy stops to investigate the clock and find the notebook hidden inside it before tracking down the police and alerting them to the thieves' route. During the ensuing chase, the thieves fire at the police, the police shoot out the van's tires, and Nancy starts another long tradition: refusing to take credit for the apprehension of the thieves. When the marshal asks Nancy to give him a ride back to the station house, Nancy hides the twice-stolen

[17] This is one of the only times in the series Nancy actually gives in to defeat. In the other nine books of the series I study, the only comparable time is when Nancy thinks she and Helen are about to drown in *Bungalow Mystery* (1930).
[18] *American Sweethearts*, p.57.

clock in the trunk and doesn't tell the marshal about it, but does inform her father when she returns home at the end of her adventure. The next morning, Nancy sleeps in while Carson procures a judge's order to open the safety deposit box recorded in the notebook as the location of the will; when the new will is found, the Tophams are forced to take a more modest house, the poor and deserving friends and relatives receive their promised inheritance, and Nancy receives her souvenir for the whole thing from the Horner sisters: Josiah Crowley's old clock.

Thus we have the pattern for a Nancy Drew Mystery Story. Nancy seeks to right some social injustice, taking from the undeserving and returning to the (sometimes temporarily) disenfranchised. The Horner girls are the first in a long line of such heroines, unable to fight for themselves, who must depend on Nancy's bravery and ingenuity to restore their fortunes. Where Deborah L. Siegel sees Nancy as a sort of Robin Hood, taking from the rich and giving to the poor,[19] Nash argues that Nancy is no Robin Hood, because the genuinely poor stay poor.[20] I see the situation as somewhere between the two. What Nancy does is asexually propagate herself through the course of some of her stories. Allie and Grace Horner, girls Nancy sees as "good" and, like her, orphans, are given the means by which they can become like Nancy: money. To look at this another way, the readers of Nancy Drew books probably had more in common with the poor unfortunates Nancy helps, than Nancy herself. Thus Nancy takes the reader-representative, the poor abandoned orphan, and makes her more like Nancy, which the reader herself desires. Nancy's propensity for judging ethnic and social "others" by their skin color or the "shiftiness" of their eyes is another matter altogether. When she makes such judgements, she demonstrated to her readers that doing so was acceptable, because she herself was never wrong in her estimations. Nancy's judgements may reflect a certain American fairy-tale morality: appearance reflects the relative goodness of the heart. But Nancy does not live in a fairy-tale world, and revisions to the texts generally replaced these stereotypical villains and Nancy's prejudicial reaction to them.

By the next book, *The Hidden Staircase*, Allie has remodeled her chicken farm and Grace has a new electric sewing machine to help with her dressmaking. Nancy has given the girls the means to pursue their calling, just as she herself does. Nancy also provided Abigail Rowen with enough money to cover her medical bills and improvements to her house, and when Nancy stops by to check in on

[19] "Nancy Drew as New Girl Wonder: Solving it All for the 1930s", p.176.
[20] *American Sweethearts*, p.59.

her progress, Abigail repays Nancy in a most satisfactory way: providing Nancy's next mystery.

The Hidden Staircase (1930) is one of Nancy's most gothic cases.[21] While the book begins with a threat against Nancy's father by the shifty Nathan Gombet, Nancy soon leaves the Gombet problem in her father's capable hands[22] and attacks the mystery at hand: Abigail Rowen's friends Rosemary and Floretta Turnbull believe their big old house, "The Mansion," is haunted. Nancy, ever the rational creature, suggests that the trained monkey of an organ grinder the sisters noticed around the house might be responsible, but her theory is stymied when the Turnbulls tell her that the windows are all screened. Nash describes Nancy as not superstitious, but enlightened;[23] Nancy refuses to believe the house could actually be haunted, and (rightly) suspects that some nefarious person is behind the "haunting." Before taking off for an extended stay at The Mansion, Nancy receives a threatening letter warning her off the case. She is also given her father's revolver for protection, since he himself will be out of town on business and unable to safeguard her in person. Nancy runs into Helen Corning again, but decides not to tell her chum about the case, since Helen is a gossip (something Nancy herself would never be).

On her first night at The Mansion, Nancy sleeps with the revolver under her pillow and is awakened by a yell in the night. Overcoming her temporary frightened paralysis, Nancy finds a priceless silver urn has been stolen.[24]

This book also contains the first proto-döppelganger. The Mansion is one of a pair of similar houses built by brothers at the same time, but when the brothers supported opposite sides in the Civil War, the Confederate brother died and his house fell into disrepair, eventually passing into the hands of Nathan Gombet. The Turnbull sisters are direct descendants of the Union-supporting brother, but they know little about their house, and The Mansion is to become a historical museum once the sisters

[21] In fact, Carol Billman's chapter on Nancy in *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate: Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, and the Million Dollar Fiction Factory* is subtitled "Gothic Detection." Billman specifically concentrates on *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*, which falls outside my purview of considering the first books in each series, although she does mention *Hidden Staircase* as containing "similar Gothic iconography" to Gothic mysteries by Mary Roberts Rinehart on p.117.

[22] On page 11 of *Hidden Staircase* (1930), Carson is described as a "fighter" in his chosen profession, an epithet which, probably not coincidentally, is often applied to Perry Mason. Billman, in the above-cited chapter, says Nancy's boyfriend Ned plays "Della Street to her Perry Mason" (p. 112).

[23] *American Sweethearts*, p.60. Bobbie Ann Mason, in *The Girl Sleuth*, sees Nancy's "enlightenment" in a different way, saying that she strips the magic away by finding the logical explanation for everything. Perhaps she plays Scully to Mason's Mulder.

[24] Having Nancy actually cower under the covers for a minute instead of springing out of bed to confront the intruder is a way of humanizing her. She's not so unlike her readers after all.

die. Nancy spends the book searching for a secret passage she knows must be there, and eventually finds it right under the Turnbull sisters' noses, but only once her father's well-being is at stake.

For Carson never returned to Nancy as he said he would, after his business trip, and while suspecting the worst Nancy can barely concentrate on the mystery at hand. When Nancy discovers that the very man who threatened her father's safety lives in the neighboring house, she sneaks over under cover of darkness with her revolver, and creeps into the cellar. After a few close calls in eluding Gombet's nasty-tempered (and, of course, African-American) co-conspirator and cook, Nancy ends up in a room full of grotesque stuffed birds, where she finds a secret passage behind a tapestry and falls down the stairs. Nancy sets out with a dying flashlight and eventually makes her way back to The Mansion's attic. In the morning, her father is still missing and the Turnbull sisters have (verbally, not yet contractually) agreed to sell their house to Gombet. After disclosing the secret passages to the sisters, Nancy takes them to town to tell the sheriff what's going on. The sheriff previously declined to investigate when the Turnbull sisters consulted him (before going to Nancy), and eventually Nancy has to invoke the name of her father to persuade him to come. Willing enough, the sheriff brings his men along with him, but only breaks into the house when Nancy curtly assures him that she will take responsibility for the act. The cook now has a sawed-off shotgun and threatens the sheriff's men with it; to outwit her, Nancy takes the sheriff through the secret passage from The Mansion and the two succeed in subduing the cook. Upstairs, Nathan is with Carson, threatening him by promising to do Nancy harm if Carson doesn't give him a good deal of money and swear not to prosecute. Nancy and the sheriff rush in, Nathan is taken into custody and confesses stealing from the Turnbull sisters before being taken away, and father and daughter are reunited. In appreciation for her help in solving the mystery, the Trumbull sisters give Nancy the newly recovered silver urn.

Parry says it's easy to see why "critic Betsy Caprio has compared the structure of the Nancy Drew series to an archetypal male quest myth. Nancy... takes the initiative to solve some sort of injustice, undergoes many trials, and is threatened by death, but she perseveres so that order is restored and is praised and then receives some sort of reward for her efforts".[25] MacLeod says that Nancy survives because her stories give her autonomy and have a single focus (on the mystery), but also because of the sex role reversal. Nash also sees the Nancy Drew series as a sexless Oedipal fantasy, wherein Nancy takes the place of the mother. But in this case, the roles are indeed reversed:

[25] Parry, p.149.

Nancy, the girl, in trying to help the Turnbull sisters, ends up helping herself. The impetus to recover their stolen property and peace of mind isn't enough to make her confront Nathan Gombet. It's only when the safety of her father is at stake that she can take matters into her own hands, wielding the power of the ineffectual sheriff by agreeing to take responsibility for whatever damage her demands might cause, and in the end she recovers her father, who has been locked in a room on the upper floor by the villain of the piece. She restores belongings[26] and peace of mind to the Turnbulls, but the greatest reward for her solving the case is not the souvenir.

Reducing the plots of Nancy Drew stories to this sketch also helps demonstrate what was so intriguing about them. Nancy does indeed function as her father's true heir, displaying a number of masculine characteristics, namely in her dedication to her chosen career and her ability to help those less fortunate than herself. More often than not, those unfortunates are girls or enfeebled old ladies themselves. The tropes of the stories demand that Nancy function as an alternative to police intervention, and as such her cases must be in some way unfit for the cops. Sometimes, as in the haunting of the Mansion, Nancy tackles a mystery the police have dismissed as unimportant; in the case of the old clock, Nancy operates on a slender thread of hearsay evidence and her personal conviction to restore justice where, as far as the law was concerned, no problem existed. The legal illegitimacy of her cases thus both undermines and affirms patriarchal domination: she proves the authorities wrong time and time again, but the cases she investigates are by their nature outside legal purview. She is a competent, efficient detective, and by operating outside the realm of the legitimate authorities, she demonstrates skills which, the text implies, will be of even more use once she moves within that legitimate sphere. However, for the life of the series, Nancy not only inhabits a liminal state between childhood and adulthood, but also between the fringe cases she investigates and the ultimate realization of her abilities as a member of a law enforcement agency.

The Bungalow Mystery (1930) sees the return of Helen Corning. While the pair are out at

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[26] Parry says Nancy Drew stories are about "things" and people with good backgrounds, and restoring wealth to the deserving (p146), instead of anything more serious, citing the names of the books which include such "things" in them (*Clue in the Jewel Box* and *Clue in the Diary* are good examples). Oftentimes recovery of the "thing" at hand earns Nancy another "thing" in the form of a souvenir, which also seems quest-like. Nash sees Nancy accepting these "things" as another way of separating her from the working class: she doesn't earn money, especially and emphatically not for solving mysteries like the Hardy Boys do, and her souvenirs may be priceless, but they are also worthless, since Nancy never intends to cash in on their nostalgic value.

Moon Lake again, in short order a storm blows up,[27] and their boat runs into a log and sinks. Helen can't swim, and Nancy, excellent swimmer that she is, manages to get Helen into a lifesaving hold, but such a triumph is short-lived. While Helen was fighting Nancy, Helen sapped her of the strength it would take Nancy to get back to shore. While Nancy wonders if she will ever see her father again, the two are saved in the nick of time by a girl named Laura Pendleton, a tragic-eyed waif of an orphan who, despite her own lack of swimming skills, rowed a boat out to save Nancy and Helen. Laura makes friends with the two, and tells them that soon she will be made the ward of a man named Jacob Aborn. When Nancy and Helen visit Laura the next day, they are immediately distrustful of Aborn, a bad-mannered man who berates Laura when they are in the privacy of their own rooms. Nancy starts to return home only to have another storm blow a pine tree into her path, and Laura, who now lives on that same road with her new guardian, is simultaneously running away from home with a bundle of her mother's jewels. Together the two girls move the tree and return to River Heights, where Nancy decides to take on Laura's case.[28]

Nancy, now described as an "unusually attractive girl",[29] returns to the bungalow to find Laura's guardian taking a bundle to a shack in the woods. She stays over at a hotel for its proximity to the site of her investigation and goes back later that night, and in the shack, after a rather feminine flight-response to finding a man in the cellar, discovers that the real Jacob Aborn is being held captive there. She has nearly freed him when the impostor Jacob Aborn, really a criminal named Stumpy Dowd, hits her on the head with the butt of a gun and knocks her unconscious. While being tied up Nancy calls to mind a trick one of her father's detective acquaintances taught her, and manipulates her hands so that she has enough slack to escape later. After doing so, Nancy meets up with her father and Laura, who set out in concern for her safety. Carson pursues Stumpy while Nancy and Laura

[27] Mildred Wirt Benson, in her introduction to the Applewood reprint of *Secret at Shadow Ranch*, says that such storms were a usual occurrence in syndicate plots. Certainly storms appear in most, if not all, of her volumes, usually leading to the necessity of a tire-change or the taking of shelter in some plot-significant hideaway.

[28] Many authors note with some amusement Laura's list of grievances against Jacob Aborn: within an hour of her arrival at the bungalow he told her that she would be the house servant, despite her frail constitution; he refused to give her allowance, took some of her more expensive belongings away, and told her that the fortune left by her mother was insufficient to keep her. Nancy is shocked that Aborn wouldn't hire a servant, and instead makes his ward do the housework. She explains this shock by saying that Laura's health is too fragile to permit her doing such work. The critics say Nancy is shocked because Laura's doing housework would make her lower class than Nancy, and therefore unsuitable as a friend.

[29] *Bungalow Mystery* (1930), p.93.

follow in the blue roadster; Carson fires a warning shot, and Stumpy fires a decidedly non-warning shot back. Nancy catches sight of a sharp curve and manages to warn her father in time to slow down, but Stumpy takes the curve too fast and his car falls over a cliff. Nancy and her father rescue Stumpy, who has survived the crash, and Nancy, even though his car is minutes away from exploding, rescues the suitcases containing Laura's (and the real Jacob Aborn's) fortune just in time. Even though she's unharmed, Carson yanks her away from the car, saying those suitcases weren't worth her life.[30]

In the end, Nancy attributes her solving the case to luck when the chief of police congratulates her, Laura and the real Jacob Aborn are reunited, and their fortunes are secure. Laura, in appreciation, gives Nancy a jeweled pendant which belonged to her mother.

Nash makes the point that Nancy achieves "average" femininity only by disguising herself among girls who aren't average.[31] While she uses Bess and George to illustrate her point, in this book Bess and George haven't yet been introduced, and Nancy's peers are Laura and Helen. Neither Laura nor Helen can swim; in fact, after their close call, Nancy undertakes to teach Helen to swim, and Helen says Nancy could be a swimming teacher[32] , but only if she ever decides to give up detecting. Laura is given into the care of Jacob Aborn, a man who proved rather incautious when he allowed Stumpy Dowd the opportunity to overpower him; but Laura gives every indication at the end of the story that her fate (her mother's jewels safe, her fortune recovered intact) is now a happy one. Where Laura (and Helen, to some degree) is timid and feminine, Nancy is calm and level-headed. The only time in the book where she reacts in a typically "feminine" manner (her flight upon discovering the real Jacob Aborn in the shack's cellar), she is alone, with no one to witness her failure. When she steels her nerve and goes back again, thereby helping usher the wronged but good Aborn out of his prison, she is again participating in the role reversal and behaving as the masculine. When Aborn's legs fail him, Nancy is the one who helps him up the stairs and promises to find him a doctor before darting off into the night in pursuit of the villain.

While Parry does indeed agree that Nancy is praised for her masculine traits,[33] and calls Bess and George the female and male sides, respectively, of her personality,[34] Nash argues that Nancy's

[30] Ibid., p.183.
[31] *American Sweethearts*, p.38.
[32] *Bungalow Mystery*, p.45.
[33] "Secret of the Feminist Heroine," p.148.
[34] Ibid., p.149.

success as a literary heroine is due to her innate "personhood." Nash says girls want to see themselves as having a "competent and important presence in the world,"[35] and Nancy definitely has those qualities in spades. While Nye calls series books "all formalized as Noh drama,"[36] Nash claims that "trashy" genre lit gives females a place to dream.[37] Perhaps both are true. Nancy Drew mysteries are comfort food. Any reader begins one knowing that at the end of the work, the universe will be back in order, Nancy will still be safely ensconced in her father's nurturing care, and the villains, even if not in police custody, will be safely banished to the outside, never to be seen or heard from again.

Mystery at Lilac Inn (1930) finds Nancy doing two things: seeking to help an orphan who is soon to be married, and fulfilling her role as domestic head of the household. Emily Crandall, yet another young woman around Nancy's age who happens to be the ward of a Jane Willoughby, is about to come into her inheritance of diamonds. By chance the two meet (Emily's car has stalled, yet another dilemma which rarely seems to happen to Nancy) and have lunch at the titular inn. After promising to come see Emily's inheritance once it is passed over, Nancy returns home to go hire a replacement housekeeper while Hannah goes out of town. The employment agency sends Nancy a whopping seven applicants; Nancy rejects five, most of whom are identified by ethnic origin (colored, Irish, and Scotch). Mary Mason, a dark-complexioned girl, seems like an acceptable choice despite her haughty attitude (always a sign of an unscrupulous person in a 1930s Nancy), but Mary won't even accept the princely sum of $15 a week once she finds out she's at Carson Drew's house. In short order Emily is engaged to Dick Farnham, and decides to sell some of her diamond inheritance to help him set up in business; in similarly short order, when Jane Willoughby and her friend Mrs. Potter are bringing the diamonds home, they are stolen at Lilac Inn.

The stakes in this case are twofold. Nancy must recover the diamond inheritance so that Emily can marry and help her husband-to-be, and must clear Mrs. Willoughby for the diamond theft before she is arrested. In the course of solving the mystery, Nancy tracks Mary Mason the would-be maid to the unpleasant "Dockville,"[38] where Mary meets her brother and a third member of the gang. Nancy, of course, is discovered, bound hand and foot and gagged, and thrown into the getaway boat. When the boat crashes (because villains are not only immoral, they are bad at steering as well) and the driver

[35] *American Sweethearts*, p.48-49.
[36] *Unembarrassed Muse*, p.80.
[37] *American Sweethearts*, p.29. This is even more true in fanfiction.
[38] Dockville is, of course, a working-class town, and reinforces Mary's unsavory background.

is thrown into the water, Mary and her brother abandon Nancy and the diamonds in favor of escaping the sinking ship. The yacht into which the boat crashed is luckily carrying a naval officer, who helps restore order while Nancy tracks down Mary. Even though Mary claims Nancy is the real thief, Nancy merely mentions her father's name and requests that the yacht crew try to save the sinking motorboat, and her name is cleared. Nancy recovers the diamonds, proving her story; the naval officer drives Nancy back home in time for her to prevent Mrs. Willoughby's false arrest; and at the party given in her honor at Lilac Inn, Emily not only gives Nancy a bracelet, but asks her to be maid of honor at the wedding.

Lilac Inn isn't the last time Nancy will have to save someone from false imprisonment (or the threat thereof). However, this is also the first time a potential marriage is at stake. Emily can't marry Dick (who is conveniently abroad and never appears in person in the text) unless she has the diamond inheritance. Because Nancy makes sure the wedding can take place, she is offered a prominent role in the ceremony, but we never see Emily's promise carried through in the books. Indeed, up until the seventh book in the series, Nancy is content in her place as perpetual bridesmaid. Jane Willoughby is the example of feminine fragility; when the police question her repeatedly, her story changes, because her mind is not so rational or ordered as Nancy's. Carson also calls the case a little big for the police, and Nancy expresses her own doubt that she can succeed, since she thinks it's a bit too complicated for her.[39] Carson says she should "try her teeth" on it. That statement can be read in one of two ways: either Carson is patronizing his daughter (and Nancy often tells him not to tease her), or Carson is referring to Nancy's relatively new status as a detective and the complicated nature of the case. It's also the first case Nancy takes which directly involves her pursuit of an actual "gang."[40]

Secret at Shadow Ranch (1931) is Nancy's first case out-of-state, introducing Bess[41] and George, female cousins and Nancy's best chums. Bess is blonde and blue-eyed, but where Nancy is becomingly slender, Bess is curvy and perpetually trying to lose weight. Lest she be mistaken for Nancy, she is also squeamish and the most timid member of the trio, often pleading with Nancy not to pursue a dangerous course of action. George is her slender tomboy cousin, with close-cropped dark

[39] *Lilac Inn* (1930), p.58.
[40] While Nancy is locked up by the gang of robbers in *Old Clock*, they are introduced relatively late in the story and are only involved because they have the clock Nancy's chasing.
[41] Bess is introduced as "Elizabeth" (although she is never addressed by that name), while George makes it a point to announce that her name isn't short for anything.

hair and an athletic build, who can be quite cruel in teasing her cousin, especially when that teasing involves a fifth sandwich. George and Bess invite Nancy to join them on a trip to Arizona, to visit Shadow Ranch, with their aunt and cousin Alice, whose father mysteriously disappeared some time earlier. While on the train Nancy meets fellow traveler Ross Rogers; Nancy is intrigued by him, although Bess judges him as "stupid." To further separate Bess from Nancy, in the end it turns out that Bess's snap judgement about Ross Rogers is wrong and he is Alice's missing father. In the meantime, at Shadow Ranch, Nancy carries a gun for protection, defending herself with deadly force against a lynx and a snake. When Bess's horse stalls and strands her in the middle of a river, only Nancy can save her. When the girls get lost on another hike, Nancy takes charge and finds them shelter for the night in a cave. During a storm and again when George turns her ankle on a hike, the girls take shelter in a mountain cabin inhabited by the suspicious Martha and her young charge, Lucy. Nancy has deduced that Lucy, who is treated badly by Martha, isn't her relation at all, and by the end of the story has determined that she is the young kidnapped heiress Louise Bowen. Along the way Nancy attracts the attentions of a young doctor, to no avail; a midnight ride he and his friends intend to take with Nancy, Bess and George turns into rescuing Lucy from Martha, setting her arm, and taking her back to the ranch with them.

Bess is further stereotyped as the typical female of the group in *Secret of Red Gate Farm* (1931). Her determination to buy an expensive and exotic perfume from a shady foreigner[42] leads Nancy to another mystery when she is mistaken by a man as a fellow member of his gang, simply by the scent. A fellow rider on their train, Millie Burd,[43] is on her way into town to find a job and earn money to help her grandmother support their farm, the titular Red Gate Farm; Millie is an unfortunate who, again, won't accept Nancy's charity, even though she faints on the train and is clearly unequal to the task of searching for a job in the big city. When Nancy accompanies Millie on her job hunt, Nancy happens to overhear a suspicious phone call and copy down a code, which she has her father forward to Washington for analysis. Once at Red Gate Farm, Nancy and her chums are drawn into a mystery involving the shady Black Snake Colony, who traipse around in the moonlight wearing what look like white-supremacist costumes. Upon infiltration of the group in their hand-sewn costumes, the girls find

[42] In an unintentionally funny moment, Nancy trails the foreign clerk to an office building, where she asks the janitor about her. Nancy identifies "Yvonne Wong" as "French-Chinese" (p.53) before she even knows the clerk's name.

[43] At least two of the articles I cite misquote her last name as "Burden."

that the Black Snake Colony is really a band of counterfeiters, and, at what Nancy calls the "psychological moment,"[44] the secret service (led by the son of another boarder who definitely seems to harbor some unrequited attraction to Nancy) swoops in to save them. The leader of the gang, a villain of the first order, has a wife Nancy has helped on occasion (and who has kindheartedly warned Nancy to stay away from the colony and its dangers multiple times), and Nancy puts in a good word for her before everyone is taken away. Nancy comes up with the inspired idea to turn the cave formerly used by the Black Snake Colony into a tourist attraction, and her idea is so successful that it makes Millie and her grandmother prosperous again. While Nancy has no "thing" to show for her labor at the end of the book, at the beginning of *Nancy's Mysterious Letter*, the girls return to River Heights from Red Gate Farm with a veritable harvest in the trunk.

The Clue in the Diary (1932) introduces Nancy's longtime "special friend," Ned Nickerson. While the girls are on the way back from a fair in the neighboring town, discussing the plight of sweet five-year-old Honey and her proud but poor mother Mrs. Swenson (that combination almost always means a good heart), they notice a mansion has caught on fire, and hurry over to help. Nancy recovers a diary at the scene, and then discovers that her car is being moved by a handsome stranger in a striped college sweater. Nancy, despite the stranger's honest face, isn't yet sure whether to trust him; he proves himself by helping the girls after Nancy's roadster is rear-ended by another man trying to get away from the fire. He wrenches off the roadster's dangling muffler and promises to follow the girls to the next town to make sure they're okay, and introduces himself as Ned Nickerson. The foursome bond over ice cream sodas while Nancy's car is being patched up, Ned expresses his belief that the fire probably wasn't an accident, and promises that Nancy hasn't seen the last of him. Bess and George tease Nancy, once they're safely out of Ned's earshot, that she's certainly made a hit; thus begins a relationship that has been going on for seventy-five years.

Throughout the story, Ned finds excuses to see the girl detective. He wakes up before sunrise the next morning to scout out the scene of the fire, then calls to tell her that he found a ring there and wondered if it was hers (since it's a fraternity ring, Ned is also obliquely asking whether Nancy has a boyfriend). He says he'll bring the ring over that night for her to see, and thus the two

[44] "Psychological moment" is usually the moment at which Nancy needs the most help, or the moment when she will be lost without outside intervention. The "psychological moment" in *Secret of Red Gate Farm* is when Nancy's escape attempt proves unsuccessful, and their lookout (Millie Burd) is also captured. They have no backup plan. All hope is lost until the Secret Service unexpectedly arrives.

have a date, which Nancy prepares for by dressing up, wheedling Hannah into wearing a cap and uniform and serving cake and ice cream, and alerting her father to be nice. Carson's response to Nancy's comment that Ned is bringing a ring over is "Not a diamond, I hope!"[45] Despite that tension (what Nash would undoubtedly call Carson's anxiety that Ned is about to usurp his place in Nancy's affections), the two men hit it off famously, and Ned is not cowed by Carson the way lesser men might have been. Ned and Nancy also nearly run into each other when Nancy's in town buying groceries for Honey's destitute (and temporarily single-mother) family, and he accompanies Nancy back to the Swenson house for the feast she's planning. He also persuades Nancy and her friends to have lunch with him, introduces Nancy to Mrs. Raybolt (the wife of swindler Foxy Felix Raybolt, mistress of the house which burned at the beginning of the story), and agrees to play taxi for Honey and Mrs. Swenson when Joe Swenson, the husband and father, is arrested.[46] At the climax of the book, Nancy, Bess and George are saved by Carson *and* Ned, who subdue Felix and lead him off in custody to prove the innocence of Joe Swenson. Even though Ned is disturbed by the audacity of Nancy's plan, Nancy, who has survived far worse, politely dismisses his remark by commenting that her plan worked. Nancy single-handedly convinces Felix to make restitution to all his victims, and he writes out a (good) check to Nancy, after which he flees with his wife to California, never to be heard from again. At the concluding party, the Swensons give the girls pocketbooks and Nancy gets Joe's fraternity ring, and Nancy and Ned have the following exchange:

> "Say, I have a notion to start [a diary] of my own!"
>
> "Why don't you?" Nancy asked lightly.
>
> She became conscious that Ned's eyes were very tender as they rested upon her. In confusion she looked away, but her hand shook so that she nearly dropped the tray of empty glasses which she had gathered up to carry to the kitchen.
>
> "I would, if I thought it might bring me the happiness I want," Ned answered meaningly. "Do you think it ever would, Nancy?"
>
> Nancy laughed and glanced quickly toward the other end of the dining room, where Bess and George were gathering up silverware and napkins. She understood well

[45] *Clue in the Diary*, p.41.

[46] Ned, ever the sweetheart, agrees to play taxi even after he shows up at Nancy's house wondering if she's free for a movie date and she begs off due to exhaustion.

enough what Ned meant, but she preferred to give no indication that she did.

George, who had caught only one word of the conversation, saved Nancy the necessity of answering.[47]

The last three mystery stories I consider were written not by Mildred Wirt (who penned the first seven), but Walter Karig.[48] For this reason, Nancy inexplicably drives a snappy maroon roadster in the beginning of *Nancy's Mysterious Letter* (1932). She also becomes involved in a case when her usual mail carrier, just short of retirement, has his entire mail bag stolen from Nancy's house while he's inside chatting with her. Ira Dixon, the victim of the theft, is heartbroken, but Nancy rushes out immediately to gather clues in the form of Tommy, a young roller-skating eyewitness to the crime. When Nancy accompanies Ira to the post office to help explain what happened, the postmaster blames Nancy for the theft, but is cowed when she invokes her father's name and reputation. However, it's Nancy's own reputation that leaves the secret service agents assigned to the case feeling a bit abashed. Carson (who Karig sometimes writes as a more authoritative figure than Wirt ever did) thinks the mailbag robbery might have been an attempt to discredit him, since he's just been appointed special prosecutor. Nancy, however, thinks the thief's vendetta was probably against Dixon.

A large portion of the plot involves Nancy's visit to Emerson University, Ned's school, for the big game. Ned, a sophomore first-year varsity substitute quarterback, has played in every game. During his visit to the Drew home, when he and Carson lapse into football strategy talk, Nancy, growing impatient, opens her mysterious letter. But the missive is meant for a British expatriate named Nancy Smith Drew, who is now heiress to a small fortune.

Then Nancy is confronted by Mrs. Sheets, a poorly-dressed sailor's wife who comes to the Drews' door and demands that Nancy make restitution for the theft of her mail. Mrs. Sheets also tells Nancy that she disapproves of girls running around cars the way Nancy herself does, and when Nancy's impatience shows, Mrs. Sheets accuses her of being just like the other Nancy Drew. Sensing a clue, Nancy agrees to placate the woman by bringing by the money, in exchange for information on the other Nancy. Tommy proves to be only marginally useful as an eyewitness (he says the mailbag thief drove back through at "eleventeen"), and Nancy tops off her bad day by running again into the

[47] *Clue in the Diary*, p.201-202.

[48] Karig wrote only three *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, 8-10. Rehak chalks this up to Harriet Adams's dissatisfaction with Karig as a writer, and more especially to his blatant breach of contract when he contacted the Library of Congress and informed them of his authorship of the three books.

postmaster, who admonishes her that girls should stay in the home. Sailor Joe Sheets regales Nancy with a story about waking up hungover and shanghaied on a pearl-diver, before Nancy confirms with Mrs. Sheets that the other Nancy was a governess for a family named Hutchinson on Long Island.

While at the Emerson game Nancy sees Ned and a teammate win the game for their team, discovers that the captain of the team's fiancée is a daughter of the family the other Nancy served as governess, and catches sight of Edgar Dixon, Ira's shady half-brother and the villain of the story. When Ned manages to find Nancy and his parents after the game, he is fittingly modest about his enormous role in winning the game; then Ned escorts Nancy to a play, after which Nancy and Marion Hutchinson are locked behind the stage during their quest to find the other Nancy. Marion is afraid of the dark, and clings fearfully to Nancy's arm; Nancy keeps her head, keeps Marion calm, and breaks the window to alert their dates to their whereabouts. Nancy goes on to discover Edgar is bilking women via mail through a lonely-hearts scheme, dresses as a Hindu prince to escort Marion to a costume party and wins first prize (a 5 pound box of candy, and a fellow envious contestant's disdain), and intercepts the other Nancy before Edgar can carry through with his plan to marry her and take advantage of her fortune. English Nancy returns home to claim her inheritance, while Edgar Dixon manages to escape the watchful eye of the secret service.

Nancy Smith Drew isn't quite Nancy's döppelganger (they aren't mistaken for each other, except in the similarity of their names), but Nancy, instead of trying to ensure a marriage, is trying to prevent one. Nancy Smith Drew, although a former governess and respected Shakespearean actress, lacks the other Nancy's keen intuition when it comes to unscrupulous men, and sets off for England on the boat trip she expected her new husband to share. Nancy Smith Drew is persuaded of Nancy's sincerity by the goodness of her face; Nancy ushers Nancy Smith Drew onto the boat taking her away from Edgar and matrimony while Ned prevents Edgar from boarding the same. Nancy has propagated herself yet again: her namesake heads for money (and unattached life) in England.

Karig also employs a storm to drive Nancy and her friends to take shelter at *The Sign of the Twisted Candles* (1933), an inn where they find the mistreated Sadie Wipple in the care of her foster-parent innkeepers, and Asa Sidney, a virtual prisoner (in the tower room, no less) who is celebrating his hundredth birthday. While the story is familiar (Asa Sidney dies, leaving a will which assigns Sadie the bulk of his estate and enabling her to escape her abusive foster parents, and Sadie is eventually

revealed as his long-lost legitimate heir), the unusual element is Bess and George's involvement in the story. Though they have no idea who Asa Sidney is that night in the inn, soon their mothers tell them that they are Asa Sidney's great-grandnieces and involve them in a feud going back to the death of Asa Sidney's youngest daughter. The incident divided the Sidneys and his wife's family, the Boontons, of which Bess and George are a member through their mothers (who are sisters). When Carson comes over to draw up Sidney's will on the day before his death, all members of the family suspect Carson's involvement, especially when the will gives Sadie eight-ninths of the estate. Bess and George snub Nancy, in a scene which leaves her at the point of tears. Only when Nancy runs into the cousins again and persuades them that the feud is ridiculous and Carson had no ulterior motive, do Bess and George return to her side and make friends with Sadie. Ned makes a cameo appearance to drive the villainous foster parents to jobs at a neighboring inn, but they soon return to thwart Nancy's efforts. In addition to the "will Nancy lose her friends" angst, Karig supplies the first obvious instance of a villain ogling Nancy.[49]

Sadie is the next in a long line of weak heroines: when she and Nancy are hiding in a wardrobe, watching Sadie's foster father hide stolen property, Sadie grips Nancy's arm and trembles, sighing about how afraid she is and about the spider on her neck. When Nancy arrives to help Sadie at the climax of the story, Sadie screams, alerting her foster parents to Nancy's presence. Sadie faints when her name is read as the main inheritor at the will reading, and when they first meet, Nancy has to work quickly to save the tray of food Sadie's carrying because the girl nearly drops it. Presumably, the knowledge of who her real relatives are, and the money she's inherited, will give Sadie strength. She even has a new name to go along with her new life, as Asa's papers reveal that Sadie was born Sarah Sidney Boonton. Even though Nancy is the one who reveals that name (she deduces that some papers which appear blank actually contain writing done in invisible ink), Nancy's attempt to save Sadie ends with Nancy dangling from an upper-story window, waiting for the men who have accompanied her to Sign of the Twisted Candles to save her.

Nancy might be a proto-feminist (if not for Sadie's untimely scream, she probably would have succeeded in saving the weaker girl), but Sadie, Laura Pendleton, and the countless other "orphaned

[49] *Twisted Candles* p.66, Semitt shoots Nancy an "appraising glance."

victim[s] of crime" [50] Nancy encounters are not. For that reason, Nash argues, the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* can't be seen as feminist, because Nancy is the exception to the rule, the only strong female character in the entire series.[51] Nancy can't even be seen as proto-feminist, due to the lengths she goes to to uphold the patriarchal status quo (which, Nash seems to argue, are identified with Nancy's father's acceptance and endorsement of her activities). Nancy's form of justice involves recovering various kinds of inheritance from unscrupulous people and returning it to the deserving. Ira Dixon, an old, weak (and therefore emasculated) man, depends on Nancy to protect him from his villainous (and virile, as he is thirty years younger) stepbrother's intentions toward his inheritance. In truth, Nancy functions as a strong character regardless of her gender or circumstances, and her characterization as feminist, anti-feminist, or proto-feminist depends on both the author of the text in question and the biases of the person interpreting it. If feminism denotes female and male equality, Nancy repeatedly escapes from circumstances most men would find daunting and solves cases which have stumped both local law enforcement and even agents of the United States government. Though the scale of such cases is occasionally lacking, this shortcoming might actually function as a strength, since it reinforces her liminal position. Were all female characters in the series so strong as Nancy, not only her special brand of femininity but her unique nature would be lost, and her cases would lose a great deal of their urgency and excitement. Nancy is unquestionably the heroine of the series, and girls choose her as the object of their hero-worship. Nancy operates in the face of adversity, just as her readers do. To make Nancy Drew mysteries strictly a platform for feminist propaganda would, I feel, mean missing the point entirely. Nancy is strong but not a superhero, and she operates within society even while transcending its limitations. The bildungsroman may be a background feature of the mysteries, but it stays in the background; Nancy may no longer be a child, but she never quite reaches adulthood, either.

The Password to Larkspur Lane (1932) finds Nancy protecting first a pigeon and then a sanatorium full of elderly ladies from the clutches of a brutal gang. The password itself is attached to the leg of a carrier pigeon, who Nancy rescues (and, instinctively, knows should be registered with the American Pigeon Club). A timely minor injury to Hannah Gruen brings Nancy to Dr. Spires' house just

[50] Karen Plunkett-Powell specifically refers to Laura Pendleton and those of her ilk this way, on p.102 of *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*.
[51] *American Sweethearts*, p.41.

as he's returning from a forced and mysterious covert mission to the sanatarium, and Dr. Spires has a single concrete clue from his journey: a bracelet featuring a family crest which he managed to recover from the old woman he treated. Nancy chases a woman who steals her purse and recovers the bracelet, runs into the intrepid Tommy again (who ends up loosing the pigeon, enabling Nancy to follow it to its home coop, where she is ogled yet again by an oily henchman who carries a whip), and finds her house under such intense surveillance that her father takes the only course possible: he replaces her (still maroon) roadster with the early present of a sharp black and green model, so that he and Nancy can escape undetected. Once Nancy and her father have fled to the lake, Carson departs on one of his perpetual business trips and Nancy competes with an amateur swimming champion in a spontaneous diving contest, besting the other girl. Nancy also takes the time to save a five-year-old from drowning, promise Ned two whole dances at a yacht club dance, and track down the Larkspur house. Nancy disguises Helen as a nurse and herself as a feeble old lady, sneaks in to save the owner of the bracelet (Mrs. Eldridge), and dispatches the two to safety before she is caught and put in a cistern. Using a stake made of a piece of rotted ladder, Nancy manages to crawl out, send carrier pigeons to Ned signaling for help, and disable every vehicle on the premises (including, despite her lack of technical knowledge on the subject, twisting the exhaust pipe on a plane around so that it eventually burns one of the gang members and sets the plane on fire). Ned and Carson arrive on the scene to apprehend all the conspirators, and Nancy ends the story by winning a silver loving cup for a flower show entry (hers, unsurprisingly, was larkspurs).

While Hannah is injured, Nancy's foil for the story, Hannah's niece Effie, takes care of the household duties. Effie is introduced as a boy-crazy girl with an ill-advised permanent wave who spends her days mooning over movie stars.[52] As Nancy's stand-in, Effie keeps track of the fleeing pigeon and is bitten by a shady character hiding in the bushes at the Drew home, but she manages to redeem herself. While hiding in Nancy's trunk (her nerve, like that of most other girls in the series, fails in the face of impending confrontation, and Nancy hides her there to continue unimpeded with her sleuthing) Effie makes a noise at the psychological moment, distracting the henchman with the whip and enabling Nancy to escape.

[52] *Password to Larkspur Lane*, p.34.

Jones says that a list of what Nancy can do clearly demonstrate she is a prodigy.[53] In the first ten books, even though Nancy can't escape from a locked closet using a hairpin (surely one of her most crucial skills in later books), she can recognize (but not read) Swedish, manipulate the position of her hands when being bound to ensure a later escape, dive like a champion, bandage injuries so competently that a doctor could do no better, and fix a twisted foot. She can change and put chains on her tires, maneuver through traffic like a pro, and reveal invisible ink, fire a gun with deadly accuracy and judge a person's character with a single glance.

But Nancy is not what she can *do*. Nineteen-thirties Nancy relies on her name (and that of her father) to command respect. While she often uses her generous allowances to go on shopping trips, they are never lavish displays of decadence and luxury, but more often charitable gestures. Nancy is generous with her money and means, using them to help those less fortunate, those whom she finds deserving of that gift. She is logical and intelligent, fighting for truth and justice (and, probably, the American Way). She is proud of her doting father, and he of her; she never gives him reason to doubt his treatment of her as an equal or fellow adult. At the movies Bess and George enjoy, Nancy's attention strays once the newsreel is over; she often has no time for frivolous pursuits when she's on a case. However, she is not an invulnerable automaton, as her reaction to Bess and George's snubbing in *Twisted Candles* proves.[54] Nor is she fully immune to the charms of the men in her life, as Ned Nickerson's continued presence attests. Parry says that when Ned is absent (as he often is), he is at work, college, or camp.[55] Nancy's life is free of responsibility to any force other than her whims, but Ned is taken from Nancy for the serious pursuits which make their relationship acceptable to Nancy's father. By keeping Ned safely at arm's length (and sidestepping all his more obvious declarations), Nancy ensures that she will retain her "autonomous selfhood and premarital identity,"[56] which Nash see as crucial to Nancy's appeal.

That autonomous selfhood, and the series' single focus on the mystery, mean that Nancy is seen only through that context. While this makes Nancy popular and predictable to readers (pick up a *Nancy Drew Mystery Story* and that's exactly what you get, a Nancy Drew mystery story), it also means

[53] p.707.
[54] Nash sees Nancy as avoiding vulnerabilities of thought and emotion (p.38), but she doesn't always succeed.
[55] p.150.
[56] p.51.

that Nancy can exist as a sort of wish fulfillment for girls. Because Nancy is nearly perfect, girls can imagine themselves as Nancy, externalize their problems and internalize Nancy's more desirable qualities, and thus partially grant themselves her strength and courage. Nash locates this phenomenon within the context of abuse and patriarchal oppression.[57] Because of the formulaic nature of the stories, readers can easily extrapolate and ask themselves what Nancy would do in a given situation.[58] While Nancy never finds a situation she can't overcome, those situations are limited to her mysteries. Nancy exists in perpetual summer, first sixteen, later eighteen; she's a high school graduate with no plans to attend college, her room and board provided by her doting and undemanding father, devoid of ambition because she has already discovered her calling as a detective. Nancy in the 1930s never has a bad hair day, and a fall down steep stairs or a flat tire is never enough to keep her down for long. To the eight-to-twelve-year-old reader, Nancy's existence is an adult existence. She falls victim to none of the growing pains or awkwardness of adolescence, nor does she allow her life to be bogged down in the drudgery of housework and chores. In truth, she's on the cusp of adulthood, lingering on the threshold without ever passing over into matrimony and a new identity as a wife and mother. Her specific context (as an amateur detective first, and a daughter second) limit her and make her unrealistic, but several critics see that quality as a positive.[59] I believe that any shortcomings when it comes to realism in Nancy Drew stories only adds to their appeal; only due to excellent circumstance does Nancy stumble onto, survive, and solve her mysteries. When that lack of realism becomes too much for her readers, they can move on to Nancy's literary reincarnations, the creations of Sue Grafton and Janet Evanovich, or pen their own stories to answer such deficiencies.

Mildred Wirt Benson, in her introduction to the Applewood reprint of *Secret at Shadow*

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[57] p.49-50. This theme is also addressed in the third chapter of my thesis.

[58] Charlotte, the heroine of *Nancy Drew Saved My Life* by Lauren Baratz-Logsted, often asks herself "What Would Nancy Drew Do?" Charlotte also dramatizes the difficulty found by non-WASP readers of Nancy Drew stories: she is Jewish and as physically unlike Nancy Drew as a woman could possibly be, save for the similarity of skin tone. The real-life situations in which Charlotte finds herself are often situations in which Nancy would never find herself. Behaving as Nancy Drew, it seems, involves logical thinking, accurate judgement, moral stability and unflagging courage, skills which any reader can seek to emulate.

[59] Siegel sees Nancy Drew mystery stories as escapist; MacLeod sees Nancy Drew mysteries as less realistic (but more popular) than those of her rivals (most specifically another Mildred Benson creation, Penny Nichols); Nash says that lack of realism is what readers enjoyed best and parents criticized most about the books (p.31).

Ranch, cites some critics as saying that her "writing was lacking in language." Melanie Rehak says that Harriet Stratemeyer Adams consistently corrected Mildred's manuscripts to make the language more closely reflect contemporary dialogue and pre-teen vocabulary. Cline answers such arguments by saying that series literature like Nancy Drew stories function as a sort of gateway story, satiating children's appetites for a time, and leading them on to meatier literary accomplishments once they have outgrown the stories.[60]

However, the books were criticized not only for their suspect literary merit, but also for their characterizations of non-whites. Jeff Tucker, the first, while not a villain, is a comic-relief character who Nancy berates for leaving his post. Nancy's association with Jeff ends once he leads her to the local police station; her last image of him is standing alone on the sidewalk as she drives back to confront the thieves. Nathan Gombet's cook, like Jeff, speaks in thick accent, but is decidedly hostile. Yvonne Wong is described as "slant-eyed,"[61] and when Nancy is trying to track down Ira Dixon's missing mailbag, she speaks pidgin English to a Polish laundress.[62]

In addition to these complaints, while some critics[63] see Nancy as possessing a decidedly timeless quality, even in the 1930s books, others use small details to locate them firmly in the period between the (unnumbered) World War and World War II. Harriet Adams instructed her writers to put in veiled references to the food and gasoline rationing of the second World War, along with sending Ned off to Europe, but by the late 1950s, the series was in need of revision.[64]

The revised volume of *Secret of the Old Clock* was released in 1959, under the auspices of Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, who claimed that from that time she took over the primary responsibility for writing the series. Under her care, Nash says a sort of "ethnic cleansing"[65] took place; Yvonne is described as Oriental, Jeff Tucker is white, and all other ethnic characters are eliminated. While alcohol never appeared in the 1930s versions except in the narratives of other (more colorful) characters, it never appeared at all in the rewrites. Nancy's borrowed revolver, likewise, disappeared, as did all references to shootouts or guns being used as weapons against Nancy and her ilk (for example, when Stumpy Dowd knocks Nancy out in the revised *Bungalow Mystery* (1960), he does so with a cane

[60] From *Guide to Literature for Young Adults*, p.23.
[61] *Secret of Red Gate Farm*, p.52.
[62] *Nancy's Mysterious Letter*, p.12.
[63] Deborah Siegel, in particular.
[64] Rehak names these among other reasons for the rewrites.
[65] p.55.

instead of the butt of a gun). Nancy, and her narrator, pay far more attention to her clothes, and boys vie for Nancy's attention more frequently (when Nancy exits the hotel to return to her sleuthing expedition at the same bungalow, she narrowly avoids a man who's about to ask her to dance; "Romance and detective work won't mix tonight!"[66]). An early suitor named Don Cameron appears in the revised version of that text, and in the climax it is he, not Laura, who accompanies Nancy and her father in their pursuit of Stumpy Dowd.

Nancy is an attractive eighteen-year-old who is surrounded by more "ordinary" (i.e. strong) girls. She's drawn into the *Secret of the Old Clock* (1959) when she saves the adopted daughter of the Turner sisters from peril during an encounter with the same robbers who loot the Topham bungalow. Nancy, ever the savvy shopper, buys a dress Ada attempts to rip out of her hands (for spite) for half-price, then meets Allison and Grace Hoover. Grace is still an accomplished cook and dressmaker, but while the Turner sisters were counting on the Crowley inheritance to help them provide for their adopted daughter Judy, Allison was counting on the money for voice lessons. In anticipation of her success, Nancy introduces Allison to a world-renowned voice coach who happens to have retired to River Heights; the coach pronounces Allison a future operatic star, and will take her as a student as soon as she can come up with the money to pay for his lessons. Nancy involves herself in the Crowley inheritance case not to deprive the Tophams of their inheritance, but to recover a portion of the money to help the others. The Turner sisters even imply that, once Judy is financially settled, they can renew their once-romantic acquaintance with the Mathews brothers. Nancy, once she recovers the old clock, tells the officer about it before letting *him* drive her blue convertible back to civilization.

Nancy's relationship with authority figures has changed significantly. Where she and her father once despaired over the intelligence of the officers, Nancy displays what could almost be described as an implicit trust in their skills. Hannah is no longer a mere housekeeper; she has been a member of the Drew household since Nancy was three and functions as Nancy's surrogate mother and confidant, and Nancy regards her with warmth and affection (but never, to be sure, an adoration matching that which she displays for her father). Increasing Hannah's role in the stories and in Nancy's life partially reduces the vaguely Oedipal tones of Nancy's relationship with her father, and provides her with a primary parental figure, since her own father is gone so often. However, because Hannah is

[66] p.103.

not Nancy's biological mother, Nancy still retains the autonomy that was her hallmark in the original stories.

While the romantic angle (the Turner sisters and the Mathews brothers) is by no means emphasized, the fact that it is present at all is a significant change from the previous volumes. By providing the disenfranchised heirs with money, Nancy is no longer simply propagating herself, but allowing them to explore other means within their own lives. Allison's fledgeling career as future operatic star is also new. In the original story, Allie was a tomboy who wanted to raise chickens, and was doing so before Nancy ever met her. Instead of providing Allie with the means to expand her chicken farm, the revised text finds Nancy providing Allison with the means to take prestigious voice lessons. While Nancy would no doubt be an excellent chicken farmer, she probably has never needed voice lessons in her life. This is a way to separate her from Allison, but it also simultaneously raises Allison to Nancy's class, because Allison thus has the financial means and leisure to take voice lessons. Lessons are also what the Turner sisters want for their adopted daughter Judy. "Lessons" are opportunities; Nancy has graduated from lessons to possibility and realization, but has not yet chosen her own adult path.

The revision also introduces the trend of remarkable coincidences. Nancy becomes involved in the case because the robbers who end up stealing the old clock also steal from the Turner sisters, and she happens to be passing by at the same time. The original story retained an element of credibility when the robbers were new characters who just happened to be robbing the bungalow at the same time Nancy had come by to find the clock.

The Hidden Staircase (1959) now describes the Turnbulls (no longer merely friends of Abby Rowen but Helen's aunts) as frail because Floretta is mother to Rosemary instead of her sister, and Nathan "Gomber" is now a member of a conspiracy to defraud the railroad company, instead of a lone nut. The history of "Twin Elms" (no longer the generic "Mansion") as told by the Turnbulls emphasizes the Revolutionary War over any Civil War connections. Nancy's date in the book is almost an afterthought, a redhead former high school tennis champion named Dirk who "doesn't like to be kept waiting, especially by any of [Nancy's] mysteries"[67] and, for that reason, exists only within the space of a few paragraphs.[68] Carson's kidnapping is more elaborate, involving yet more accomplices, but those

[67] *The Hidden Staircase* (1959), p.16.
[68] Although Ned can often be described in the same way, at least he's a good sport about it.

accomplices are always the weak link in the chain (after the kidnapping Nancy tracks one of them down and wheedles a confession out of him almost instantly). Nancy is no longer alone at Twin Elms with the Turnbulls, but accompanied by Helen, who helps her investigate the property for the hidden staircase and tunnel.[69] The cops, a much stronger presence, find Carson, but he's in the tunnel and kept drugged (where, in the original version, he was defiant and terribly worried for the safety of his daughter). Because the urn is never stolen, Nancy receives no reward at the end. While in the original version Nancy debated telling Helen about the mystery but decided against it since Helen's a notorious gossip, the new version of Helen plays an important role in the story, and though she does engage in a bit of girlish screaming, it's under entirely understandable circumstances (she falls through a rotted floor in an outbuilding). Helen, instead of serving as a weak foil to Nancy, is now a capable (and suitably less perfect, in comparison to Nancy) accomplice. Nancy and Carson also go to church for the first time in the stories, further establishing Nancy's Wasp credentials.

Changing Helen serves a few purposes. Helen is no longer merely a social peer of Nancy's, but equal to the challenge of helping in her investigation. While Nancy may have achieved a "normal" femininity between the original Bess and George characters, Helen is more like Nancy in the revision, willing and able to search for secret passages and bounce back even after a ceiling falls on the girls. If the original Nancy Drew stories were less than stringently feminist, the Nancy of the 1950s and 1960s surrounds herself with capable women who complement while not quite matching her own skills.

The gothic elements of the story are also reduced. In the revised text Nancy never finds a room full of grotesque owls or a barred tower room which holds her father. She is no longer alone in her attempt to help the Turnbulls, and Helen's presence reduces the feeling of isolation Nancy has in the story. Nancy's date is a new development as well, although his presence in the text is abbreviated. He also sets up a tension: he is a male, a tennis star, but his inability to respect Nancy's chosen career makes him inadequate as a mate. He sees her detective work as a minor inconvenience, a quirk, something Nancy can easily put aside like a sewing basket.

[69] The Dana Girls were introduced under the following logic: the Hardy brothers were a popular sibling duo who solved mysteries, and Nancy Drew is a girl. Having two protagonists is therefore better than one; their interaction can reduce lull time in the stories. The act of pairing Nancy for the majority of the book with Helen, even though Nancy is still a more capable detective, results in detracting from the inherent danger of the situations: even if Nancy finds herself stuck in a secret passage, at least she has Helen around. Bess and George don't often serve the same detracting role: Nancy delegates crucial but less taxing errands to the girls, and they never serve to threaten Nancy's superiority as the detective of the group.

Dirk, thus, can represent a sort of backlash against the feminism Nancy occasionally embodies. Because she is a strong female who is deeply committed to her career, Dirk must fall into one of two categories: a strong male who tries to assert his personality and desires over Nancy's, or a strong male who subsumes his desire and personalities to Nancy's. He selects the former, and is never heard from again. Ned usually does the latter, and manages to stay with Nancy through the majority of the series.

The revised *Bungalow Mystery* (1960) supplies Stumpy Dowd with an equally unpleasant wife,[70] the real Jacob Aborn with a suitably absent one, and Nancy with titian-blonde hair and an overnight bag she carries in the trunk of her convertible (this time of year, it includes a swimsuit). Stumpy found out about Laura's fortune through a separate bank-securities scam, which Carson is investigating. Nancy only has to lifesave-hold Helen during their ordeal on the lake because Helen's limbs were numbed in the accident. Helen discusses wedding plans, Don Cameron witnesses and affirms Nancy's bravery during the climax of the plot, and while Laura (a much more capable character than her previous incarnation) gives Nancy an aquamarine ring, Jacob Aborn promises to immortalize Nancy through his writing.

This immortalization, of course, is troublesome. If Nancy, an extraordinary girl depending on her ordinary appearance to disguise herself among the mere mortals she helps, depends on her anonymity, any publicity can undermine her activities. Taking pride and credit for her achievements also goes against her typically feminine, blushing modesty. Nancy, time and time again, is underestimated by villains and law enforcement officers alike, due to her youth and appearance. Nancy also moves within a largely female sphere: the unfortunate victims she helps are almost always women. When Ira Dixon's mailbag is stolen, Nancy is as much defending her own name as she is trying to help Ira. Nancy is an alternative to the police because she is female and more sympathetic to individual plights, and because she shows a vested interest in preserving the status quo (returning lost fortunes, punishing those who attempt to impersonate those above them), she can be trusted to succeed where the police have little interest or ability. Her singlemindedness and determination, which make her so successful as a detective, also serve to make men uneasy. Nancy, as an individual,

[70] The villains of the earlier *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories* were almost always unmarried loners. Giving them wives seems to serve as a sort of cover ("he can't be that bad if he's married"), but it also helps support the reading of Nancy Drew books as non-feminist texts. There are no strong, role-model type women other than Nancy herself.

is a fluke. For her to propagate as she does, demonstrating female ability and achievement, she must also disguise herself, and minimize the threat she poses to male authority. Thus it is appropriate for her to demur credit and recover only "things": to overstep her bounds, in these stories at least, would change attitudes toward her from benignly tolerant to alarmed.

I believe this is also a reason that Nancy is never allowed to age and reach adulthood. Nancy as an adult would need a career, and her chosen career would mean working with her father as an equal. Nancy's father handles cases of major importance: he is not limited to finding lost wills and missing fortunes. Instead, in the revised novels he heads up task forces charged with punishing corruption in the city and handles major deals for entire towns. Nancy as a teen detective is quirky and unusual. Not female, not woman, not lady, she is "girl": adolescent, immature, inferior, nonthreatening. Advancing her to any logical conclusion would reduce her to stereotype (single, strong female who works with her father and has achieved professional success at the cost of her personal life) or parody (see Chelsea Cain's *Confessions of a Teen Sleuth*). When the possibilities are collapsed into one reality, Nancy loses what made her unique. As such, Nancy learns no "lessons" during her cases, she merely acquires skills which will later help her in solving other mysteries.

Don Cameron also chooses to subsume his personality and desires to Nancy's; he allows her to fix him up with Laura when she has to break a date with him. He also takes Laura's place at Nancy's side for the climax of the story (the car chase), claiming that he managed to thus get his date anyway. Because he actually witnesses Nancy's bravery, he calls her the most courageous girl he's ever met. Despite all this, Nancy feels no spark for him (she was using his invitation to a family barbecue as a way to check out suspects), and Don does not appear in other volumes.[71] Don is unsuitable, perversely, because he is so compliant to Nancy, and so quick to go along with what she suggests. He doesn't have the personality or strength to stand up to her. The text does not emphasize this as a problem because Nancy has never been preoccupied with the future in regards to her marriage prospects, and insinuates that, were Nancy ever presented with a choice between her career and her love life, she would unhesitatingly choose the former.

The entire plot of the next volume, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* (1961), is different. Emily Willoughby now owns the inn, along with her fiancé, and Nancy and her friends are repeatedly victims

[71] Don Cameron is reincarnated in a volume of the *Nancy Drew Files*, but his affections remain unrequited.

of Nancy's actress/döppelganger. Nancy's lookalike breaks into her father's house, steals her charge plate, impersonates Nancy at a department store and to her friends, and even tries to convince Carson Drew that she is the real Nancy (Carson is only fooled from a distance). Nancy endures the attack of a fake shark (revealed in the climax to be a prototype submarine), a spear is thrown through her camera while she's underwater, and the cabin she shares with Helen is blown up (luckily, they are both outside it at the time). Mrs. Potter, a friend of Emily's aunt, is now a red herring, whom Nancy dislikes and immediately suspects (in a lingering holdover from Nancy's old attitudes, possibly because Mrs. Potter is a brash woman in reduced circumstances, who has the gall to flirt with Carson). Nancy also suspects the intentions and motivations of the best man-to-be, John McBride (who can't possibly be involved, as he is an officer on leave from the Army).[72] McBride, who serves as Nancy's mild love interest during the plot, ends up bringing in the Army to recover the prototype sub; all his suspect activities were due to his trying to track it down. Nancy's also become an accomplished skin-diver, another quality which ingratiates her to McBride.

Although the Secret Service did appear in the original version of *Secret of Red Gate Farm*, this is the first case where Nancy's investigation involves a government-magnitude subplot (the prototype submarine). Nancy is distrustful of John McBride because he, as a male authority figure, is allowed to move and disappear at any time with no repercussions, a freedom Nancy is only occasionally allowed. McBride doesn't tell Nancy about his case because she isn't a legitimate "detective." He appreciates her skill as a skin-diver (he only finds out because the local paper ran a story on Nancy and her achievement in the skin-diving course), but on the whole he seems to view her as an able companion, not quite an equal. There was no counterpart to McBride in the original text; the naval officer appears only at the end of the story and has a small role.

Lilac Inn also eliminates Nancy's domestic subplot. In the original story, the text emphasizes that Nancy, at her young age, has been in charge of the household since the death of her mother, and Carson trusts her to hire domestic help in time to prepare a dinner party for him. Nancy doesn't relish that responsibility, but she is secure in it, and does not disappoint her father. The original's domestic subplot both reemphasized Nancy's femininity and her unique nature: despite her young age, she manages to run her father's household with unparalleled grace and skill. When the two are compared, elimination of that domestic side of Nancy's personality consequently diminishes its

[72] When Nancy shares her suspicion of McBride with her father, he says basically the same thing.

importance to her as a strong character. The subplot also provided Nancy with a way to meet Mary Mason. By increasing Mary Mason's role in the revised text (she's a former waitress at the Inn, Nancy's döppelganger, and is instrumental in the plot to steal the prototype sub), the author makes Mary a more worthy adversary for Nancy. Mary even blows up Nancy's cabin in the rewrite. But, lest her readers think Nancy may finally have found a Moriarty to her Holmes, Mary is too easily caught by Nancy to serve as a true nemesis, and the real test comes when Mary unsuccessfully tries to impersonate Nancy to her own father. Nancy can bear to be misrepresented and mistaken by anyone else, save him; but he easily sees through Mary's subterfuge, and Nancy does not have to confront that issue. Nancy is accustomed to dealing with threats from without, not within, her own familial sphere. In the original text, Nancy tries to recover the diamonds and clear an innocent woman as a suspect in the incompetent police investigation. In the rewrite, Nancy is only trying to find the diamonds to reduce bad publicity for the grand reopening of Lilac Inn; she argues from the beginning that the police should be called in, and only investigates in the meantime.

While the rewrite definitely has more action (in the original, Nancy isn't even present in the chapter where the diamonds are stolen), it seems to lack urgency. Nancy isn't racing against the clock to prevent false imprisonment anymore, but chasing after a girl who has stolen her charge card. Nancy can't even be kept down by a case of identity theft, though. Where the Nancy of old worked alone, trying to find Emily's missing diamonds, the new Nancy enlists Helen's and John's help. While this change might be more realistic, and promote a sense of teamwork and community, Nancy still remains unique. None of the other girls can skin-dive and thus impress John. This logic also serves later when Nancy meets Ned again; she's unique enough to keep men interested, and her refusal to commit only seems to heighten their attraction. However, Nancy didn't learn to skin-dive to attract mates, but to help in her sleuthing. Nancy's abilities are first and foremost meant to supplement her detective work; they only happen to pique men's interest as well.

The rewritten *Secret of Shadow Ranch* (1965) finds Nancy trying to track down the hidden treasure of Dirk Valentine,[73] with the Louise Bowen kidnapping case entirely eliminated. Shadow Ranch is also being tormented by a phantom horse, a misdirection technique almost entirely borrowed

[73] This subplot is important because one of the cowboys is legally due to inherit the Valentine treasure, which will enable him to send his sister to school. It also provides Nancy and her friends with reasons to go on their hikes and horseback rides, where in the original they simply did so for the fun of it. Nancy spends *Shadow Ranch* not on vacation, but on a protracted scavenger hunt.

from Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Alice's missing father has been gone only half a year, and she and the girls spend a good deal of the book chasing him through ghost towns. The domesticated Nancy goes to a rodeo with her friends and the cowboys, preparing an excellent chocolate cake for the event. Mildred's version of Nancy wasn't one to cook or entertain the (newly younger) cowboys, the way Harriet's does.[74]

The Dirk Valentine treasure is, of course, a love story: Dirk, an outlaw, hid his stolen treasure for his fiancée. By finding the treasure and thus ending the "haunting" by the ghost horse, Nancy helps Bess and George's aunt and uncle keep their farm help, including a cowboy who has an inheritance claim on the treasure. She also continues helping females by reuniting Alice with her missing father. Notably, Nancy's romantic interest is no longer a doctor, but a cowboy; neither succeeds in distracting her for long, however.

That minor change is telling. In the original story, Nancy meets the doctor at a dance, and though he is present for the climax of the story, Nancy and her readers learn little about him. Therefore, even though Bess and George tease Nancy about the doctor liking her, the reader does not view the doctor as a true threat to Nancy's single status. In the rewrite, the cowboy is present from Nancy's arrival on the ranch, and almost immediately takes a dislike to Nancy. This familiar romance trope is completed when the cowboy admits a somewhat grudging respect for Nancy's abilities and later asks her to the rodeo dance. However, when Nancy moves into a client-service relationship with the cowboy (she's helping recover the fortune which rightfully belongs to him), the series indicates that any character introduced in that role can never become a romantic interest for Nancy. Because she takes the masculine role in their relationship (recovery of the treasure at the climax of the story), they remain unequal even after that conflict is resolved. Thus Nancy's somewhat conflicting sex roles are occasionally problematic, but in the realm of the story, that conflict merely simplifies things for the reader. Nancy solves mysteries not to attract male attention, but because she is obeying her own personal impetus to do so, regardless of the gender of the impoverished party. Were Nancy consistently solving mysteries to make herself alluring and attractive to members of the opposite sex, her appeal would narrow and her characterization become less iconic. She persists, in popularity and in the series, due to no force outside herself. To do less would be to weaken her universal appeal.

In *Secret of Red Gate Farm* (1961), Nancy cracks a code which stymies even the Secret

[74] The original Nancy doesn't bake a cake, she goes cowpunching.

Service,[75] takes expert care of George when she falls victim to a snakebite, consults the police at every turn and is even assigned by Chief McGinnis (another new addition) to track down the disbanded Hale Syndicate. River Heights Police Chief McGinnis is a recurring character through the stories, and in the *Files*, he often alerts Nancy about potential cases, gives her inside information when appropriate, and also serves as a form of patriarchal support, since Nancy refers those who doubt her abilities to the Chief for a moral and career reference. McGinnis has the freedom to use Nancy as a sort of outside "consultant," an agent for whose actions he can maintain plausible deniability. He functions as her perpetual link to law enforcement, but their relationship stays open-ended. Nancy, of course, would make an excellent detective on the River Heights police force, but the depth of her abilities suggest that taking such a course would almost be a compromise, and unequal to her great potential. McGinnis provides Nancy with an appropriate arena in which to exercise her skills, while keeping the safety net of informality intact. He gives her a way to prove herself in a safe setting. No longer does Nancy need to trade on the respectability of her father's name; she can point to a figure of authority who can vouch for her skill and accomplishment as a detective. This more fully agrees with a meritorious system, where Nancy earns respect for what she herself can do, and as such is more fully American, democratic, and independent. She no longer depends on the fortuitous circumstances of her parentage to grant her respect and equality. Thus she cements her status as an icon: like any other American girl, Nancy is able to succeed by sheer force of will, determination, and intelligence, transcending her identity as a lawyer's daughter and becoming the girl detective.

Clue in the Diary (1962) finds Nancy able to translate the random Swedish phrase,[76] a volunteer at a "crippled children's home," and the recipient of a lecture given by the Swedish neighborhood baker on the subject of diaries.[77] Ned now wants a diary so that he can fill its pages with

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[75] This makes Nancy at the same time appear less vulnerable and more fantastic. She has to borrow a book from her father about codes; she's no expert. Elsewhere Adams doesn't seem to support the other, less obvious reading, that the government is staffed by virtual idiots.

[76] Another advance over the skills of the old Nancy, and another characteristic which makes her less realistic. Although Nancy says she learned the random Swedish phrase from an exchange student at her high school, this explanation still makes her come off as a know-it-all or extremely lucky. The revised Nancy seems to know a lot of exchange students.

[77] Although Nancy Drew books were criticized for being didactic (as this mini-sermon seems to support), the baker also delivers the line that "The little girl who loved cookies is now a detective" on p.154, which almost makes up for it.

entries of dates with Nancy.[78] Felix even makes restitution without Nancy's interference, in the hopes that it will reduce his jail sentence. This more fully agrees with a reading of Nancy as a junior detective, though without the negative connotations such a classification implies. Nancy functions within and under the auspices of legal authority, and although Nancy is the agent by which Felix is brought to justice, she turns him over to the police for rehabilitation, instead of serving as the sole force behind his decision to make restitution.

This volume also renegotiates the terms of Nancy's relationship with Ned. Throughout the earlier volumes, Ned, from the beginning, makes many veiled references to his intention of marrying Nancy someday. Nancy neatly sidesteps acknowledging or returning those declarations, but does not directly deny such a relationship as a possibility. This agreed with the depth and exclusivity of their relationship. In the revisions to the original stories, Ned's affection and respect for Nancy remain genuine, as does his occasional frustration at her singleminded determination and light treatment of their relationship, but Ned is relegated to "special friend" status, and he is not her exclusive date. Although Nancy was never content to define herself solely in the terms of her relationship to Ned, this distancing is another way to emphasize her liminal status. She is conventional in that she is ostensibly heterosexual and maintains friendly relationships with the opposite sex; she is unique in that her long-term relationship remains undefined, open, and unconfined by the promise or conclusion of marriage, and that such indefinite terms do not constitute a shortcoming or preoccupation on her part. For Nancy to become a wife or mother is not out of the question, is never out of the question, but Nancy does not dwell on or even acknowledge the possibility. For that matter, neither do Bess and George. Helen Corning marries only within the scope of the revised novels, and once she does, she no longer plays a large role in Nancy's cases. This is appropriate, because Nancy's appeal lies in what she does not do as much as in what she does. Nancy would prove a very poor mother and wife if she pursued her cases with the same zeal and preoccupation even after marriage; for her to serve as a good role model, she has to remain unattached. Because she is so young, this inability to commit is not a drawback, but an advantage. She can afford to be single-minded about her detective work without permanently denying herself the status of wife and mother.

[78] Plunkett-Powell accurately reports that the revision "tones down" Nancy's emotional response to Ned (p.101), but Nancy manages to evade this significantly less flirty comment anyway, without George's help.

In *Nancy's Mysterious Letter* (1968), Tommy not only witnessed the letter theft but remembers part of the villain's license plate number, and even recovers a shoe for Nancy, earning him a jar of candy and a plastic detective badge from her. Nancy learns early on of Edgar's plot to marry and swindle the other Nancy, and spends the majority of the text trying to find and warn the girl. Ned, now the first-string quarterback, is injured in but still manages to win the big game, Carson Drew loses money a foolish client sent him when the mailbag is stolen, and Marian is no longer afraid of the dark when she and Nancy are locked behind the stage. Again, Nancy seems to be the beneficiary of a string of lucky coincidences, the biggest being the sharing of her name.

The toy detective badge Nancy gives Tommy is described in the text as a joke gift someone gave Nancy at a party. She kept the badge, but only in a sort of miscellaneous compartment in the dining room. Although Tommy accepts the badge as an appropriate token for his own detective work, the badge is not among Nancy's earned artifacts and she does not value it in the same way. Instead, the text implies without dwelling on it, that the badge was given as a way to undermine Nancy's credibility and status as a detective. Close attention to the books reveals that Nancy is always overcoming some such setback, be it authorital skepticism in her abilities or outright hostility from misogynist characters. In part, because Nancy is widely underestimated as an adversary or ally, she can assume an identity as a typical female among other females, disguising her abilities and traits as a superhero might. She moves as an undercover agent in the events of her own life, her unique abilities known only to her closest friends and family. In that way she manages to turn even what would amount to a debilitating obstacle to her own advantage. Nancy can always be trusted to demonstrate her enviable abilities when the situation demands it. She can accept a toy detective badge with grace and tact, and she can debunk the preconceived notions of her detractors and readers by using even such a slight to her own purposes.

Sign of the Twisted Candles (1968) sends Hannah to stay with the still-weak "Carol" (formerly Sadie) and Nancy when they stay at the inn (and Nancy shows a bit of her old self when she pulls the "do you know who my father is" line on the abusive foster-mother, in an attempt to stop her from beating Carol with a hairbrush). In *Password to Larkspur Lane* (1966), Carson comments that Nancy "attracts mystery like nectar in a flower attracts a bee,"[79] an interesting comparison given Nash's Oedipal reading of their relationship. Nancy is also drawn into a connected case involving the newly

[79] p.15.

married Helen Corning's grandparents, their trusted butler, and a mysterious circle of blue flame. This time around, Nancy expertly disables the plane and directs Ned to arrive via seaplane, and Helen's grandfather says he will order crystal larkspur earrings for the girls to commemorate their saving the couple's jewels.

The differences between the original text of *Larkspur Lane* and the revision reinforce marriage within the realm of the Nancy Drew novels as an institution firmly located in adulthood, and thus as a limiting force. Helen, in the original text, as an unmarried peer, assists Nancy in breaking into the fraudulent nursing home and freeing Mrs. Eldridge. Helen, in the revision, invites Nancy to investigate the case of the mysterious blue flame at her grandparents' house, but contributes little to the solution; Bess and a temporarily incapacitated George help Nancy save Mrs. Eldridge. Marriage, in the 1960s at least, would have meant giving up her calling, and Nancy, ever the effectual career woman, would not let that happen, at least not for a good while.

While Nancy can be interpreted in a variety of ways in the original novels (distrustful of authority, a bit of a vigilante, unusually gifted and blessed with her father's prestige, and perhaps even a slight snob), she evolves to change with the tastes of her readers in the revised novels. She remains unattached and uncommitted to any one man, but alluring to them all, without becoming a stereotypical flirt. Her well-honed detective instincts are unfailing and she functions both as a leader and as an integral member of a community, working with her friends, law enforcement, her father, and the disenfranchised to restore order and return the displaced. However, Nancy has no intention of changing society, save by her own example. She can be read in so many different ways, and her popularity endures, because her character is static. The Nancy of the 1930s does not progress, through trials and tribulations, to the Nancy of the 1960s; she doesn't go to cooking school, develop a passionate interest in civil rights, or apply to a progressive college. Instead, Nancy becomes more well-rounded, while retaining her identity as a moral and upstanding citizen. What Mildred Wirt and Harriet Stratemeyer understood about Nancy was that keeping her on the cusp of realization, making her equal to any challenge she meets, and delivering on their promise of Nancy Drew as first and foremost a girl sleuth, her fans and readers would find her irresistible. They unintentionally managed to sell not only books, but the vision of a lifestyle and more accurately a moment in particular. That static portrayal

immortalized the idea of the girl sleuth, and helped establish her as the cultural icon she remains to this day.

However, to her readership, Nancy can be the perfect role model for a thousand different reasons. She's strong and capable when it comes to catching criminals, but she is also deferential to authority, whether it be in the form of her father or law enforcement officials. She is attractive but down-to-earth at the same time, and though she does not achieve everything she attempts, through perseverance she is always able to reach her own goals. By maintaining an undefined relationship with her boyfriend, she gives girls permission to imagine an alternative to adulthood as synonymous with marriage and motherhood. She is accomplished enough to be equal to nearly any obstacle, and while she does occasionally fall victim to despair and doubt, she always manages to prove herself worthy, not only as the apple of her father's eye but as a serious, logical detective.

In the following chapter I explore the next generation of permutations and changes in Nancy's character and the kinds of cases she solves, and the way those changes influenced the way her readership viewed her, as a role model and as icon of their times.

Chapter II: Second-Generation Nancy Drew

In the 1980s, Simon & Schuster reimagined Nancy Drew for a new generation of readers.

The *Nancy Drew Files* series began in 1986, without the guiding hand of Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, and was meant to "reflect the interests and concerns of today's teens."[1] In the first book of the series, *Secrets Can Kill*, Nancy receives her updated blue roadster in the form of a gift from her father, but this time it's a brand-new blue Mustang GT convertible, which she drives through various mishaps through the remainder of the series. The Nancy of the *Files* is a strawberry-blonde, but in some ways she's still familiar:

> "At eighteen, Nancy Drew already had a reputation in her home town of River Heights as one of the brightest, hottest young detectives around. And she'd earned every bit of that reputation the hard way—by tracking down clues and solving mysteries that ranged from arson to kidnapping."[2]

Secrets Can Kill, however, is no update of *Secret of the Old Clock*. Nancy's tackling what at first appears to be a case of school vandalism and theft, but in the end takes down a U.S. defense employee guilty of selling secrets to the ominous U.S.S.R. A murder is committed halfway through the book, and a (non-recurring) character is shot during the climax. Nancy's (old, red) car explodes, allowing her father to provide the new, blue Mustang. And the first kiss of the series comes not from Ned, but from Nancy's contact on the case, the Porsche-driving hottie Daryl Gray.

The magnitude of the above changes cannot be overstated. Nancy in the earlier stories investigated only disappearances, never murder cases, and invariably recovered the object of her search. By demonstrating her proficiency at operating within the more adult sphere of solving murder cases, Nancy proves herself equal to her father, but the scope of his own cases has also widened. The changes also, at least in part, answer concerns that the original stories were juvenile or otherwise weak, but stylistically the newer series still leaves itself open to the same charge of "trashy" dialogue and description. The *Files* are firmly located in their context, the late 1980s and 1990s. Though the cover art has always reflected a certain level of attention to contemporary fashion trends and artistic concepts, the covers of the *Files* volumes portray Nancy not as timeless beauty but as what Plunkett-

[1] *Girl Sleuth*, p.300.
[2] *Secrets Can Kill*, p.2.

Powell describes as "debutante" Nancy.[3] Her bustline has increased and she stares out at the reader, usually with a male figure at her side or in the background. That preoccupation with physical beauty and the opposite sex is reinforced by the texts themselves, and is discussed below.

Bess and George are mostly the same, just described in updated language:

> Bess and George were Nancy's best friends, and they were cousins, but that was about all they had in common. Blond-haired Bess was bubbly and easygoing, and always on the lookout for two things: a good diet and a great date. So far she hadn't found either. She was constantly trying to lose five pounds, and she fell in and out of love every other month.
>
> George, with curly dark hair and a shy smile, was sweet, with a dry sense of humor and the beautifully toned body of an athlete. George liked boys as much as Bess did, but she was more serious about love. "When I fall," she'd say, "it's going to be for real."[4]

Bess, no longer chubby (merely five pounds overweight; later in the series it's revealed that she wears a size six), is the flirt of the group, while George is the judo expert. Their help in Nancy's mysteries is much more a collaborative effort. Nancy often bounces her theories off Bess and George, and Ned, while she's developing them. When her contacts on cases (the characters which, in the original stories, would have been the disenfranchised orphans or spinsters) express misgivings about sharing their problems in front of Nancy's friends, Nancy repeats her father's reassurance from *Secret of the Old Clock*, when his business associate worries that Nancy might prove untrustworthy as an audience: she trusts her friends implicitly, they are integral to her investigative techniques, and any facts which should be shared with her can be shared with them as well. Bess and George, and Ned, as capable helpers, never betray that confidence, just as Nancy never betrayed that of her father.

The evolution of Nancy's peer group also progresses, as it did from the original series into the

[3] p.51.

[4] Ibid., p.3-4. The George of the original series could rarely be labeled "sweet," and more often sat out on dances than not. Though George is still a somewhat masculine presence (she's the judo expert, and she still teases Bess about shopping, flirting, and eating), that masculinity is tempered by her undeniable femininity. In the third book, *Murder on Ice*, George falls for Nancy's prime suspect and defends him against Nancy, resulting in a rift similar to the one between the girls in *Twisted Candles*. The suspected complicity of boys in Nancy's mysteries often comes between the girls. When these same issues come up between Nancy and Ned, they understandably revolve around Ned's male peers.

rewrites. Concerns about George's sexuality are answered by granting her the same occasional relationship status as her cousin,[5] though George also tends to serve as the "muscle" of the group even when males are around. Bess remains cautious, and prefers a shopping trip over a dangerous mystery anytime, but her relationship with Nancy means that Bess can and often does rise to the challenge of improvising a timely misdirection or pumping a suspect for information. Just as her first readers probably found they had more in common with the people Nancy helps than Nancy herself, readers of the *Files* could identify more readily with the mall-hopping Bess or the fitness buff George, even though Nancy is the clear heroine of the series. However, Bess and George share Nancy's strength and weakness as ultimately undefined characters. For example, Nancy, Bess, and George never plan on going to college, but they never eliminate it as a possibility. What differentiates Nancy from Bess and George, besides her status as leader, detective, and adventurer of the group, is her ability to stay in a long-term relationship with a member of the opposite sex.

Thus Ned, or more specifically Nancy's relationship with him, is a huge part of the series.

> Nancy glanced at the mirror above her dresser where she'd stuck a snapshot of Ned Nickerson, and her grin changed to a soft smile as she thought of the first boy she'd ever loved.
>
> Nancy and Ned had a very special relationship. They'd known each other since they were kids, and when they'd first realized they loved each other, they'd thought it would last forever. But neither one was ready yet for a 'forever' commitment, so occasionally they drifted apart, dating other people. Yet somehow, Nancy always found herself coming back to Ned. They were so in tune with each other that no matter what they were doing—whether it was tracking down the clues to a mystery or planning a private party for two—it seemed that they could read each other's thoughts.[6]

Nancy's subsequent flirtation with Daryl Gray sets up a tension which lasts through the first ten books of the series, culminating in Nancy and Ned's breakup in *Two Points to Murder* and their

[5] Parodies of Nancy Drew stories, drawing from the 1960s version of George's character, sometimes portray her as a lesbian (see Chelsea Cain's *Confessions of a Teen Sleuth*). The series books, and most fanfic writers, consistently characterize her as heterosexual, even if she is less likely to find herself in a stable relationship.

[6] Ibid., p.4.

reconciliation in *False Moves* and *Buried Secrets*. Those books, and all the ones between, describe a breakdown in communication between Nancy and Ned, and the ways they manage to overcome it. Ned appears in all but one book of the first ten, and even in that book he's still mentioned.

Ned, in many ways, has at least partially taken the place of Nancy's father in the original series.[7] In *White Water Terror*, Ned manages to save Nancy's life twice. After the first time, when Ned pulled Nancy out of the path of a huge boulder:

> As Ned put his arms around her, Nancy began to tremble uncontrollably. Ned's arms felt so strong and protective, as if they could shield her from anything the world could throw at her. ...Suddenly she realized the enormity of what had just happened. If it hadn't been for Ned's quick action, she'd be smashed like those trees. She swayed dizzily and sagged against Ned.
>
> He held her tightly, then lowered her gently onto a rock.[8]

The next morning, Ned kills a rattlesnake which is about to strike Nancy. The Freudian significance of this act is probably not coincidental. Even though another couple on the trip sleep in close proximity (but not together), Nancy sleeps surrounded by Bess and George, with Ned nearby. Despite Simon & Schuster's attempt to make the *Files* reflect current teen concerns, Nancy and Ned never even bring up the topic of sex. Their makeout sessions are usually interrupted (by Nancy's cases) before they can get very far, if not by Nancy herself. If she and Ned are staying in the same hotel, their rooms are usually in separate wings. No female character in a Nancy Drew File is ever raped or an unwed mother. For all the women's liberation movement, the *Files* seem strangely behind the times in that respect.

Ned is Emerson's star quarterback and co-captain of the basketball team, despite his being a sophomore.[9] He's more than equal to the physical demands of being Nancy Drew's boyfriend; his frustration is based on the amount of time her cases take away from their relationship. In *Smile and Say Murder*, Nancy unceremoniously cancels a trip Ned planned to take to the mountains with her and his

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[7] When Nancy is about to be roasted alive in a sauna in *Two Points to Murder*, she thinks not of how it will affect her father but how it will make Ned sorry for the way he's been treating her, and then uses a silver pen, a gift from her father, to short the circuit and disable the heating element.

[8] *White Water Terror*, p.105-6.

[9] The series also establishes him as pro material in those sports as well as baseball (*Till Death Do Us Part*).

family, to take a case.[10] In *Two Points to Murder*, the bigger problem is that Ned and his basketball teammates *are* the case. Nancy suspects Ned's co-captain, but Ned trusts him and won't hear of Nancy's suspicions. Even after it turns out Nancy was right, Ned still thinks her pursuit of the case has gone too far. Nancy asks forgiveness for the way she handled Mike as a suspect, but Ned can't forgive her, because the results were so horrible.[11] Ned gives voice to some of the complaints Karen Plunkett-Powell raises in *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*: he doesn't provide Nancy with anything she couldn't get from a hundred other guys,[12] and she's already so independent that it's hard for him to give her love, support and sympathy. Her cases always come before their relationship, his opinion doesn't matter, and Nancy doesn't trust people, including him; Ned is sick of being put down and ignored, and sharing the danger and fun of her cases isn't enough to make up for it. Nancy tells Ned she loves him, but it's too little, too late.

However, Ned brings Nancy's next case to her door,[13] and in the process of solving it, the two manage to reconcile. The friction caused by Nancy's singleminded determination to solve mysteries and her inability to fully commit to Ned remains an issue between the two of them for the duration of the series. By further exploring the strain Nancy's dedication to her chosen career places on her relationship, the *Files* address a problem the previous series declined to investigate. When Ned tells Nancy, as he does repeatedly, that he loves her not only in spite of but because she is so dedicated to solving mysteries, readers are shown that their heroine can usually successfully balance romance and career, in an arguably adult manner. Nancy may experience doubts in her relationship with Ned, and question whether she should remain with him, but she almost never questions her choice to be a detective or her qualifications for that role.

Leaving Nancy and Ned's relationship aside for a moment, Nancy herself is portrayed as an

[10] In an entirely related development, Ned takes an undercover assignment to help Nancy, and Nancy's insecurity in their relationship makes her irrationally see Ned as flirting with a suspect when he's only trying to get information. She refuses to listen to any of his explanations for his behavior, and only when a third party intervenes does she take Ned back.

[11] Mike decides to quit the gambling ring of which he's a member, and as a direct result is thrown off the gym roof. His spine is injured, and though the doctor thinks he'll probably walk again, he'll never be able to play basketball.

[12] "In the late 1940s, readers and journalists started grumbling about Ned: Ned isn't strong enough for her... he is too bland... he never complains... he is just there to fix her car or punch an especially sinister villain" (Plunkett-Powell 104-05).

[13] Either *False Moves* was written by someone else, or the author was sloppy with his or her continuity. The conclusion of *Two Points to Murder* states that Ned's out for the season; when he comes to see Nancy about a month later, he tells her that he sank the winning basket in a subsequent game.

ordinary (though attractive) girl with above-average skills. Nancy may rush to snap judgement on suspects as she meets them, but her snap judgements are wrong as often as they are right. She and Ned don't like the look of Dave Peck in *Deadly Intent*, and he turns out to be involved in the record piracy scheme; Nancy likes Yvonne Verdi, the publisher of the hot teen magazine *Flash*, possibly because Yvonne has excelled in a male-dominated field, but Yvonne turns out to be the somewhat unbalanced culprit. Nancy's a good enough tennis player to copy Teresa Montenegro's style and fool a crowd into thinking she's the semi-professional. However, Nancy also carries a lockpick kit with her most of the time, owns a fingerprinting kit, can bypass a lock using a credit card, and hot-wires a car. She justifies her actions because the contact who brings her in on a case usually authorizes her to do "whatever's necessary" to find the culprit. Therefore she breaks into school lockers and locker rooms with impunity. This stands in strong contrast to the previous novels, where Nancy always "happened upon" unlocked doors or accidentally overheard crucial conversations. By taking a more direct and masculine role in her investigations, Nancy simultaneously opens herself to attack as less law-abiding and appears to take her career as a detective more seriously. Because the *Files* begins with Nancy as an established detective, already having learned through previous cases the proper way to behave and track down suspects, the reader no longer questions whether her "mysteries" are just a lucky and passionate hobby for Nancy. Her established reputation means that she does not have to wait for happenstance or chance meetings to bring another mystery her way. By showing Nancy in this light, the authors also diminish the modesty which was a hallmark of Nancy's character in the original novels. Nancy still, on the whole, downplays her role in solving cases, but the strength of that earned reputation belies such modesty.

Nancy in the 1980s is fluent in Spanish, has a brown belt in karate, and is proficient at judo. She can develop film in a darkroom by herself and knows how to surf and sail. She doesn't know everything, though: in *Hit and Run Holiday*, Nancy learns about illegal immigrants *and* how to windsurf from an undercover police detective.[14] By leaving some gaps in Nancy's knowledge and experience, the stories also partially satisfy didactic purposes. If one reads the *Nancy Drew Files* as a type of

[14] The stories of (female) illegal immigrants almost always end happily. In *Hit and Run Holiday*, Ricardo is an activist for the rights of illegal aliens, but he's shot and killed; Maria is sponsored by a white woman and allowed to stay in the United States legally (and go to school to become an engineer). In *Deadly Doubles* Roberto, a freedom fighter for San Carlos, is tortured and murdered (and in the course of the book suspected to be a double agent); Teresa Montenegro, while she is only a visitor to the country, is granted asylum so she can continue to play tennis, for the United States.

instructional or conduct guide, Nancy as role model provides her readers with a thousand small details of etiquette, social behavior, proper conduct, and how to defeat rattlesnakes, stop a runaway horse, or escape from a skid on an icy road. She thus enables girls to, in some small way, emulate her, by becoming at least partially self-sufficient. One primary example of this reading of Nancy is when a character on a television show, after learning how to successfully change a tire, proclaims "I feel like Nancy Drew!"[15]

Nancy is also, in the *Files* series and those following, less perfect. She does not always take frustration well, and her reaction to Ned in some books is, to put it mildly, less than rational. Where the Nancy of the original series was a girl detective first and a social creature second, Nancy as imagined during and after the 1980s has a life outside her cases, and the conflict between those two spheres is allowed to cause her personal grief. No longer is she the master of every situation; she can, and does, lose control of her temper and strain her relationships with those around her. By showing how she manages to overcome such problems, the texts allow readers another way to understand and identify with Nancy. While this answers some complaints about the realism of Nancy as a character, it also represents an intermediary step between Nancy as a perfect static creation, and Nancy as imagined by her readers, who desire to see her in more challenging situations than authorized texts are allowed to portray.

Where non-Caucasian characters were rather stereotypically portrayed in the earlier Nancy Drew stories, almost all the villains in the *Nancy Drew Files* are white (Craig, Ned's basketball teammate, is black and involved in the gambling ring, but his role is diminished by the presence of the white doctor as ringleader). Nancy, when undercover as an intern at *Flash*, makes friends with another female black intern, and at least three of Ned's basketball teammates are black. Because *Deadly Doubles* has such a strong connection to South America (Teresa Montenegro, the tennis player Nancy protects, is from a fictional country there called San Carlos), the villains of that piece are largely Hispanic. Katya Alexandrovna, a Russian ballet dancer, is one of Nancy's childhood heroines but is proven guilty of theft in *False Moves*. In *White Water Terror*, Nancy's antagonist is Paula Hancock, whose father Nancy put away for embezzlement. Paula is white, but she is also insane, and Nancy is unable to prevent her accidental death during the climax of the story. Undoubtedly Paula, if left alive,

[15] The television show *That '70s Show* has many references to Nancy Drew, including the above, made by the character Jackie in the first-season episode "Career Day."

would have found a way to continue terrorizing Nancy, and the authors of the *Files* may let Nancy's romantic entanglements last for several volumes,[16] but the criminals she removes from society tend to stay that way.

Nancy's archnemesis is introduced in the first book of the series, as well. Brenda Carlton, black-haired and green-eyed, is Nancy's dark and less capable evil twin.

> As she looked at Brenda, standing there in her trendy trenchcoat, a notebook and pen in one hand, Nancy felt like laughing. Brenda had delusions of being an investigative reporter for *Today's Times*, her daddy's award-winning newspaper. But as far as Nancy was concerned, the only things Brenda did well were wear clothes—and mess up Nancy's investigations. She'd done that too many times for Nancy ever to trust her, and there she was again, smirking and lurking.[17]

The similarities between them abound. The original Nancy fancied herself a detective based on her father's successful practice. The Nancy of the *Files* would herself wear a trendy trenchcoat (though hers would probably be referred to as "stylish" instead). Nancy's detective work vacillates between amateur and professional several times in the course of the series.[18] Nancy, it is revealed in *Deadly Intent*, also carries a notebook and pen wherever she goes.

Brenda turns up to blow Nancy's cover in *Smile and Say Murder*, and challenges Nancy to an "investigative duel" in *Buried Secrets*. During the course of the latter investigation, Brenda manages to do something Nancy could not: she unearths one of Nancy's prime suspects (through her father's connections, but she does so nonetheless). Brenda wears inappropriately feminine apparel (her thin stiletto heel snaps off when she and Nancy are pursuing a suspect), and when she tails a car tailgating Nancy, she manages to remember almost none of the license plate or the make or model of the car.

Brenda, although Nancy views her as an annoyance to be endured, serves as a foil to Nancy, to demonstrate what Nancy could otherwise be. She exaggerates all of Nancy's characteristics. Brenda trades on her father's name because she, unlike Nancy, cannot succeed in a meritorious

[16] Here I'm specifically thinking of the "Summer of Love" and "Passport to Romance" trilogies.
[17] *Secrets Can Kill*, p.65-66.
[18] Her notoriety varies as well. In the first volume, she is River Heights' hottest teen detective; in the second volume, she's "one of the nation's top detectives" (*Deadly Intent* p.2), and in the third volume, *Murder on Ice*, she's internationally famous (p.4). Even though Nancy turns down Mick's offer of a cover story in the fourth volume (*Smile and Say Murder*), citing a need to keep her profile low, in the seventh Senator Kilpatrick details Nancy's heroic efforts to save her life in a press conference (*Deadly Doubles*).

system. In a psychological reading, Nancy may dislike Brenda so much because Brenda is too much like Nancy herself, for comfort. When compared to Brenda, Nancy almost always comes off favorably. Brenda, by serving as an overblown caricature of the girl sleuth, allows Nancy to demonstrate her authenticity as the well-mannered original.

This characterization of Brenda as a döppelganger is more fully realized later in the series, when Nancy is impersonated by an extortionist and therefore, for the course of the story, unable to participate in the apprehension of the criminal. Even Nancy's trusted Chief McGinnis, who knows that Nancy would never have been involved, has to accept the mistaken eyewitness testimony of one of the victims. Since her own identity is thus verboten, Nancy disguises herself as Brenda Carlton and is therefore able to use Brenda's given skill set to solve the mystery. While Nancy relishes this opportunity to become someone else for a while, after her name is cleared she returns to her former appearance and identity. Nancy dons many different names and disguises in the course of the series, but her masquerade as Brenda is startlingly effective.

Hannah Gruen's role in Nancy's life has stayed expanded from the revised *Mystery Stories*.

> Hannah Gruen had been with the Drews since Nancy was born. After Mrs. Drew died, when Nancy was still a baby, Hannah's role had grown way beyond that of a housekeeper. Mrs. Gruen had hugged and scolded Nancy through childhood, bandaging scraped knees and kissing away tears. And the years went by, she was always ready with encouragement and advice. And, of course, the hugging and scolding had continued, too. In time Hannah had become almost a second mother to Nancy. She was always there when Nancy's father's work as a lawyer took him away from his daughter. Carson Drew trusted Hannah implicitly, and Nancy loved her without question. [19]

Hannah begs Nancy not to reopen a thirty-year-old murder investigation in *Buried Secrets*, but her reluctance is due to her own history: she always believed her boyfriend at the time might have been involved in the murder. Nancy, of course, doesn't heed Hannah's warning to stay off the case, and in the end finds that Hannah's ex was guilty of obstruction of justice, but not the murder itself. When their house is ransacked, in the same book, Nancy helps Hannah put everything back in order.

[19] *Secrets Can Kill*, p.6.

Hannah is the one who comforts and understands Nancy's feelings after Ned breaks up with her.[20] In many ways, Hannah functions as Nancy's mother, but without the authority of a blood-bond behind her suggestions. Nancy's final accountability is not to Hannah, but to her father (and Ned).[21]

A few years after the introduction of the *Files*, Simon & Schuster began producing a spinoff series: *Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys SuperMysteries*. Since the Hardy Boys had their own series reboot, in the form of the *Hardy Boys Casefiles*, the *SuperMysteries* were a way to bring the detectives together.[22] The series is penned under the same name, Carolyn Keene, and there is little to no change in character between the Nancy (and Bess, George, and Ned) of the *Files* and the *SuperMysteries*. However, the *SuperMysteries* introduce a very interesting development: Nancy Drew and Frank Hardy are romantically attracted to each other.[23] While they don't act on that attraction very often, citing their significant others, it is present in several of the volumes. Nancy's reaction to their involvement also follows the appropriate trend in the *Files*: Nancy stops the relationship, confesses her transgression to Ned, and is granted forgiveness. In *Last Resort*, she vows to herself not to act on the attraction she feels for Frank anymore, but she eventually breaks her word.

This flirtation between Nancy Drew and Frank Hardy was a way to tantalize readers, since it never matured into a relationship. Ned's career goals remain undefined for the duration of the series, but he shows little interest in joining Nancy in a career as a detective. However, Frank and Nancy share the same passion for solving mysteries, and Frank can, in some ways, therefore represent a more ideal partner for her. She was, in a way, invented as his female counterpart. By leaving her relationship with him open-ended, the authors leave readers with the impression that Nancy, if given an opportunity, might find a more fulfilling (and possibly more secure) relationship with Frank. For that reason, a great deal of fanfiction is dedicated to exploring that potential, since it was never realized in any authorized

[20] Carson's out to dinner at the time. Carson's business trips have also become more exotic: he goes to Boston, arrives to chew Senator Kilpatrick out when Nancy's on the case in Washington, D.C., and spends a volume in the Middle East. When Carson does try to reassure Nancy over her uncertain relationship with Ned, in *Smile and Say Murder*, his efforts are unsuccessful.

[21] During a particularly dangerous case, *Deadly Doubles*, Carson tells his daughter "You're a human being, Nancy, not a computer or a comic-book heroine!" (p.103). Ironically, Nancy became a comic-book heroine in a spinoff of the *Girl Detective* series.

[22] This probably wasn't planned from the beginning: in the fourth *Nancy Drew Files*, a character named Mick tells Nancy that he's been reading thrillers ever since he discovered the Hardy Boys in grade school.

[23] In the fifth book of the series, *Last Resort*, Nancy and Frank are snowed into a mountain cabin and share a kiss. In the twenty-fifth, *Secrets of the Nile*, Nancy and Bess pose as Frank and Joe's wives, respectively, for a case.

text.

Nancy and Ned's only breakup in the entirety of the series was over a case.[24] Though Nancy "dates other people" often, sometimes in every other book, her cheating doesn't seem to bother Ned nearly as much as her cases. Ned, on the other hand, dates other girls very rarely, even though they flirt with him constantly. Ned has the willpower to resist, where Nancy doesn't; the flirtations with other girls make her jealous, and in turn bring her closer to Ned.[25] As he comments in one volume, he knows he loves Nancy because otherwise her flirtations wouldn't hurt him so much. But Ned is Nancy's constant; he rates at least a mention in every book, and with few exceptions[26] he's the one she returns to, again and again.[27]

In the *Files* as well as the *SuperMysteries*, Nancy's ability to disguise herself as an ordinary person comes in handy. The Nancy of the original stories would never dream of taking a position as a waitress to help solve her case; Nancy, in Files 79, does exactly that. She can play a semi-professional tennis player, a taxi driver, a magazine intern, a ghostwriter,[28] and an FBI trainee with equal ease. She sends George undercover in a gang and turns Bess into a standup comedienne. Even though Nancy proves more than proficient at all these careers, she always returns to that of the amateur detective, without ever planning to go to college or take classes in pursuit of her real goal.[29]

The *Nancy Drew On Campus* series (1995-1998) finds Nancy in college, pursuing a journalism degree, and answering some of the unrealities of the *Nancy Drew Files* series. In short order Nancy and Ned break up, and while Nancy becomes entangled with a string of still rather chaste boyfriends during the course of the series, George eventually has a pregnancy scare and Bess loses the love of her life in a motorcycle accident. Nancy's dormmates also appear in the majority of the

[24] They break up temporarily in *Smile and Say Murder*, but since it's over within a few pages and as far as Ned's concerned he's still Nancy's boyfriend, it doesn't really count.
[25] Nancy and Ned are both capable of going overboard when it comes to those flirtations. Ned shows off in front of Nancy's would-be suitor, Sasha Petrov, and nearly gets him killed. Nancy's so insecure in their relationship that when any other girl even glances in Ned's direction, she becomes either possessive or insanely jealous, probably depending on the author of the volume.
[26] Mick Devlin, an Australian hotshot detective who romances Nancy in Files 72-74, returns in Files 96, but his pursuit of her proves less successful.
[27] Ned's also the first man to propose to Nancy, in *Till Death Do Us Part* (Files 24). Mick Devlin also proposes to Nancy, during Files 74. She turns them both down.
[28] This rather meta turn of events occurs in Files 11, *Heart of Danger*.
[29] It's worth noting that, even though Nancy did turn down Ned's proposal, she does occasionally and in a dreamy sort of way imagine herself marrying Ned, with the caveat that such a ceremony won't happen anytime soon. Ned would have to graduate college first, and, despite his being in college for 75 years, he still hasn't managed to earn a degree.

stories, and Nancy stumbles onto mysteries quite often, but more of the text is taken up with soap-opera plot twists and the love lives of the three girls than any crimes Nancy tries to solve. Lasting for 25 volumes (compared to the 124 of the *Files*) and three years (compared to the ten-plus years of the *Files*), the series demonstrates that perhaps a hint of unrealism in Nancy Drew books was still a good thing.

The *Nancy Drew: Girl Detective* series began in 2004 and is still being published today. Nancy narrates the stories in first-person (all other series I mention are in the usual third-person past tense), and describes herself this way in the inaugural volume:

> My friends call me Nancy. My enemies call me a lot of other things, like "that girl who cooked my goose." They actually sometimes speak like that, but what can you expect from criminals? See, I'm a detective. Well, not really. I mean, I don't have a license or anything. I don't carry a badge or a gun, in part because I wouldn't touch a gun even if I could, and also because I'm just not old enough. But I *am* old enough to know when something isn't right, when somebody's getting an unfair deal, when someone's done something they shouldn't do. And I know how to stop them, catch them, and get them into the hands of the law, where they belong. I take those things seriously, and I'm almost never wrong.
>
> My best friends, Bess and George, might not totally agree with me. They tell me I'm wrong a lot, and that they have to cover for me all the time just to make me look good. Bess would tell you I dress badly. I call it casual. George would tell you I'm not focused. By that she'd mean that once again I forgot to fill my car with gas or bring enough money to buy lunch. But they both know I'm always focused when it comes to crime. Always.

Nancy drives a hybrid car and has a cell phone, but to keep readers on their toes, Nancy often forgets to fill her car with gas or charge said cell phone. Compared to the *Files*, her cases are often tamer: her first involves missing zucchini. Ned is now the son of the newspaper editor, while Nancy's archnemesis is the daughter of another famous lawyer named Deirdre Shannon.[30] Nancy's also

[30] Nancy describes Deirdre in much the same way her earlier incarnation described Brenda: she's snobby and good for wearing clothes well, but not much else (*Without a Trace* p.35). However, Deirdre often flirts quite brazenly with Ned, something Brenda would never do.

scatterbrained, a bit forgetful (see the habit of running out of gas), and somewhat dependent on the skills of her friends (Bess is now a whiz at fixing cars, and George is great with computers).[31] What Nancy Drew, girl detective has going for her is persistence. She's still determined to catch the bad guy. She's still a social activist, volunteering at an animal shelter and riding in charity bike races. She still does the things that most girls only wish they could.

Another innovation of the series, besides the introduction of Nancy's first-person narration, is the presence of cliffhanger volumes, meant to catch a reader's interest and virtually demand that she purchase the next volume in the series to find out what happens next. Not all volumes end on a cliffhanger. The original volumes practiced some degree of this when the closing paragraphs provided a title for Nancy's next mystery, but Nancy, before the *Girl Detective* series, never ended a book without finishing her current mystery or by embarking on a new, unresolved case. This change in the newest series may follow a trend in popular culture, specifically in television shows like *Veronica Mars* and *Lost*, to make each episode another chapter in a long-term mystery, but since the books have not switched over to that exclusive format, it may serve merely as a way to boost book sales.

The emphasis on Nancy's career in the *Girl Detective* series serves to regress Nancy to the singleminded determination of the original stories. Balancing her chosen profession with romance or a social life is no longer a concern, and since the stories are told in first-person, this frees up narrative space for more details about the mysteries. Due to their incorporation of advances in technology (the cell phone, the hybrid car), for the stories to maintain the same level of suspense, readers must suspend some disbelief when it comes to Nancy's forgetfulness at charging her cell phone or filling up her car's gas tank. Nancy functions as an integral member of the society of three, with Bess and George, and more fully realizes Nash's comment that Nancy must disguise herself as "normal" only among other extraordinary girls. The realism that had begun to creep into the *Files* and presented itself more forcefully in the *On Campus* series has been dialed back to push Nancy's skills as a detective to the forefront. Since the *Girl Detective* is fast approaching her twenty-fifth volume, the younger readership targeted by the stories must be finding something they like in this somewhat ditzier, more career-driven version of Nancy.

But, as imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, some girls have been writing their own

[31] Even though Bess and George, like Nancy, were consistently only children, *Girl Detective* grants them siblings, possibly explaining their sisterly relationship with Nancy.

adventures for Nancy Drew, further exploring Nancy as a strong feminine character, detective, and heroine. The *Nancy Drew Files*, for all their attempts at modernization and relevance to the contemporary readership, still left Nancy in that liminal state, in the summer after graduation from high school. The *On Campus* series may have been less successful because it failed to consider the winning formula of the original Nancy Drew stories: girls pick them up expecting, first and foremost, a mystery; if they want love triangles and college intrigue, they are more likely to turn to *Sweet Valley University* books, or other series devoted specifically to that genre. By stripping away some of the romance and more "adult" characteristics of Nancy, the *Girl Detective* series locates her as a normal adolescent who just happens to dream of clues instead of movie stars.

Some readers see a different path for Nancy altogether, or seek to fill in the blanks left by the stories. A great deal about Nancy is left undefined: the circumstances of her mother's death, how exactly Hannah Gruen came to work for the Drew household, and ultimately Nancy's future. While these facts are unimportant to Nancy as a detective, readers often pore over every volume of the series, searching for scant textual clues to Nancy's lineage and history. Writing fanfiction is a way some of them explore the character of their role model, and, more than demonstrating her "authorized" evolution as a character, these stories more accurately portray the way her readers think about Nancy and reclaim her for their own, to more accurately serve as their alter ego and true heroine.

Chapter III: *Nancy Drew* Fanfiction

"Fanfiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by folk."[1]

Fanfiction[2] is born in dissatisfaction. That dissatisfaction can be mild ("I wish my show came on more often" or "I wish the books came out more frequently"), moderate ("I wonder why the author/show doesn't explore this particular pairing" or "I can't believe they just betrayed everything we know about the character that way"), or severe ("I don't agree with anything that happened in the last series/season").[3] Fanfiction writers take that dissatisfaction into their writing, and purge it that way; they create new texts, tailored and specific to their own desires for a character, a romantic relationship, or even a simple situation. Fanfiction is a way of reclaiming a pop-culture "myth" and making it more completely realize its purpose as entertainment, by the consumers and fans who are no longer fully satisfied with the original product.

Henry Jenkins, in *Textual Poachers*, describes the process the other way. Fans choose a fandom[4] and write for it, based on their preexisting feelings and ideas, and the fandom's suitability as an arena for those ideas.[5] This process, however, is not always conscious, and most readers of fanfiction cite only dissatisfaction without endorsing a particular agenda; as far as they are concerned, those who become fanfiction writers stumbled onto a popular book series or television show, became a fan, and, only after identifying on some basic level with the source material and experiencing some

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[1] Henry Jenkins, qtd. by Curtin.

[2] "Fanfiction" is, at its simplest level, fictional stories written by fans. Some debate exists over whether legitimately published, for-profit work can be considered "fanfiction." The term "fanfiction" itself originated in the science fiction fandom (see note 4) in the 1930s.

[3] *Girl Sleuth*, p.200, reports that "...girls were writing in to say they wanted Syndicate characters, including Nancy, to have husbands or steady boyfriends, a trend that troubled Harriet until she concluded that it was all about the war [World War II]." Sometimes the dissatisfaction is merely in the scope of the material: Rehak quotes an idea representative of many the beginning of a fanfic: "'I can foresee the day when Nancy Drew stories will be transmitted via satellite to colonies on the moon... She'll be 19, wear a space helmet, and drive her own space ship. And if the space ship runs short of atomic energy... Nancy will say: "Don't worry... only one rocket is out."'" (p.279)

[4] A contraction of "fan" and "kingdom" which generally refers to the group of people who are more than casually interested in a given television show, book, or movie. For ease of understanding, I'll use a *Hamlet* metaphor: if I wrote fanfiction based on *Hamlet*, I would consider myself a part of the *Hamlet* fandom. If I wrote *Hamlet* fanfiction which dealt solely with the Kenneth Branagh movie version, I would still be a member of the *Hamlet* fandom, but only in the subgroup of Branagh-movie fans.

[5] *Textual Poachers*, p.34.

dissatisfaction with it, decided to use it as a suitable vehicle for their own ideas (usually of where that fandom should go).

When I asked specifically why people read (and write) Nancy Drew fanfiction, the responders cited a dissatisfaction with certain elements in the stories.[6] A few said they always wanted to see Nancy and Ned's relationship develop past the level it reached in the books (i.e. to engagement, marriage, production of a family), and therefore read or wrote stories exploring that possibility. Others wanted to develop their writing skills in a safe environment; Jenkins refers to fan(fic) publishing as a "training ground" for those who will go on to become professional writers.[7] In a way, writing with a preexistent set of characters, backgrounds, and situations, is like writing with training wheels. When one writes in a preexisting fandom, the tools at one's disposal have already proven valuable to the creators, and the potential readership is already built in. Granted, such capitalization on the ideas of others constitutes a form of copyright infringement, but from its inception, fanfiction has generally been ignored by the corporations which own the original work, as long as the fanfic itself is not being sold for profit or presented as an original creation by the fanfiction author.

Other Nancy Drew fanfiction readers and writers value a "psychological aspect" which is more deeply explored in fanfic,[8] or express a dissatisfaction in the "level of sophistication and danger and intrigue [in the *Nancy Drew Files*, which] was never as high as that of the Hardy's Casefiles."[9] That dissatisfaction with the source material echoes some of the critical concern over the novels themselves, which has been around since the first volume, and seeks to correct it. However, the responder's concern is not necessarily over the literary merit of the Nancy Drew stories, but their level of intrigue and suspense, especially when limited to a discussion of the Nancy Drew series in relation to that of the Hardy Boys. As such, the responder's stories seek to incorporate more danger and sophistication in the plots Nancy investigates, and thus have her character demonstrate an even greater proficiency at solving mysteries. In that way, the author selects those characteristics of a Nancy Drew story which "work" best for her, and emphasize them above others. For example, Nancy's abilities as a detective are the cornerstone of her character. When the author shows Nancy employing

[6] See the appendices for full responses.
[7] *Textual Poachers*, p.47. While I have only anecdotal evidence to back up this claim, I believe it to be well-founded.
[8] "nancy nickerson," the penname (alias, screenname) of this responder. In addition to masking her identity, "nancy nickerson"'s name indicates her preference for a Nancy and Ned relationship.
[9] "TesubCalle."

her abilities in the more "adult" setting of a law enforcement position, she can therefore increase her emphasis on Nancy's preexisting talents.

Writers, and readers, form a community which by necessity cannot be duplicated with a ghostwriter; one responder in the Nancy Drew fandom said she[10] was "bummed" that her favorite fanfic author had stopped writing, and wasn't sure whether to continue reading in the fandom,[11] while writers cite positive response to their stories as the reason they keep writing. Some fanfiction authors develop their own following of readers who share similar tastes and ideas for how characters should act and be treated. The ultimate realization of this trend is the BNF, or "big name fan," who becomes known for his or her strengths at portraying a certain character or relationship in fanfiction. BNFs have some degree of power within their own fandom or community,[12] and can go so far as to endorse/recommend, or "rec," works of fanfiction to their followers.

Jenkins discusses the plethora of romance-genre fanfiction[13] in terms of the nearly completely female body of fanfic writers and the way females perceive a story as a "narrative to be inhabited" and thus appropriated for psychological exploration, the preferred mode of feminine interpretation.[14] "nancy nickerson"'s reply above tends to back that claim. Jenkins gives the anecdote of how women choose to retell a story in their own words; where men concentrate on relating the action, women are more likely to identify with aspects of the story and thus "inhabit" it in the retelling. This potential for this behavior is pushed even higher in Nancy Drew fanfiction. When girls first read the stories, Nancy is displayed as a nearly perfect role model, and the narratives encourage readers to identify with Nancy and emulate her behavior. Thus, from the beginning, if a reader becomes a fan of the stories, she already begins to inhabit the narrative and see herself as a potential Nancy-figure. The common knowledge that Nancy Drew has no true "author" (that Carolyn Keene does not exist) further

[10] Henry Jenkins' research, while some years old, suggests that the majority of fanfic writers (as a whole, not specifically for Nancy Drew stories) are female. My own experiences in the Nancy Drew fandom back up that suggestion.
[11] "shadowme."
[12] A community refers to a smaller group within a larger fandom. Communities can sometimes exist to promote certain character pairings. A good deal of fanfiction and fandoms post stories and hold discussions at Livejournal.com, and Livejournal's environments for this sort of discussion and dissemination are also known as "communities," but this similarity is probably coincidental. BNFs function like Oprah to a community; while not every member of a community necessarily agrees with Oprah (or the BNF), they at least know of her existence and reputation.
[13] To clarify, this only refers to fanfic written in a romantic style. Practically any fandom can have romantic fanfiction written about it, not just shows or series which feature a romantic pairing.
[14] *Textual Poachers*, p.112.

heightens uncertainty, not about the legitimacy of the novels as entertainment or Nancy as a female role model, but as to who can create Nancy Drew stories. In a way, the difference between any Nancy Drew fanfic writer and "legitimate" writer of a volume of a Nancy Drew series is whether the author receives a check.[15] Therefore, Jenkins' calling fan publishing a place to practice is doubly true for Nancy Drew fanfic writers. Some, on message boards, even directly express their desire to become an authorized "Carolyn Keene" and use their stories as preparation for this role.

Henry Jenkins's *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* asserts that "female," or feminine, romatic texts (Nancy Drew stories would almost indubitably fall into this category) need less reworking than "male" (masculine, action-oriented) texts and are thus less represented in fanfiction, while he also finds that romance, in fanfiction, is being reconceptualized as a feminist fiction (p.45,50). Nancy Drew stories often contain little explicit romance, since their main focus is on the mystery at hand, and are often (but not exclusively) reconceptualized as romances in fanfiction. Since romance is almost exclusively defined as a feminine genre, and since the majority of fanfiction writers, most especially in the Nancy Drew fandom, are women, appropriating Nancy Drew as a romance heroine is a way to bring Nancy closer to her audience, in terms of like characteristics. Placing Nancy in a domestic environment is a way to "play" or experiment with her as a character and role model. While this experimentation need not be directly related to any aspect of the source material and more often bespeaks only of the preferences of the author, Nancy is somewhat of an anomaly as a heroine. While she has a boyfriend (or several), her legitimate authors never limit her by irrevocably attaching her to any one man. By leaving her in that state, the authors kept her appeal more universal but also limited the realms she could explore as a (single) girl detective. This is an important selling point in her character, but it also leaves an avenue wide open for fanfiction to explore.

The website Fanfiction.net[16] is considered the largest fanfic-hosting site on the internet. This is not due to its story selection in any one fandom, but the sheer number of fandoms and languages represented. Anyone age thirteen or older can register and electronically publish his or her fanfic

[15] One can argue that the quality of their work is also a distinguishing factor, and this is usually, though not universally, the case.
[16] http://www.fanfiction.net, hereafter abbreviated FFN.

easily on the website.[17] This is both a positive and a negative: the maintainers of the site do not put the authors through any sort of screening process. Due to the sheer amount of badfic[18] found there, FFN is widely referred to as the "pit of voles," or "the Pit." Authors "post" (electronically publish) their stories and see them appear moments later, can monitor the hit statistics[19] on their stories, and can even publish stories which are not yet finished (these are referred to as "Works in Progress," or "WIPs." A large percentage, perhaps as high as half, of the stories at the site are categorized as incomplete. Because authors are not required to ever finish their stories (there is no punishment,[20] a story cannot be taken down merely because it is unfinished), some authors abandon their stories, put them on hiatus, or simply vanish from the community. FFN is also a fluid archive: authors may choose to "take down" or remove their stories from the site at anytime, and FFN can remove stories which violate its terms of use or are "reported" by readers as inappropriate in some way.

Fanfic can be divided into two categories: relationship-based or non-relationship-based.[21] Fanfic writers who ship Nancy/Ned[22] may write stories which, even if they don't directly address the relationship between the two of them, still make it a part of the story. On the whole, however, the majority of the Nancy Drew stories at FFN support a Nancy/Frank pairing. While this relationship is

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[17] Providing that said story meets the terms of use and is rated below what was once referred to as an NC-17 and now as an "MA" rating (for mature audiences only). The ratings on FFN are K (kid-friendly), K+ (appropriate for older children), T (appropriate for teens), and M (for older readers). To prevent underage readers from easily finding inappropriate stories, the search engines default to displaying only K through T-rated stories, but any user can easily change that setting or go to a given author's page, where all of his or her stories are displayed, to read them.

[18] Predictably, "bad fanfic."

[19] The number of times a given page/chapter of a story has been viewed by another person.

[20] This proves frustrating to readers, who can follow a multiple-chapter story religiously only to find that its author has no plans of completing it. They may leave reviews expressing their interest in the story and begging the author to continue, but the author is not obligated to do so.

[21] This is by no means the only way to categorize fanfic. FFN asks authors to label a story by rating and genre (mystery, romance, angst, etc.), in addition to providing a descriptive summary.

[22] "Ship" is basically a contraction for "support a romantic relationship between." The slash between the two names indicates the pairing (but this is not to be confused with the term "slash"). In *Hamlet* terms, "Hamlet/Ophelia" would represent a story including a romantic relationship between those two characters, while "Hamlet/Laertes" would be a "slash" (homosexual) relationship. An "OTP," or "one true pairing," is a fan's favorite pairing, and is limited to one (overall or per fandom). However, many writers and readers support multiple pairings in a given fandom, and may even read and write stories endorsing different pairings for the same character (Hamlet/Ophelia and Hamlet/Laertes).

considered at least partially canon-based,[23] it was only hinted, and stories categorized as Nancy/Frank are AU.[24]

This is not to say that all fanfiction written about Nancy Drew deals specifically with Nancy in a romance-type story. Even though fanfiction often grows from a dissatisfaction in romantic portrayals in source material, an author may choose to deal with that dissatisfaction in the text of a story, in a side comment in the story itself, or not at all. Stories about Nancy Drew are rarely either Nancy investigating a mystery or Nancy dealing with a romantic relationship; most authors incorporate both aspects, to varying degrees, in their stories. When the *Nancy Drew Files* are used for basis in these stories, the direct relationship between Nancy and romance is less tenuous. More than in any other popular series, the *Files* established Nancy as a young adult exploring romantic relationships while still exercising her skills as a detective.

Because the Nancy Drew stories at FFN are grouped under the heading "Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew," they can include Nancy and/or secondary or tertiary characters from any Nancy Drew series, the Hardy Boys and/or any secondary or tertiary characters from any Hardy Boys series, or both. Therefore some stories under that heading feature only the Hardy Boys, and some only Nancy Drew. The presence of the *Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys SuperMysteries* in canon means that stories featuring both Nancy and the Hardy Boys are not considered "crossover,"[25] and a good deal of Nancy Drew stories archived on the site also feature the Hardy Boys.

To discuss Nancy Drew fanfic in more detail, I have selected five stories which in some ways represent common trends in the fandom:

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[23] "Canon" refers to the legitimate information in a fandom. The *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, Nancy Drew Files, Nancy Drew On Campus* books, and *Nancy Drew: Girl Detective* stories are all "canon," but a fanfic author can choose which series to include or ignore as background for her story. Nancy/Frank is "canon" only in that Nancy and Frank admit a mutual attraction for each other in the *Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys SuperMysteries*. A *Hamlet* canon pairing would be Hamlet/Ophelia; a non-canon pairing would be Ophelia/Rosencrantz.

[24] Alternate Universe. This label applies to stories which do not fit into the canon as written. AU stories can split off from a point within or after canon (for instance, if a story presented Nancy as having joined the American forces going to World War II after *Quest of the Missing Map*, that story would have "gone AU after" that book). An AU *Hamlet* fanfic could find Hamlet committing suicide in the third act, marrying Ophelia and running away to another country, or being revived after his death scene at the conclusion of the play.

[25] Crossovers are stories where characters or settings from other series overlap. If Hamlet found himself in Verona with Romeo and Juliet, or if Miranda walked into Hamlet's castle, such a story would be considered crossover because it combines elements from separate series. This term isn't limited to connected series; Hamlet could also walk onto the bridge of the starship *Enterprise* in a crossover fic.

-Nancy alone, with no romantic involvement ("The Hourglass Mystery");

-Nancy/Ned with no secondary romantic involvement ("The Meeting");

-Nancy/Ned ending in Nancy/Frank ("Who's That Girl" and "Risking Love for Love"); and

-Nancy/Frank romantic tension/involvement ("Holiday Trials").

As made apparent by my categorization, fanfic writers overwhelmingly (but not exclusively) choose to discuss romantic entanglements in the series. This is not uncommon in any fandom; if fans express any dissatisfaction over the source material, that dissatisfaction is usually first seen in a story's treatment of canon relationships. As a female role model, Nancy also is predisposed to characterization as a romantic heroine, despite her identity being first and foremost as a detective. Perhaps in part because of her status as a cultural icon, readers may wish to explore Nancy's relationships more fully. This is a slight paradox, because, as previously argued, Nancy's iconic status is in part due to her unwillingness to form overtly romantic attachments, and her popularity as a series heroine probably would have faltered otherwise. But fanfiction, due to its very nature as a fringe activity, can succeed where authorized texts would fail. Nancy/Frank stories are targeted at a niche market within the fanfiction-reading community, and, because authors accept reviews[26] instead of money for currency within the community, as long as an author is receiving his or her own predetermined level of "payment," the stories can and do continue. Some authors, however, write only to fulfill their own creative instincts, and therefore such currency may be discouraged or refused. Within the sometimes competitive context of FFN, however, most authors value reader reviews both as feedback and as a way to endorse their story to future readers.

Authors and readers also have the satisfaction and disappointment of knowing that whatever fanfiction may do to the series characters, the series does not actually change in response. An author can easily write a story where Carson dies and explore Nancy's response to that event, without actually killing Carson in canon; a reader can take in the story knowing full well that Carson will never die in any

[26] "Reviews" are feedback on a story. Positive reviews usually include some emotional response ("I really loved that scene where Hamlet punched out Laertes") and can also include constructive criticism ("...but you also ended a lot of your sentences with prepositions"). Most constructive criticism is accompanied by praise for a particular aspect of the story. "Flames," or negative feedback, can be nonconstructive criticism ("this story sucks") or an attack on the author ("you suck as a writer"). In an attempt to reduce flaming (the act of being "flamed" or attacked), some authors choose to only receive "signed," or non-anonymous, reviews. Flames in the Nancy Drew fic community, in general, seem to be attacks on perceived deficiencies in writing style, or on the endorsement of a pairing which the "flamer" does not support. Reviews are discussed in greater detail and context below.

canon work, and enjoy the piece as a sort of intellectual exercise. Fanfiction, or more generally internet-based fan response, is not unheard of as a way to influence the course of a television show or series, but due to the murky copyright issues involved when "legitimate" authors read and are influenced by the original ideas of fanfiction producers, fanfiction is generally not seen as a viable vehicle for such influence. Fanfiction authors, although they do not hold the rights to make profit from their portrayal of a preexisting (owned, non-public domain) character, do in fact hold copyright over the content of their stories and their original ideas. This is another iteration of the training-wheels idea: if an author's idea is good enough, she may eventually choose to rewrite it as an original piece of fiction, eliminating fanfictional elements and thereby reclaim it as her own work.

Because a Nancy/Frank relationship never actually came to fruition in legitimate series texts, this possibility is explored over and over again in fanfiction, in a variety of ways. Many of these stories set up an author-created "universe"[27] : Nancy can leave Ned at the end of one story to pursue a romantic relationship with Frank, while subsequent stories in the universe return to or progress that relationship. Readers respond overwhelmingly to such stories, leaving positive reviews which are then attached to the story and can be viewed by subsequent readers. A high number of reviews can speak either to the quality or the popularity of a pairing in a work. When readers desire stories about a particular pairing, they often read every story featuring the couple and accept writing of a lower quality in compromise. However, if a posted story is so garbled and stylistically challenged as to be incomprehensible, even if it endorses a popular pairing, it can still fall under attack.

First and foremost, every fanfic author is a fan. Their dedication to the source material serves as a form of currency in the fanfic environment; slips in that dedication leave a work vulnerable to attack as OOC.[28] For this reason, good Nancy Drew fanfiction authors make sure their stories maintain a close tie to the source material, either in style, content, or by using it as a major reference point. For a

[27] This is best explained in terms of a series. An AU *Hamlet* "universe" (series) could start with a story where Horatio defends the castle against siege forces, followed by a story where Horatio takes over the kingdom and sets about finding himself a consort. A given story may be AU (non-canonical); a series, is not necessarily non-canonical (AU). The "universe"/series could also deal with exploring each character's psychological state within canon: Ophelia's thoughts just before drowning herself, Gertrude's thoughts when she realizes Claudius's complicity.

[28] "OOC" stands for "out of character," a subjective term indicating character behavior which is not endorsed by or reflected in the original work. A story which included Carson physically abusing Nancy would be considered OOC, unless justified by the piece (and even then, some readers would still reject it). Hamlet deciding to become Claudius's adoring stepson/nephew would probably be considered OOC.

certain type of story and author, Nancy Drew fanfic is ideal because the original stories themselves so consistently iterate a genre and a set plot. However, for some authors, that static quality is a negative characteristic they seek to correct, by changing certain aspects of the original stories. Every author has her own motivations for selecting Nancy Drew as her vehicle of expression, and what is crucial to one author might be the first quality discarded for the next. Fanfic authors, especially in the Nancy Drew fandom, have such a wide selection of canonical materials to choose from that they can plant "in-jokes," references which would only be recognized by similarly devoted fans.[29] This practice further constricts the audience for a given work, creating a privileged "in-group" of those who pick up on the reference. Due to the age of most of the fanfic writers (mid-teens to late twenties, based on their profiles), stories are based on the Nancy Drew as embodied in the *Files* and in the spinoff *SuperMysteries* series. Nancy's character in these series, while maintaining a strong tie to her previous incarnations in the 1930s and 60s, is more accessible to modern readers; the *Files* more especially are generally available in public libraries and the personal collections of older readers. Most of the fandom is familiar with the structure and style of both the *Files* volumes and the original (1960s) series.[30] Most important to a majority of her writers is the concept of Nancy as a strong female character and heroine, with above-average intelligence and clarity of thought; the same qualities which make Nancy a cultural icon also make her appropriate as fanfictional heroine.

The first story I analyze is described this way by the author, "mazebuilder24," on her profile page:

> In "The Hourglass Mystery," I was trying to meld the suspense of the '70s era Nancy Drew novels ("Suddenly, a ghostly figure appeared in the hall!") with the quasi-serious themes of sacrifice, abandonment, and family loyalty. Not to mention a Hawthorne-esque mistrust of science, a faintly disturbing sibling relationship a la Edgar Allen Poe, various unexplained supernatural elements, and a creepy

[29] A character could make a throwaway (unimportant to the plot) reference to "that time we met Dracula," which would confuse some readers but be recognized by those familiar with the 1970s television series or the novelization *The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew Meet Dracula*.
[30] A number of members of the Nancy Drew fandom have never read or heard of the original 1930s stories. Within the context of fanfiction, this hardly presents a problem, since few if any authors reference those original works or base their version of Nancy on those volumes.

evangelist. But don't let that scare you off.[31]

"The Hourglass Mystery" finds Nancy in a superficially familiar situation: former classmate (and orphan) Celia Laramie begs Nancy, at her brother's graveside, to solve the puzzle of his sudden death. However, Nancy's father has suffered an accident (possibly a stroke), leaving him a shadow of his former self, and Nancy is reluctant to leave his side to pursue the case. The author uses Gothic imagery and language to describe him (and, subsequently, Celia's Victorian folly of a mansion and the rooms within):

> In a recliner on the opposite end of the room hunched a man, ghastly pale in the flickering light. He was covered with an orange afghan, and his almost-skeletal hand rested on the arm of the chair. Even in the dark, there was an evident pallor to his once-handsome face and his dark hair was flecked with grey....
>
> Carson Drew smiled, and in his smile one could detect traces of the man he once had been: respected criminal lawyer, pillar of River Heights society, dashing and laughing and vibrant.[32]

In the nearly exclusively female cast of the story, Carson is Nancy's only male (and non-sexual) interest. No suitors for Nancy's affection appear or rate a mention. The story ends with Nancy calling her father from Celia's house:

> "Dad?" Nancy said, tears welling in her eyes. "I just wanted you to know how much I love you."[33]

Nancy's foils, Celia and Isabel, are both orphans. Though they are neither as strong or as beautiful as Nancy, when the girls are about to enter a spooky hidden passageway, Isabel is the one who takes the initiative and plunges into the darkness. She represents one of the goodhearted (if financially destitute) charity cases Nancy often helps:

> "Oh," Isabel replied, with a brittle laugh, "sure, I can sew and cook and pick corn and do things like that, but Celia thinks I'm stupid 'cause I don't speak French or play the

[31] "mazebuilder24"'s profile page on FFN. This conversational tone is often found on profile pages (similar to the kind of description an author writes for the back sleeve of a book jacket) or in "author's notes," offset material found before a story by which an author can speak directly to his or her audience, usually including content warnings (i.e. slash or character death, which disturb some readers) or external notes.
[32] "The Hourglass Mystery," Chapter 1.
[33] Ibid., Chapter 12.

piano or write books."[34]

Celia is from an aristocratic (land-rich but money-poor) family, and her point of view is often an extreme version of Nancy's. After this exchange:

> "I never wanted to be a princess," Isabel said, her voice dangerously calm.
>
> "That's good," Celia hissed, "because you'll never be anything but a filthy ignorant little redneck sl—"[35]

Nancy interrupts the two girls and, by the end of the story, reconciles them: an elderly woman from River Heights is taking an extended vacation in Europe, and the two girls take positions as her traveling companions. Isabel continues the familiar refrain:

> "Thanks, Nancy, for everything," Isabel said. "We couldn't—well, I guess we wouldn't—have done it without you. We wouldn't even have met. We'd still be crying by ourselves."[36]

This, despite the fact that at the climax of the story, Isabel and Celia subdue the long-lost and bitter relative who inadvertently caused the death of Celia's brother, while Nancy herself is paralyzed by a momentary vision of her father.[37]

Even though "The Hourglass Mystery" does not deal with a romantic relationship, the theme of family and Nancy's unsettled relationship with her father is first and foremost. By demonstrating Nancy's weakness in the face of her father's frailty and dramatizing her impairment through the physical manifestation of her mental paralysis, the author explores a psychological depth which is not often found in the original "text," the revised *Mystery Stories*. However, "The Hourglass Mystery"'s debt to the original texts is clear. A Nancy Drew fanfiction can easily develop the source material's Gothic overtones to Poe-story levels, and Nancy as a character is not significantly changed by placement in a Hawthornian setting. At the end of the story, Nancy reconciles herself to the reality of her father's illness, and regains some measure of her strength in doing so.

"The Meeting," by "nancy nickerson," begins with a defensive note to the audience about the

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[34] Ibid., Chapter 8.
[35] Ibid., Chapter 7. Such language would never be found in the source material, and Celia's choice of words can be explained by her sexual jealousy toward Isabel, who figured in her brother's affections before his death.
[36] Ibid., Chapter 12.
[37] Ibid., Chapter 12.

subject matter of the story. She describes it as a "Nancy/Ned all the way story,"[38] and is unapologetic in her recognition that many readers do not like that pairing and thus will not like her story. In what almost follows in oral-tradition terms as a retelling of a creation story, "The Meeting" retells and updates the story of the meeting between Nancy and the Hardy Boys.[39]

The Nancy of the story is pre-canon, a junior at River Heights High. Not only does Nancy meet the Hardy brothers, but she also meets Ned in a flashback sequence. Through the insertion of a non-canonical sister for Ned,[40] "nancy nickerson" firmly locates Nancy and Ned's meeting in an environment not dissimilar to her own: high school. The account of Nancy's meeting and adventures with the Hardy brothers when she comes to stay with them as an exchange student is interwoven with situations identifying Nancy as a contemporary high school student (Nancy engages in note-passing behavior with her friends, for example). The Nancy of this story is familiar in her knowledge and determination: she knows more about cars than the traditionally "masculine" Hardy brothers, and brushes aside the warning notes she receives from the villain of the piece. Another new element "nancy nickerson" introduces is the story of Nancy's mother: in "The Meeting," Nancy's mother, Elizabeth,[41] was a detective, and was killed during an investigation. Nancy's stalker and her mother's killer turn out to be related, and Nancy clears the man who confessed to the earlier crime. The story ends on a cliffhanger which is explored in the next story in the "universe" or series. The focus in this story, as in "The Hourglass Mystery," is on action. Nancy's rental Corvette explodes, and she herself is kidnapped in the climax of the story. While Frank does feel some affection toward her, those feelings are unrequited and not the main focus.

Introduction of the flashback into a Nancy Drew story is a new innovation. Nancy of canon is a figure entirely located in the present; she spends little time dwelling on past experiences or future possibilities. Making, or regressing, Nancy into her past identity as high school student, serves a few

[38] "The Meeting," Chapter 1.

[39] This meeting, much like the death of Nancy's mother, is alluded to in only the vaguest terms in canon. In fact, it's a form of retcon ("retroactive continuity," the act of reconciling contradictory information presented within a single canon and eliminating all evidence that such a paradox ever existed), since the Hardy Boys exist as fictional characters *within* the *Nancy Drew Files* series.

[40] Sometimes such new characters are termed "Mary Sues," although this label doesn't apply to Ned's sister. "Mary Sues" tend to upstage the traditional heroes of a story or become romantically involved with them, and are sometimes wish-fulfillment characters, representing the desires of the author.

[41] "Elizabeth" is widely accepted in Nancy Drew fanfic as the name of Nancy's mother, and is therefore called "fanon" (fan-determined canon). A less widely accepted piece of "fanon," especially among Nancy/Ned supporters, is the same name as Nancy's middle one, thus making her initials NED.

purposes. In a psychoanalytical reading of the work (which the author's response to the question about why she writes fanfic supports), the author transfers Nancy-as-heroine to a familiar and contemporary matrix, high school, to extrapolate and thus emulate Nancy's behavior in the given situations. While this can on some level be seen as weakening the character, since elements of the author's personality inevitably slip into the text in such instances, this is largely irrelevant, since the character of Nancy Drew is serving a specific purpose for the author-creator. As Jenkins' reading suggests, Nancy Drew was chosen to serve as the author's vehicle for self-expression because she possesses characteristics the author wishes to claim for herself. Her adolescence is a crucial factor, therefore, although within the context of fanfiction a character's age usually doesn't matter, since age is merely another factor which can be changed. Her strength and intelligence are of more use and are retained as major character traits in the younger version of Nancy. By reconceptualizing Nancy, her author uses her to explore a different context without violating the spirit of the original character.

However, in "Holiday Trials" by "katie janeway," the mutual attraction between Nancy and Frank is an important part of the story, and her relationship with Ned is an elephant in the room, only voiced in the conclusion of the story.[42] Building extensively on the *Hardy Boys Casefiles* canon, "Holiday Trials" finds Nancy, Frank and Joe being tested by "The Network," a shady organization Frank and Joe sometimes represent. They fall victim to staged "attacks" meant to test their "strength, intelligence, and courage,"[43] although those adjectives seem to apply more directly to the first three trials (the three are attacked by goons, intercede when a man interferes in a parade carrying a knife, Nancy is knocked off her bike and nearly over a cliff) than the fourth (Nancy, Frank, and Joe are attacked: Joe is knocked out and left behind while Nancy and Frank are drugged, kidnapped, and left alone together in a hotel room with one bed and no other distractions). This scenario, set up by an agent who opposes the teens' entry into the Network organization, doesn't quite go as planned:

> "Damn," he muttered under his breath. "I was hoping..."
>
> "Hoping what, Johnson?" The Gray Man asked. Johnson jumped. He hadn't heard the other agent enter the room. "Hoping to find that the moment they are alone for

[42] "Holiday Trials" can even be read almost exclusively as a Nancy/Frank UST story (UST standing for "unresolved sexual tension," with its counterpart being RST for "resolved"), because Ned is not even mentioned until the very end. UST is a classification used more specifically in *X-Files* fanfiction, but is still applicable here.

[43] "Holiday Trials," Chapter 7.

extended periods of time, Frank and Nancy will fall into each other's arms?" the agent continued in a mocking tone.

The guards watching Nancy and Frank are more explicit: "'...My guess is that the boss heard about some sort of spark between them, and figured that meant they were two horny teenagers always eager for a go at each other.'"[44]

Nancy and Frank do have a few close calls in the story, but in the conclusion, when Frank attempts to consummate their attraction with a kiss, Nancy objects, explaining:

> "I'm sorry, Frank," she said softly. "But we can't...I've decided that I need to take a break. From Ned…and from you... I can't keep ignoring whatever we have, and I can't keep lying to Ned about it, either. So I'm taking a break to sort out my feelings."[45]

The Nancy of this story is calm and capable, although she proves less effective than the Hardy brothers during hand-to-hand combat and, during their kidnapping, she is made sick and weak (and thus feminized) by the drugs the kidnappers used and Frank has to take care of her. Her behavior and personality match that of the *SuperMysteries* stories, and, while her decision at the end of the story is not one found in canon, it is not out of character.

"Holiday Trials" draws heavily from the context and background of the source material. "The Network" as an organization exclusively belongs to the canon Hardy Boys universe, and Nancy's role as friend and fellow detective stays the same. In general, the story reads like an early draft of a *SuperMystery*. However, the change comes in when the author explicitly spells out that which is left unspoken in the source material: the overtly *sexual* tension between Nancy and Frank. Exploring such potential is the natural progression from the legitimate text, but the "legitimate" text is never allowed to take that step. The author's interpretation of how such a situation might be resolved is, also, a logical extrapolation from the source material. While Nancy, Frank, and Joe aren't the only characters which could, in characterization, function within the given scenario, they are the most obvious choices for such a story. Nancy's decision to refrain from acting on her feelings for Frank is a common act in the legitimate texts and is also one of her iconic qualities, in that it represents Nancy's characteristically moral behavior.

"Who's That Girl" by "TesubCalle" is another AU story. Beginning *in medias res*, it finds the

[44] Ibid., Chapter 5.
[45] Ibid., Chapter 7.

Hardy brothers in a New York cafe, debating over whether their mysteriously familiar waitress might actually be Nancy Drew. Before they can confront her privately, she disappears, and the author gradually reveals that Nancy is in the witness protection program. A year before, she was a member of the Chicago Police Department,[46] newly promoted to Homicide squad Detective and investigating a serial murder case. When an attempt was made on her life (directly resulting in her friend George's paralysis), Nancy went into hiding while those responsible for the hit were investigated by the FBI. Frank, acting on feelings for her which his brother Joe recognizes but he himself does not, investigates Nancy's staged "death" and puts her in more danger. After a series of incidents involving cut brake lines (all involving the Hardy brothers, since Nancy is safely on the other side of the country, serving to narrate the backstory), Nancy decides to confront the forces responsible for her banishment from society and goes back to solve the case. Throughout the story Nancy conflates her feelings for her boyfriend Ned (who believes she is dead) with her feelings for Frank Hardy (who is actively pursuing her by his investigation). In the end, Ned has moved on and is in a new relationship, while Frank has been freed of his own. The story ends with Bess and George actively encouraging Nancy to pursue a relationship with Frank,[47] and she does so; the story ends thus: "Frank pulled Nancy to himself, enfolding her in his hungry arms. She willingly melted into his embrace, savouring the warmth of his touch."[48] Because the telling and retelling of this story is so popular in the fandom, but only by its implications, such stories are usually followed by ones exploring Nancy and Frank's subsequent relationship. "Who's That Girl" is followed by two sequels, continuing this theme. Nancy is feminized by her position in the narrative as conveyor of backstory, and only reclaims her identity (both literally and figuratively) when she returns to Chicago and confronts her former detective partner over the murder of his wife. The bulk of the action takes place either in flashback (in Nancy's case) or in the presence of the Hardy brothers. Because they were insulated from the shock of her staged "death" by their career (they were on a case and out of contact), they are immune to the changes which struck Nancy's inner circle, most notably her father, Hannah, and Bess and George. Ned's devastation is kept off-screen and shown only in the comments of other characters; he appears only to release Nancy

[46] In fanfiction, which often advances Nancy's age and gives her a career and more adult responsibilities, the authors often place Nancy in law enforcement positions.
[47] This is a common fandom trope. Bess and George stand in for members of the reading community, expressing disappointment or outright hostility towards Ned and encouraging her to reciprocate Frank's affections.
[48] "Who's That Girl," Chapter 20.

from the vestiges of their relationship before (indirectly) leaving her to Frank.

"TesubCalle" presents common concerns in her answer to "why write Nancy Drew fanfiction":

> Hardy Boys Casefile number 1 opens with a huge bang when Iola gets blown to bits in a car bomb intended for the brothers. That sort of stuff would have never happened in the Nancy Casefiles. Can you imagine Ned being blown up in Nancy's blue, Mustang convertible? Or some other fate? Her dad getting killed by a disgruntled client? Nancy, Bess or George being kidnapped, raped and tortured? Not gonna happen. Not saying it'll happen in my fics either, but you get my point.
>
> I do try to make sure that no one's immune to dangerous situations. I'm not restricted by editorial concerns, because it's obvious the Nancy ghostwriters did NOT have free rein. This was one of my reasons for paralysing the George Fayne character in 'Who's That Girl?'. Nancy's 'world' has never known tragedy of the kind the Hardys experienced. I wasn't about to kill off an important member of that world; I don't generally kill off characters that don't belong to me.

"Authorial intent" is often a major concern in other fandoms. Some writers slavishly follow canon and remain perfectly faithful to what they see as the "true" characterizations in a given fandom. However, readers of Nancy Drew stories are often aware that these stories were written by ghostwriters, and the question of authorial intent is blurred. The act of ghostwriting and the act of producing fanfiction are, as "TesubCalle" points out, separated only by the restrictions of editorial concerns.[49] Producers of Nancy Drew fanfiction might pore over the books, making sure to get every crucial detail right, while finding their own way to explore that prefabricated universe. Ghostwriters themselves don't even share that attention to detail (see Walter Karig's making Nancy's consistently blue roadster maroon).

But there's still a large degree of wish fulfillment in the work of producing fanfiction, which sometimes can affect the quality or characterization in a work. "Risking Love for Love" by "jordigirl" is a

[49] "TesubCalle"'s answer went on to include the following: "I've found a pretty good community here with a good bunch of talented writers who have a great handle on the characters. The plots are engaging, entertaining and riveting. Some are heart-warming. Others are hilarious. Some are full of excellent suspense that rival and even surpass the SMs [*SuperMysteries*] and CFs [*Casefiles*, referring to the Hardy Boys series and the *Nancy Drew Files*]. (Ugh - there are several Supermysteries that are so BAD, there's DEFINITELY fanfiction here that's better than what was published)."

songfic,[50] flashback-laden account of Nancy's hesitant acceptance of Ned's proposal and her realization at the wedding that she has fallen into a comfortable but platonic relationship with Ned but is truly in love with Frank Hardy. Ned is a despicable character who often comes home drunk,[51] and Nancy endures this treatment until she comes home one day to find Ned with a co-worker in their bed.[52] She flees to the comfort of Frank Hardy's arms, and thus finds the strength to return and tell Ned that, though she is pregnant with their child, she wants a divorce. After he accuses Nancy of sleeping with Frank, Ned completely reverses in character and grants Nancy her divorce.[53]

Nancy's career is given as "detective" in the story, but the events, in flashback or in the main text, consist only of Nancy's realization that she has married the wrong man. Ned is thoroughly villanized, and Nancy's choice to leave him at the end is the only possible "good" outcome.[54] Frank gives voice to the audience's feelings by often internally expressing a desire to physically hurt Ned for his actions. His following Nancy back to Chicago after she decides to confront Ned, and his accompanying her as she performs that act, are common romantic tropes, while his willingness to accept Nancy and raise her unborn child is also romantically ideal.

I selected the above story because it is unique among the others in my sample. The other four present Nancy in a typical mystery setting, explore her backstory, or attempt to extrapolate Nancy as an adult member of a law enforcement community. All these stories deal with Nancy as a detective and thereby do not separate her from that defining characteristic. This last story ages Nancy but does not place her within the logical careers of detective, law enforcement officer, government agent, or similar. Instead, Nancy becomes identified not with her career, but by her status as wife. As this is also the only portrayal of Nancy as a married woman (there are many other stories in the fandom exploring Nancy as wife and mother), that lapse is significant for a variety of reasons. Marriage, as in the original

[50] A "songfic" incorporates lyrics from a popular song into a story; the song often helps a character through a time of particular crisis or to a moment of emotional realization. FFN has banned songfics, ironically enough for their copyright-infringement implications, but has not been stringent about enforcing this policy.

[51] The story implies that Ned is (at least somewhat) physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive towards Nancy, with the last being most nebulous ("He demanded things from her that she didn't want to give him", ch.3).

[52] "Risking Love for Love," Chapter 3.

[53] Ibid., Chapter 9. The story concludes with this note from the author: "I needed to end the story with Ned realizing he was wrong because he's such a good guy in the stories and even though I never liked his character I couldn't deny that."

[54] Interestingly, Nancy never considers abortion as a possibility.

texts, is a way to limit Nancy's potential and is rejected as a viable choice; Nancy, in the story, is punished not because she married, but because she did not marry the man she loved. Also, Nancy as a married woman in an abusive relationship is portrayed not only as possessing the inner strength to meet and overcome that challenge, but as a woman who, once she realizes that she can escape her relationship, quickly begins another. As previously discussed, this "reading" of Nancy can be chalked up to authorial intent and motivations, and Nancy as vehicle of this expression may have been a perfect choice for the author, for reasons which are opaque to the readers of the story. On a surface level, however, this story could easily be told in almost any fandom, and more easily in a work of original fiction. The story of a battered woman leaving unhappiness behind in the pursuit of potential reward does not immediately suggest Nancy Drew as its champion. However, because Nancy as a character possesses the necessary determination and circumstances (canon states that she is indeed attracted to both Ned and Frank), her appropriation is not altogether inappropriate.

Also, as previously stated, the romance genre recapitulated as feminist would describe this reading of Nancy as feminist. She displays the strength and skill, within the context of the story, to achieve a good outcome: she has freed herself of her abusive husband and earned respect and commitment from a more suitable mate. By romanticizing this story and placing Nancy in that context, the author thereby has reclaimed Nancy to a more fully domestic and feminine sphere, and can explore her response to problems within that context.

As for myself, my reasons for reading and writing Nancy Drew fanfic are the same as most of my readers: before I knew what fanfic was, I knew only that I wanted to carry Nancy and Ned's relationship in the *Files* forward to its logical conclusion and explore the dynamics of their relationship through the trials of engagement, marriage, and parenthood. As such, the majority of my stories within the fandom are characterized as Nancy/Ned, one of the least popular categories. In one "universe," I seek to undo the damage I perceive as being done by the *Nancy Drew On Campus* series.[55] The fraternity parties Nancy attends in my stories aren't the chaste soda-fueled dances of canon, and Nancy no longer turns Ned's innuendoes away with a wave of her hand and a batted eyelash. The emotional and societal realism in those stories, because they are safely "deauthorized" by their presence in the illegitimate form of fanfiction, can be enjoyed by a small circle of fans without resulting

[55] One of my readers describes her experience with the series, after enjoying the *Files*: "then i discovered the nightmare on campus series and could not bear to read it."

in the economic loss an "authorized" version would likely experience.[56]

The authors of Nancy Drew fanfiction locate Nancy in a world not unlike their own. Nancy now has a cell phone and investigates serial murderers, finds employment as a police officer or an FBI agent, and continues standing up for the powerless in the name of truth and justice. The difference comes in the conclusions: often, everything's not back in the same place the author found it. Carson or George might be injured, and Nancy might even be dead, leaving her friends to carry on in her name.[57] Writers can address a tiny part of the reading population (Nancy/Ned shippers) or a majority (Nancy/Frank), and if a reader doesn't find what she's looking for, she can always become an author herself, her own Carolyn Keene, publishing her own vision of Nancy Drew's past, present, or future nearly instantaneously. Those who write Nancy Drew fanfic aren't so much seeking to right a perceived wrong as appropriating the framework of the Nancy Drew stories for themselves, and in so doing, reproducing her in a new and different way while still staying faithful to what they see as the essential qualities of her character. In writing Nancy, girls can not only write their own individual role model, but they can write what they want their *own* stories to be. Nancy is thus not only a gateway on the path to the subsequent discovery of literary greatness, but a vehicle for self-expression and realization. It is her unchanging qualities, her strength of intelligence and character, her persistence and resilience, and her unflagging sense of right and wrong, which make her both a cultural icon and a suitable subject for fanfiction; reimagining Nancy as an individual, personal heroine would mean little otherwise.

[56] Plunkett-Powell cites the dramatic drop in readership the Ruth Fielding series experienced after Ruth was married (p.109), using that to partially explain Harriet Stratemeyer's resistance to deepening the Nancy/Ned relationship.

[57] See "katie janeway"'s story "Confession."

Conclusion

After a thorough examination of the facts, the essence and basis of Nancy's appeal and popularity as a literary heroine reveals itself thus: Nancy is so popular because she can be nearly anything her readers want her to be.

Although this assertion is most completely true in fanfiction, it assumes a certain textual fidelity on the part of the reader. Nancy Drew, as a character, represents some basic truths; when those truths, or characteristics, are eliminated from her repertoire, she ceases to be herself. One such characteristic is Nancy-as-detective. Every legitimate portrayal of Nancy, every movie, book, or television episode, leaves that alone, as Nancy's defining quality. Without Nancy Drew, the phrase "girl sleuth" would never bring to mind the image of a feminine silhouette, bent and studying the ground through a magnifying glass. Likewise, a Nancy who was not a "girl sleuth" would not be Nancy at all.

However, Nancy Drew as a personality and caricature is recognized by people who have never so much as read a *Nancy Drew Mystery Story*. She is a part of the American zeitgeist now, and that achievement is still a bit of a mystery. Nancy Drew stories, while engrossing, are not particularly well written. Nancy as a character is not provided with a fully fleshed out or even consistent back story. She never ages past her eighteenth year, and never realizes the almost limitless potential that her father and genetics have supplied her. Her sidekicks are two rather extreme examples of femininity, her father is occasionally absent, her mother is dead, and her longtime boyfriend has never so much as attempted to give her an engagement ring. All these things are true. In another girl's life, they might have amounted to the makings of a tragedy.

That Nancy can so effortlessly turn all those facts to her advantage, is part of her appeal, and might be its most basic cause. She moves within a world which underestimates her abilities, because she is young and because she is female, and manages to prove anyone who dares judge her at face value wrong anyway. She is never engaged or married and never lets that uncertainty cost her one minute of sleep; instead, she relishes the freedom of being unattached. Because her mother is dead and her father is often working, Nancy has the autonomy and resources other girls merely dream about; her family's affluence provides her with the leisure to function as a detective without

demanding it as a way for her to make her living. Bess and George may be extreme examples of what it means to be a girl in contemporary society, but they at least partially function as moderating facets to Nancy's personality, in the form of caution and strength.

All the qualities which make Nancy excel as a detective are the qualities which make her a heroine, and are emphasized time and time again in the stories, over seventy-five years and more than two hundred books. Intelligence, bravery, courage, strength of character and convictions, adaptability and resilience, patience and kindness; these are the qualities which make up Nancy Drew, qualities a hundred or a thousand other heroines share in some degree. But Nancy is frozen at a moment in time which is almost impossible to find, especially in the life of a twenty-first-century teenager. Nancy has a car without working two part-time jobs to pay for it, insurance, and the cost of gasoline. Nancy has no concerns about starting a paying career or going to college, while those are the two most pressing concerns to high school graduates. She has a boyfriend who never pressures her for sex and best friends who are devoted to her and would do anything for her. Despite all this, Nancy manages not to take herself too seriously or exist as a perfect, flat, two-dimensional character. Instead, all her depth of character and purest realization is through her pursuit of mysteries. She rarely falls prey to personal or professional uncertainty, and never to existential despair. She has, presumably, sailed through the pitfalls and angst of adolescence to arrive as a confident, serene young woman, self-assured and dignified, who still enjoys ice cream sundaes and having slumber parties with her friends. She has it all, and can afford to take it for granted. Her readers only wish for that kind of stability in their own lives.

Because Nancy perpetually lingers on the cusp of adulthood without actually stepping over the threshold, younger readers who found Nancy and her limitless possibilities enchanting age to find her inadequate as a heroine, once they reach their own adulthood and find that Nancy's life is an idealized, unrealistic version of reality, populated by easily-deciphered mysteries and the occasional brief personal conflict. While Nancy functions as an adequate, even excellent, role model for those readers who still see adulthood as a glorious responsibility-free vacation from the drudgery of school, she nevertheless retains characteristics which would still make her admirable as an adult. Thus, when readers of Nancy Drew books grow up to create their own heroines, Nancy often figures as an influence on the adult iterations of the girl detective, another way she has managed to impress herself on the mass subconscious of popular culture.

While fanfiction in the form of parody is often the easiest way to deal with Nancy herself as an adult, this method of reimagining not only childhood heroes but the fictional population of contemporary culture has been superseded by fanfiction as a serious work of both homage and exploration. Chelsea Cain's parodic *Confessions of a Teen Sleuth*, marketed at adults who read Nancy Drew books as a child, capitalizes on Nancy as a commodity and in-joke for members of contemporary society and exaggerates Nancy's drive to uncover and solve mysteries. Kelly Link's short story "The Girl Detective," instead emphasizes the more tragic aspects of Nancy's character, as a lonely motherless girl driven to solve mysteries. Nancy Drew Mystery Stories themselves are almost a character in Susan Kandel's *Not a Girl Detective*, a novel in a series starring Cece Caruso, herself an adult detective-figure modeled after Nancy Drew. Lauren Baratz-Logsted, in *How Nancy Drew Saved My Life*, combines elements of Nancy Drew mysteries with the gothic overtones of Jane Eyre, and playfully demonstrates how even adults can successfully follow Nancy's immaculate example. These are just a few examples of Nancy's more visible appearances in recent fiction, not counting the common practice of calling any inquisitive character on a television show "Nancy Drew," which happens fairly often.

Because Nancy Drew as girl sleuth, as myth, has so thoroughly proliferated through our culture, some readers attempt to reclaim Nancy as role model and heroine by recreating her in their own fictional works. Nancy, consistently rewritten through the generations to meet the needs and tastes of her readership as defined by a corporation in terms of financial benefit, can be instantaneously transformed through fanfiction to meet any need of any audience, so long as the needs of that audience can be satisfied by some permutation of her basic traits. I argue that it is *because* Nancy is so accessible and adaptable as a heroine that she is written and read by fanfic communities. The enunciated but unrealized potential in her personal and professional lives provides girls not only with a way to dream about their own lives, but a way to recreate Nancy's in that tenuous image. She functions not as a blank state, but as a suitable vehicle for girls to imagine themselves as strong, individual, productive members of society.

Nancy was born with the characteristics which make her the cultural icon she is today. No revision of those original stories, no reboot of the series, no unsatisfactory incarnation of Nancy in any television show or movie has been able to tarnish or diminish her reputation as eponymous girl sleuth.

At her most basic level Nancy *is* timeless, a creation of an era which may have passed but has still left its mark on society, and Nancy's honored place in the consciousness of that society provides an alternative to the contemporary sensationalist trend in young adult literature. Nancy's humanity, as realized through her imperfections, leaves girls a space to dream, to imagine themselves, to partially recreate their heroine and provide an inspiring force in their own lives, and this is the true heart of Nancy's appeal. She is human, both like and unlike us, and by identifying with her through the act of reading and the act of fanfictional recreation, we can become her and thereby more fully realize our own potential.

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Appendices

Forums » Say Anything » Why do you read/write Nancy Drew fanfic?

Author	Post
ulstergirl Since: Jan 20 '06	Topic: **Why do you read/write Nancy Drew fanfic?** I know that people may have answered this question elsewhere, but just because I'm curious: Why do you read Nancy Drew (or Nancy Drew/Hardy Boys) fanfic? If you write Nancy Drew (or Nancy Drew/Hardy Boys) fanfic, why do you write it? The longer and more detailed answer you can give, the better. #1 Jan 07th 2007, 07:43PM Reply »
TesubCalle Since: Nov 01 '01	Why do I write ND/HB fanfiction... Well, when I first started, I wanted to contribute something I could be proud of. I wanted to write something my readers would really enjoy. The response was so positive and overwhelming, it motivated me to make further plans for more stories. I always enjoyed reading these characters when I was younger. While the Nancy Casefiles were fun reads, it was a bit irksome that the level of sophistication and danger and intrigue was never as high as that of the Hardy's Casefiles. The Nancy CF content was decidedly lighter fare. It focuced more on fashion and romance than fights and technological gadgets, government conspiracies and covert operations. Hardy Boys Casefile number 1 opens with a huge bang when Iola gets blown to bits in a car bomb intended for the brothers. That sort of stuff would have never happened in the Nancy Casefiles. Can you imagine Ned being blown up in Nancy's blue, Mustang convertible? Or some other fate? Her dad getting killed by a disgruntled client? Nancy, Bess or George being kidnapped, raped and tortured? Not gonna happen. Not saying it'll happen in my fics either, but you get my point. I do try to make sure that no one's immune to dangerous situations. I'm not restricted by editorial concerns, because it's obvious the Nancy ghostwriters did NOT have free rein. This was one of my reasons for paralysing the George Fayne character in 'Who's That Girl?'. Nancy's 'world' has never known tragedy of the kind the Hardys experienced. I wasn't about to kill off an important member of that world; I don't generally kill off characters that don't belong to me. So yeah. Those are the main reasons I write. Why do I read?? I've found a pretty good community here with a good bunch of talented writers who have a great handle on the characters. The plots are engaging, entertaining and riveting. Some are heart-warming. Others are hilarious. Some are full of excellent suspense that rival and even surpass the SMs and CFs. (Ugh - there are several Supermysteries that are so BAD, there's DEFINITELY fanfiction here that's better than what was published)

	The really good fic authors take these characters in places most of us only wished we could have seen them in the books. So in a way, reading and writing is a bit of wish-fulfilment. But then that's what FAN fiction is all about, isn't it? #2 Jan 07th 2007, 11:45PM Reply »
katie janeway Since: Jun 23 '01	Why? Simply put, when I first entered the fandom, I was a junkie for the H/D crossovers. I was working toward owning all of the crossover books, etc. I'd been an N/F fan for years, but that didn't matter to me as much as the idea of the trio teaming up to solve cases. As to writing it...I decided I wanted to see if I could hack it as a mystery writer. Of course, I didn't initially start with the mysteries - I started with N/N, N/F one-shot... and then I moved to "Confessions"...and then...on to the actual mysteries. I also just wanted to grow as a writer. The more characters you practice writing, with their own limitations and abilities, the better. Fanfic lets me explore different personalities, worlds, etc. and allows me to hone my writing skills. I still write for the fandom, though I've not updated in ages. Some projects have taken me far longer than I would like, which makes me a bit disgusted with myself. It's a relief to step into the world of ND and the HB, even if just for a little while. #3 Jan 08th 2007, 08:13PM Reply »
lightwarai Since: Dec 07 '05	Wow... hmmm.... Why do I read? I started reading Nancy Drew books back in elementary school. The first book I picked up was "Mystery at Lilac Inn" and from there, I was COMPLETELY in love! Then, in fifth grade, my father told me he used to read ND, but preferred Hardy Boys. So I picked up "The Tower Treasure" and once again, I was in love! Then in middle school, I found SUPERMYSTERIES!! WHO KNEW!!!! In the originals, I definitely prefer F/Callie, N/Ned, J/Iola, and I LOVE Burt and Dave in ND, but with the SMs, I prefer N/F etc... Anyway. I started out loving the mysteries first, and the relationships second, but as I've grown up, it's about even. I have always wanted to be Nancy Drew, globe-trotting, mystery-solving, attractive, everything she is and I'm definitely not. Ya know? And IT'S THE SAME WITH THE FANFICS! The fanfics just take us to worlds that the books never even touched. Not just geographically, but emotionally, with the vast relationships, character developments, deep and thick plots, you name it, I love it. As for why I write... I've been writing NDHB fics since I was in middle school, but I'll never post any of that stuff. In High school, I wrote Jonny Quest: The Real Adventures fics, and posted them to the mailing list I was a part of. Then, about a year and half ago, I found this site and fell in love all over again with NDHB. Thus, I started writing, because I wanted to see if I still could. I just wish I had more time. I have a lot of favorite authors on here, and lots of favorite stories. It's almost like another family. Does that make sense? I've messaged with a few authors so much that I feel I can call them my friends. Besides, all this makes me feel like a kid again. :) #4 Jan 10th 2007, 09:19AM Reply »

shadowme Since: Nov 25 '06	I'm a fan fiction junkie not really caring what fandom I read. I started reading thios section because of friend wanted me to checkout some of the talented writers and I like Frank and Nancy. My favorit auther on this site is shallowbunny but now that she has announced her retirement, check her profile, begause of some idiot people I don't know if I'm going to keep reading here. I do like ulstergirl's work, but she writes nancy ned maybe I'll just convert. I don't knoiw there are so many other places like sailor moon for me to read and I love to read so... I don't knowe. I'm bummed. #5 Jan 10th 2007, 10:53AM Reply »
lightwarai Since: Dec 07 '05	Shadowme - I'm extremely sad to see Shallowbunny go, but please give other authors here a chance. She is a fantastic writer and we will all miss her dearly, but there are other authors who are also extremely talented. #6 Jan 10th 2007, 12:59PM Reply »
katie janeway Since: Jun 23 '01	Shadow, I agree with lightwari. We're all going to miss Shallowbunny, but it isn't a reason to quit the fandom. And if you're worried about finding other stories you might like... why not try exploring Shallowbunny's favorite list? I often peek at the favorites of the authors I like, and that usually leads me to even more great fics. #7 Jan 11th 2007, 10:24AM Reply »
lightwarai Since: Dec 07 '05	Katie, that's a great idea! I wish I had thought of that... I could have discovered lots more great fics by now of other authors! Sorry, ulstergirl, for changing the subject a bit :) #8 Jan 11th 2007, 01:20PM Reply »

Moderator(s):	msnancydrew,
Rule(s):	1. Forums are not to be used to post stories. 2. All discussions, language and content, must be suitable for teens. 3. The owner/moderator(s) of this forum is solely responsible for content posted within this area. 4. All forum abuse must be reported to the moderator(s).

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- The Nancy Drew Fan Fiction question [#]
- why i read nancy drew fiction [#]
- (no subject) [#]
- Why do I read it? [#]



mod post

« previous entry | next entry »
Jan. 31st, 2007 | 10:14 pm
posted by: tiscwslabmuz in nancydrewfic

Part of my thesis is about Nancy Drew fanfiction. I made a forum posting over at ffn (you can see it here). If you haven't answered the question over at ffn, you can answer it in the comments here. Please do. Even if you've never read any of **my** fanfic, you can still answer.

Why do you read Nancy Drew fanfiction?

If you write Nancy Drew fanfiction, why do you write it?

I started writing Nancy Drew fanfic before I had any idea what it was. I was around eleven or twelve, I'd been reading Nancy Drew books for three or four years (the yellow-spined Mystery Stories and the Files) and I decided that I wanted Nancy and Ned

to be married.

And there were **no** existing Nancy Drew stories about that.

So I started writing Nancy Drew stories, longhand in notebooks, where Nancy and Ned were married. She didn't solve cases; after I discovered the Files, the romance of those stories took over for me. I longed to read stories where Nancy and Ned's relationship was never under pressure from outside sources, and when that seemed to be only my own fantasy, I decided the only way I'd ever be able to read it, was to write it myself.

Then I went away to a month-long summer camp when I was fifteen, and to stave off my homesickness, I started a Nancy Drew story on the computer my parents let me take there. That story eventually became over three hundred typed pages long. Then I rewrote the story, and began investigating variations on a theme, especially once I discovered that there actually were other people out there who wanted to read Nancy Drew stories as much as I do.

I read Nancy Drew fanfic stories because I like to see how other people handle the same issues I deal with. How do you make the story interesting? How do you handle the complicated love triangle between Nancy, Ned, and Frank? Do you age her, keep her character consistent, put her through more serious personal challenges and dangerous cases? I read to see more Nancy/Ned interaction, Nancy as an adult, reinterpretations of how Nancy acted as a child. I'm a bit biased because I try to read as little Nancy/Frank as possible, mostly because those stories seem to demonize Ned. I read fanfic to see how Nancy could be, without the constraints placed on her by the people who own her, now. I might be the only one who would enjoy a series with Nancy in her mid-twenties (and of course dating or married to Ned), but until that day comes, I must content myself with writing it myself and finding the stories of other people who feel the same.

link I **leave feedback**

I **Add to Memories**

Comments {5}

(no subject)

from: ***{anonymous}***
date: Feb. 1st, 2007 03:48 pm (UTC)
link

Why do I read nancy drew fanfiction?

Well, i started to read nancy drew books when I was about eight and loved them. then i started to read the files and was totally addicted. i loved the nancy/ned relationship also i adore carson drew. he is the most amazing father. anyways i grew out of nancy drew books and had totally forgotton about them. we got the internet, and i was never really into computers so i started going on the internet looking at various sites and stumbled upon fanfiction.net. i had never in my life heard of fanfiction and loved it. especially your stories because you had the same kind of ideas i had about nancy and ned and all nancy's relationships. I haven't written any stories yet, but you never know. (glasheen25)

respond

The Nancy Drew Fan Fiction question

from: ***{anonymous}***
date: Feb. 4th, 2007 09:20 pm (UTC)
link

Why do I read Nancy Drew Fan Fic? I used to read the original books,the yellow ones when 8 and up. i read some of the files too. I then grew out of reading them but had wished that there was a series that dealt with Nancy and Ned when they were grown up, in college, married etc, but there were none. I stumbled upon the fan fiction site a year ago and have been hooked ever since. I wished that it did not take me until I was in my late 30's to get excited about reading a great series. I have read a lot of books and continue to, but this internet site is great. There has never been anything quite like it and I look forward to the next story on Nancy Drew. Thanks for creating this site.

respond

why i read nancy drew fiction

from: *{anonymous}*
date: Feb. 4th, 2007 10:47 pm (UTC)
link

i read the original nancy drew mysteries when i was in my early teens and fell in love with nan and ned.he was just so perfect.at that time i lived in a foreign country and knew nothing about the files.about thirty years later my niece was reading the original and it brought back such good memories that i went to the library and lo and behold i found the files and then i was on a mission to read them all which i did.i was not too happy with nan at times but i forgave her because she always went back to ned.then i discovered the nightmare on campus series and could not bear to read it.i own all the girl detective series and its okay.my first fanficion site was hda and much as i enjoyed that it was really not a nancy drew site.then i discovered ffn and i was shocked at what they did to ned.i visited that site in hopes of finding the few n/n fans.i discovered you by accident but i love all your stories now i am on the site every day.thank you so much.i do hope you finish the 100 situtations i love the way he falls for her and how she is falling for him and hopefully they will get married have children and grandchildren etc.then i can be happy if you stop. thanks for remaining faithful to nancy/ned.

respond

(no subject)

from: *{anonymous}*
date: Feb. 8th, 2007 03:01 am (UTC)
link

(this is nancy nickerson)
i read nd fanfiction b/c after i read on campus, i got really depressed with the ending(no NED!!!). then i started reading supermysteries, and my whole world got out of whack b/c nancy/ frank is so prominent there....i just kept thinking no no no, this can't be how it ends, and then voila, a week later i found fanfiction.net...it seemed to be the answer to my prayers, but then i realized than it was mostly nancy/frank. thankfully, you showed up so there was plenty of nancy/ned which made me ESTATIC!!! anyhow, i started reading ffn with the intent to get more nancy/ned action (not sex at the time (i was 11!)but like the cute fluffy kisses & all) that was kind of...not a central theme in the books...even in the files, which i LOVE, it's not exactly worked with a lot...i mean, i love reading the mysteries also but the psychological aspect of it isn't really explored in any of the published books. i LOVE that in fanfiction, people can write whatever they want...whether it be romance, mystery, humor, anything at all. they can write what they want to write and want people REALLY want to read...not just the published books, where there had to be a certain amount of mystery, a certain amount of this, and a certain amount of that. and the original yellow backs....man oh man, i love them to DEATH, but the thing is, they were written 70 some years ago, so you couldn't really write the kind of stuff we read today without it being...scandalous, i guess. i think that the best mysteries are in them, but the best romance can only be found in fanfiction. there's certain things that publishers don't want to put in books that will be read by 11 year olds...and yes, our society has loosened its reign somewhat on what little kids can get a hold of...tv, radio, anything really. but with nancy drew books, there's still that standard. well, im 15 now, and the published books...their lack of romance and

nancy/ned involvement makes them seem less...sparkly and fanfiction more sparkly.
i don't know if that really made sense, but i don't really know how to say what i'm trying to say.
i write nancy/ned fanfiction for some of the same reasons. i wanted to put more nancy/ned stuff out there and when i finally got the courage to do it, i realized it was so much more than that. (yeah i know i havent updated in a while, but soon...hehehe) anyhow, i realized that in the stories i write, i'm reflecting something that i want. i think it would be SO amazing to have lived during WWII and felt and seen all those things firsthand...i think of how i would have felt if i was in nancy or ned's situation and i use that to write their feelings and reactions. in the other stories, they kind of reflect my fantasies...i haven't posted any of my favorites yet (except 1942) but when i get around to them, you'll be able to see what i mean. but the way i want my life to be, with a relationship with an AMAZING guy and great job etc...i put that in my stories, kind of like a way to make it real...just not for me.
lol, and i love nancy in her 20's married/dating ned...but like i said, i haven't posted any of my favorites yet, because i want them to be JUST RIGHT when i do, but you'll see. you'll see.

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Why do I read it?

from: river57
date: Feb. 10th, 2007 09:58 pm (UTC)
link

Short answer is "because it's there." Actually, I didn't know fan fiction existed until I stumbled across it as a result of a Google search.

I read fan fiction if it meets three criteria. I have to love the original, the writing has to be reasonably well done, and the author has to validate my perception of the original work. That eliminates a lot of what's out there. It's the "uber girly" coming out in me - but I pretty much read only Nancy/Ned, Bobby/Alex, or Marianne/Brandon.

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