

“POSTMODERN QUALITIES OF THE FEMINISM OF NANCY DREW”

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the possibility of Nancy Drew becoming a preliminary example of postmodern feminism. The research relied on Melanie Rehak’s book *Girl Sleuth* as a major source for bibliographic information and other critics who have studied the icon like Amy Boesky and Kathleen Chamberlain. It explored articles that were solely postmodern discussion. Then also, theorists explaining the encounter between feminism and postmodernism. Other important sources of information include the 1930 and 1960 first and second editions of *The Bungalow Mystery*. The thesis concluded that Nancy is a transitional icon. Her modernist emergence into culture grounds her a figure of absolute truth and goodness while her postmodern characteristics allow her to transcend the original modern Nancy by being continuously remade and therefore always culturally relevant on some level. Because of the remakings, she puts forward many cultural ideas that don’t normally co-exist, but Nancy Drew’s later versions, in the age of postmodernism, allow them to co-exist.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nancy Drew has mostly been known as the girl sleuth through the Great Depression, the dime novel that Stratemeyer Syndicate is most known for alongside *The Hardy Boys*. Her iconic status continues to spread. In considering cultural movements in icons, it's important to follow the thread, tracing the character from its origins, through its development, to its culmination as icon. In the case of Nancy Drew, the series, and her other entertainment forms, her character began as an example of modern culture. But through pastiche and the recursion evident in the historical references by Nancy to her creators and cultural context, and also through the prospect of future versions and remakings of Nancy to reflect an ever-changing culture, Nancy Drew becomes understandable through the lens of postmodern criticism specifically related to the notions of *other*, *recursion*, *pastiche*, and *re-making*. While there are many possible avenues to interpretations of the series, this study, in an attempt to consider them as a whole, requires the postmodern lens so that these different versions may co-exist and even conflict.

Richard D. Altick writes in *The Art of Literary Research*, "The climate of postmodern theory has contributed to the drift away from regarding the text of literary work as personal artifact dominated by the author" (80). This is especially true in considering novels in *Nancy Drew* mystery series as editor and publishers could dominate

the content of the novels and therefore would not be a truly personal artifact by the author. Altick further writes, “Debate on the nature of ‘meaning’ [in postmodern theory] casts all in doubt...even if an author assumed knowledge of his or her own mind...there is no proof that he or she did actually know it, and therefore the meaning contained is actually illusory” (80). Altick’s statement speaks of the space that a postmodern theoretical approach requires of its readers. This space is especially important to this thesis. At postmodernism’s most extreme, this lens would not be suitable for literary criticism because “meaning leaves language and text is also dispensed” (80). This would make research impossible for this topic. However, considering the rate of the movement as Altick defines it, a drift, allows a transitive period which is how the collective Nancy can be viewed and this thesis argues should be viewed. It’s important to emphasize the collective Nancy and not any single version of Nancy, which is also why a postmodern approach is beneficial. With this approach, “the important consideration is not what he or she personally meant, but the x number of meanings that x number of readers have discovered in the text. At that point, if not before, the author is dispensed with” (Altick 80). The author will remain of significance in this thesis, but only as a vessel, a conduit, for transferring meaning from their lives and their culture to create a heroine.

Due to this delicate balance, a particular textual criticism has been applied. William Proctor William and Craig S. Abbott write, “One form of critical editing, called historical-critical editing...uses authorial intention on a limited basis. Its chief aim is to prove a complete textual history rather than to establish a text” (83). They further

write, “Historical-critical editors see textual authority resides more in the states than in the individual readings of a text” (Willaim and Abbott 83). This thesis demonstrates a similar handling of the Nancy Drew texts considering the authors as necessary, but much more concerned with the state in which the text was written and received, and most importantly the reception of the text.

Melanie Rehak’s *Girl Sleuth* provides a detailed recounting of the history of not only the original Nancy Drew, but also of the Syndicate, the women who created her, and the multiple Nancys that have emerged since the original. Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, daughter of Edward Stratemeyer, who founded the Stratemeyer Syndicate, explains, “‘I grew up in a story-book house,’ . . . ‘My earliest recollection of my father was when he was playing with my sister and me – outdoors, indoors; and we had continuous stories – not just bedtime stories, but all day long. . . my recollection of him as a child has more do I think with his imagination than anything’” (Rehak 12). This image captures the core of Nancy Drew, her history, her future, possibly the core reason for all of the nostalgia, and years of intrigue. Ultimately, this type of nostalgia resulting in such an impact that “rarely a year has gone by in the last fifty or so [years] – ever since the first generation of little girls who read the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories got old enough to write newspaper and magazine articles – without someone, somewhere, attesting to the power of the teen sleuth in passionate print” (Rehak *xiv*).

Other critics, such as Bobbie Ann Mason, have also worked with the series. Her research focused more on the popular culture images of girl sleuths including Nancy than

on Nancy herself. In this case, like in others, Nancy is criticized. Discussions of this book have recognized the transition from the modern Nancy and into another type of character, most critics consider her later developments anti-feminist. However, the postmodern lens allows readers and critics to explore the transition as into an integral, transitory icon to postmodern feminism. Though Nancy's transition has been criticized, or marked as an impossible ideal, this study suggests that through a postmodern lens, rather than the subject of contradiction, the transition she undergoes is key because it reflects Nancy's travel through a modern period and into a postmodern period. It also allows for the future discussion of a post-postmodern Nancy.

Stratemeyer began his syndicate with a passion for stories and an equal if not greater passion for his audience. In fact, as he progressed in his work he often declined what could be described as professional public addresses feeling unqualified to give them as he viewed himself as simply a writer of children's books, not a speaker. Therefore, he believed his best critics were his readers and would ask the young audience of boys to provide criticism (Rehak 13). From this crucial gender divide sprang Nancy Drew. Boys and girls were raised quite differently in those days. It would be years later before Stratemeyer began to target a young female audience. When he did, "he began to expand his winning formula to include the opposite sex, taking into account another, more personal, reason for doing so. As he noted in a letter to a successful girls' book author: 'I have two little girls growing up fast, so I presume I'll have to wake up on girls' books ere long'" (Rehak 24). His daughters were always at the center of his girls' series, and

unbeknownst to him, the girls would have an even greater impact not only on the characters in these series, but on the entire readership and especially women when his daughters would later inherit the company (at which time Harriett would have to learn what a heroine was – a lesson she hadn't learned despite her father's line of work) (Rehak 28).

There are many other measures to be considered before labeling any work feminist. And with the many types of feminist discourse, this thesis would engage in very circular discussion because Nancy Drew has survived the various waves of feminism.

Teresa L. Ebert writes:

Feminism raises the issue of gender as the basis for the organization of society – from the production and distribution of wealth and the division of power to the construction of identities and ways of making sense of reality. It argues that all other divisions in culture, especially class and race, are deeply imbricated in gender division and may even be predicated on them. Feminism rewrites not only our knowledge of but also our construction of society by inscribing gender in social relations (Ebert 888).

As the majority of scholarship surrounding Nancy Drew acknowledge her as feminist, this thesis will set to prove 1) that she can be both feminist and postmodern and 2) that she, Nancy, in the original and in later forms, can be understood through the lens of postmodernism, a theoretical school that has not been applied to the Nancy Drew series in an extended way before. She, Ebert, concludes, deciding on a postmodern materialist

feminism, “But a postmodern materialist feminism based on a resistance postmodernism, I contend, does not avoid the issue of totality or abandon the struggle concept of patriarchy; instead, it *rewrites* them” (899). The focus on rewriting in postmodernism and in the Nancy Drew icon is key to this study. Fraser and Nicholson in their article “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism” write, “Thus, each of the two perspectives suggests some important criticisms of the other. A postmodernist reflection on feminist theory reveals disabling vestiges of essentialism, while a feminist reflection on postmodernism reveals androcentrism and political naïveté” (84). Then they write on the topic of feminism, distinguishing motives between feminists and postmodernists that the motive for feminism has been out of necessity from “political practice” rather than just “professional philosophy” (91-92). They, Fraser and Nicholson, argue, “a robust, postmodern-feminist paradigm of social criticism without philosophy is possible” (100). Writing further, “Rather, theory here would be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different groups within societies and periods” (101). And, “Finally, postmodern-feminist theory would dispense with the idea of a subject of history. It would replace unitary notions of ‘woman’ and ‘feminine gender identity’ with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity...attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation” (101). While this thesis cannot explore all of these, it does reveal that feminism is inherently postmodern as they also state (Fraser 102).

Jennifer Wicke and Margaret Ferguson's article argues that a state of postmodern feminism is exactly what women are living in right now. They write, "the awkward pairing...is a description of our lives. The feminism practiced, theorized, and lived by many women (and men) today...arises within the vicissitudes of a transforming postmodernity" (1). They further write, "it [postmodernism] needs to be...put into practice, and even contested within feminist discourses as a way of coming to terms with our lived situations" (Wicke 1). Their article elaborates how one alters the other and vice versa. They write, "[postmodernism and feminism] are discourses on the move, ready to leap over borders and confound boundaries" which is what Nancy appears to be doing – printing in sensitive territory, yet gaining in sales (2). If Nancy is a primary example of postmodern feminism, she does do as Wicke and Ferguson write, "give feminism a foothold in the solidly masculinist terrain...where postmodernity makes the case for the blurring of canon boundaries further interrogated by feminist questions of value and hierarchy" (4). They conclude citing the common thread, "feminism and postmodernism urgently converge in a need to theorize systemic relations and a global politics" (7). Using postmodern theory as a means of exploring how Nancy Drew is feminist because she overthrows the cultural dominating structure allows the critic to answer how she confounds so many boundaries with such success.

Though Nancy Drew entered the world so long ago during the Great Depression with mystery sleuths for boys, she has remained a constant presence. She was born of the imagination of Edward Stratemeyer, crafted by Mildred Wirt Benson, and redesigned by

Mr. Stratemeyer's daughters, Stratemeyer Adams mostly but also her sister, Edna, who stopped involvement by the time the rewriting began. Rehak describes this emergence, "It was into this world that Miss Nancy drew, a well-to-do plucky girl of the twenties, arrived on April 28, 1930, dressed to the nines in smart tweed suits, cloche hats, and fancy dresses – including 'a party frock of blue crepe which matched her eyes'" (116). Even from her initial entrance in 1928, when culture was at the beginning of an economic downturn, she appears no less than "well-to-do" having all of the middle-upper class luxuries now alienated from a crashed-stock-market culture, but from the perspective a young girl no less, and here is the first testament to her anachronistic success: "Her adventures provided an escape from humdrum dailiness of childhood just as surely as her world provided an escape from the Depression" (Rehak 155). Perhaps this is another possible explanation for her success: she confounded the boundaries of reality.

Arthur Daigon explains some of the features of the series' success: "A study of the novels which 120 seventh graders freely selected for leisure reading reveals the Nancy Drew mystery to be the most frequently chosen of all 201 titles read" (Daigon 666). These numbers coupled her title as the "young defender of Goodness and Truth" help situate her success (Daigon 666). Still though, "most librarians and educators looked askance at modern juvenile series" (Grossman 174). Kathleen Chamberlain writes, "By 1975, the character of Nancy Drew had all the trappings of a cultural icon... Literally millions of copies had been sold. Nancy had been the subject of four feature films. She had starred in her own Parker Brother 'Mystery Game.' She had her own cookbook. She

had appeared as a prestigious ‘Madame Alexander’ doll. She was also beginning to be the subject of scholarly consideration” (1). Rehak writes, “All of this attests to the enduring presence of Nancy Drew, but none of it answers the question of *why* she has endured” (xv). She then justifies the modernist qualities of Nancy Drew, the right and wrong, the will power and determination writing, “All of these things remained constant, even when the details surrounding them – the clothes, the location, the slang – shifted with the times” (Rehak xv). It is known through letter correspondence that Edward Stratemeyer’s Stratemeyer Syndicate had a plan to succeed, but it’s unknowable if they anticipated exactly how culturally known the girl sleuth would become.

Elizabeth Marshall writes, “The ways in which the character of Nancy Drew continues to be revived globally constitute a key feature of the series’ circulation and success” (210). Later, “Part of the Nancy Drew brand’s global appeals, then, is the result of explicit marketing as well as a benevolent cultural imperialism, through which the books – and their particular ideas about American girlhood – are transported around the globe” (213). Perhaps the backlash to racism and other complaints in the 1930s edition, forcing a second edition into a newly postmodern culture from Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, who was then CEO of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, was the beginning of the road to icon success.

Part of Nancy’s success lies in her flexibility to exist symbiotically across cultures and times. This is in part due to the multiple personalities of Nancy created by the multiples writers and rewrites of the series. Geoffrey S. Lapin, a critic who helped

uncover Wirt Benson's role in the creation of Nancy Drew despite the Syndicate's privacy expectations, asserts, "what has sustained the popularity of and love for the Drew character is the intangible concept of her characterization" (67). "Intangibility" of course would create some flexibility, but there was also a system, an internal structure with Nancy as there was with all of the Syndicate's series, a magic formula for success. Stratemeyer is reported to have said, "'I see in your books you have a tendency to fearful and fainting girls and women,' ... 'Better cut it – in these days the girls and women have about as much nerve as the boys and men. The timid, weeping girl must be a thing of the past'" (Rehak 80-81). It's clear that Stratemeyer caught on to at least some of the most obvious characteristics of a heroine. Characteristics like these become constant in Nancy though they may shift a little, but the truly empowering characteristic and enigma of the series is the character's flexibility. Nancy's remaking is key to both her success and can be understood through a postmodern approach. Sally Mitchell writes, "the early Nancy Drew... was childhood reading for the adult women who moved into the world as second-wave feminists in the 1970s. Other contributors take viewpoints from library science, children's literature, and cultural studies; look at the mystery genre; discuss the matter-of-fact racism in the earliest books and the way it was solved" (353). Considering that each rewrite of Nancy is simply rewriting Nancy, let's also extend this to the women's movement, which is culturally significant to the reception of the series. Rehak writes, "To many it seemed that the world was made new after the massive destruction of World War I ended in 1918 – and that women were made new too" (77). Likewise,

Nancy, by publisher Grosset & Dunlap, “had been wise to count on revisions of old series with brand recognition, rather than the creation of new ones, to energize their sales numbers” (Rehak 247). “Heorine” wasn’t coined by Nancy; she simply remade feminism thanks to postmodern culture.

Amy Boesky’s article “Solving the Crime of Modernity: Nancy Drew in 1930” (which draws upon Rehak’s research as well) expands Nancy’s impact to not only have been a motivating and inspiring cultural icon for the women’s movement, but maybe even primarily for adolescents and a rejection or critic of modernism (Boesky 187-188). She also explores rejection in terms of the child and the adolescent from the adult, but also as other from each other. Right at the onset of her fictional life, Nancy rejects the perception of modern youth, a rejection that is key in evaluating her postmodern tendencies later.

Yet, Nancy wasn’t always changing. In fact, many of the Syndicate’s feuds were grounded in disagreements on changing or maintaining Nancy’s character. As the series pushed into the 1970s and 1980s it became more difficult for the women writing Nancy to concede to cultural changes. Each change and each constant regardless of the culture, era, or writer, become integral to reaching American icon status. But Nancy was constantly at the whims of individual ideals, those ideals that drove the behaviors of people who controlled Nancy and manifested in the characters near River Heights. It seems that with each curve though, Nancy was ready to adjust, yet still maintain some constancy.

It's also important to use postmodern theory because Nancy isn't wholly feminist in every version of her that arose. Hope E. Burwell's article recounts her first experience as a youth reading Nancy and the deep impact it had on her healing from family scars. "She may not have been an intentional feminist," Burwell writes, "when someone said, 'Girls can't do that,' we looked back startled, uncomprehending, and unmollified, because we had, already, indeed, done it" (53). Burwell also heightens the reader's awareness of how "stand alone" Nancy is as a character. Burwell accentuates the duality of Nancy's character "but most significant of all, in my own personal development, I think, is the image Nancy Drew presented of a girl both able and humble, both worldly and refined, both innocent and wise" (53). At times, especially in later versions, she more appropriately aligns with the modern 20s, as a young girl being courted. As later books remake her, she becomes more interested in who will take her to dances; college Nancy is especially a testament to prove this. Considered as a whole, she doesn't perfectly fit the feminist mold. Ellen Brown writes, "'the reader of a Nancy book is never allowed to forget that our heroine – gunning down the highway after a gang of crooks – is a sweet young lady who dresses nicely and enjoys having tea with little cakes'" (6). Nancy's appearance and attire ground her in a very feminine and at times seemingly less feminist character. This coupled with her insatiable need for mystery and justice allows to her to reject both the modern 20s girls and feminism.

Eric Zency's "Labyrinthitis and Postmodernism" uses the metaphor of the ear's structure enabling balance to postmodernism to explain postmodernism use of

perpendicular structures to enable balance. He elaborates more on the idea of postmodernism throughout but, aligning with the conclusion drawn here for Nancy Drew, determines that postmodernists seek “readers’ interpretation” as significant. This is also revealed in Stratemeyer’s own initial actions to receive feedback from boys reading his series rather than professionals. Stratemeyer, too, needed balance; he had plenty of feedback from adult editors and publishers. Zencey further states that postmodernists don’t define a truth but rather look towards social and cultural constructions as avenues to a truth. This last point is how this thesis situates the Nancy Drew cultural icon. Somehow, regardless of time and cultural movement, Nancy responds in apposition with the movement allowing her to succeed years beyond many other protagonists and exist with, between, social movements that otherwise wouldn’t be possible. The movement of postmodernism and its dependence on culture and social interpretations has made this possible for Nancy and her impact has henceforth continued to be profound.

Using postmodern theory to approach Nancy Drew reveals the multi-cultural and personal layers manifested through the development of the character; ironically and ultimately revealing her untimeliness and anachronistic quality and therefore her postmodern feminist ideal. In order to utilize the best resources, this thesis will focus on the third book in the series, *The Bungalow Mystery*, because it was the last book in the series that Edward Stratemeyer was alive to edit and therefore the last novel that would both demonstrate his input and also would be evidence of the original system after having published two novels previously. Postmodern culture cultivated and provided the means

for Nancy to be remade, though her praise has always been as feminist, she maintains this title, but in this thesis meets the postmodern culture and theory that developed the young sleuth into an icon.

CHAPTER II

OTHER

Nancy Drew is an intriguing study because of the many questions and issues her texts raised at the time and continue to raise. While each book individually presents themes we might identify as modern or postmodern, this chapter will focus on the ways that the entirety of Nancy Drew has postmodern qualities that should be acknowledged and analyzed as an explanation for the series' success. The iconic character of Nancy Drew has broken into several "sub-parts" that are identified as one of the many Nancys with which her readers identify. This chapter introduces to Nancy Drew studies the idea of the term *other*. In this sense, *other* represents a type of change of dominant. But rather than a complete change to a new dominant, it is more of a nod to the suppressed, allowing a new dominant in the text but a change that is not common or representative of culture. The change of dominant seems to suggest that the *other* has become normed enough that it has replaced the former dominant. This is not the case in *Nancy Drew*. Nancy is intentionally displayed as *other*, but is not intended to represent that there are other situations like hers. Nancy is to be viewed as the exception. The idea of *other* typically refers to gender, class, or race. While there is scholarship that merits these topics of *other* in the series, this thesis will explore a new *other*, creating a new change of dominant between the already existing binary of male versus female. Now it's Nancy versus males (sometimes) as well as other females.

Tamise Van Pelt writes in the article “Otherness” that “the contemporary idea of the Other [is] rooted in area studies [and] inscribes itself in theories of race, class, and gender and reinscribes itself in post-colonial theories of national identities both placed and displaced” (2). Aaron Schutz writes, “the desire to preserve and enhance alterity, or absolute otherness, is a crucial ethical impetus, explicitly or implicitly, of much postmodern work” (225). Preserving and enhancing alterity becomes an obvious function of the Nancy series when her character, and Nancy in contrast to others, is constantly demonstrating a need to establish some type of relationship with the “other.” Jennifer Woolston writes, “A large part of Nancy Drew’s appeal has been her overt physical action, as it materialized during a moment in American history when female ‘dependence’ was ‘treated as the preferred occupation.’ Instead of buying into the idea that women should be relegated to the hearth and home, young readers of *Nancy Drew* mystery stories were presented with a decidedly more exciting alternative” (Woolston 177). Woolston is establishing that Nancy as *other* is exactly the appeal. Nancy presented readers with an *other*. Arthur Daigon writes in “The Strange Case of Nancy Drew”:
“How different from the vicarious experiences which occur in the reading of the animal story! Here the joy is in freedom from constraint, in struggling against elemental forces, in owing allegiance to no social or moral code” (667-668). Daigon and Woolston’s remarks cite the freedom and endless opportunity for discussion and interpretation presented by the postmodern *other*.

The first and maybe main idea of postmodernism, if it were to be broken into bullet points, would be its rejection of a dominating structure. Postmodernism is in constant pursuit of being *other* from the dominant, yet also resists submitting to any of the other minority agendas either. For example, Nancy is considered feminist but there are certain aspects of her character, such as her desire to be a helpmate for her father and care for the home, that conflict with the Nancy Drew series submitting to the grand narrative of feminism. Nancy, therefore, represents *other* where she at times is feminist, yet at other times is a blatant rejection of that narrative. As this thesis highlights the feminist nature of the series, it will need to be clear that she does not fully submit, though it will be the angle of focus. According to the purposes of the theories of feminism and postmodernism, these two theories cannot overlap because to do so would be a blatant violation of each purpose. Feminism seemingly violates postmodernism because feminism is a focused agenda for women and women's voices. Postmodernism's purpose is to bring to the foreground the alternative voice that has been "pushed back," so that now feminists do not have to submit to any agenda including feminist agenda. Yet, the feminist voice in this case is that which is being silenced because feminism is an obvious *other* to patriarchy. Phillip Dybicz provides what could be an explanation of the effect of the transition between the theories of modernism and postmodernism. In discussing mimesis, Dybicz uses this proof "Heidegger illustrates this point through his anecdote of the dysfunctional hammer – it is only when it no longer operates as a hammer that people begin to question its essence as a hammer" (347). Any change allows room and even

causes a new analysis. So, the transition from modernism to postmodernism during the second edition of the Nancy Drew series leads to questioning the essence, the theoretical purpose of the body of works and how they fit together, and in this case, *if* they can fit together. Recent research by many postmodern feminists or feminist postmodernists determines that the two theories can exist and do co-exist. The theories, like Nancy, have seen an important developmental process. And shows how Nancy works bridge a theoretical transition resulting in multiple Nancy versions and ultimately a postmodern product that stands in *other* to her original self.

Yet, other theorists find postmodern rejection of *everything* dominant to not only be ironic but even anti-foundational to a “theory.” Jorge Larrain attempts to uncover the irony of postmodern theory specifically in its attempt to reject an ideology because in order to criticize, the most well-known of postmodern names have ironically undertaken some form of ideology in order to properly critique despite their claim of overthrowing ideology. He explains, “this is why postmodernism is suspicious about the critical concept of ideology, because it is impossible to pass judgment on a discourse from the perspective of another discourse. Hence the critical concept of ideology must be abandoned “ (291). While Larrain is ultimately arguing that postmodernism claims to overthrow the use of ideology and yet still does apply its own dominating ideology in order to critique, it poses a new alternative. Rather than dismissing that postmodernism is therefore ineffective, it creates a new option. It removes the dominant approach as “the correct approach,” and while a reader may still read a text in the dominating ideology

(and this is acceptable), a different reader could use another ideology and possibly be as accurate and justified for doing so.

The idea of *other*, according to Pelt, is that “many contemporary theories of identity use the Other as half of a Self/Other dichotomy distinguishing one *person* from another” (2). But it is never as simple as one idea versus another. Culture and experiences have a significant impact on deconstructing meaning. Aaron Shutz writes in his article “Teaching Freedom? Postmodern Perspectives” that “postmodernists tend to argue that we are led to believe about ourselves, what we learn about how we are supposed to act, the ways we are to frame ‘problems,’ and even the tools of reason that we use to solve these problems, do not simply represent neutral skills but are in fact ways of forming us into particular kinds of subjects” (216). Dybicz argues that “...human action is based on intention – these value judgments ultimately touch on a value concept that is universal to all human beings...This relates to a causality of human action in that all people have an image of themselves as how they are and how they would like to be (or continue to be)” (343). And later, “humans have a particular desire that they would like fulfilled and that reflect who they would like to be. They also reflect on their past to inform themselves of who they are” (346). Dybicz makes it difficult to ignore cultural impact. For Nancy, not only does the writer and editor change, but the readers change; they change because their culture and therefore values change, so Nancy must change, or at least be interpreted differently and this has resulted in her *otherness*, but also in her long reign.

Because of this *other*, Nancy is said to inspire her readers. Many current leaders will recount that in their adolescence it was Nancy who inspired them to such daring; Nancy became a form of self-identity and self expression and as she was continuously remade in an effort to maintain this relationship between the reader and their fictional heroine, this identity can differ between readers. Burwell writes, “Carolyn Keene’s physical descriptions [as a creator of Nancy] faded in the face of my absolute identification with the character...It didn’t matter to me what Nancy Drew looked like because in my mind’s eye, I was she” (52). Kathleen Chamberlain’s article cites Mildred Wirt Benson as saying, “Girls want characters they can identify with...I just wrote somebody I knew they could be like” (Chamberlain 5). Nancy’s Hoffman’s article in a 2009 *New York Times* post “Nancy Drew’s Granddaughters” describes the success of this goal: “Nancy Drew was invoked last week during the Senate confirmation hearings for Judge Sonia Sotomayor. She has said that her Nancy Drew represented boldness and intelligence, the books a gift from a hardworking single parent. In recent years, Laura Bush, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Gayle King, and Diane Sawyer have described themselves as fans” (Hoffman). Hoffman lists culturally impactful women who, according to the article, cite Nancy Drew’s characteristics as both inspiration and a means of molding themselves into the leaders they later became. Chamberlain’s article explores this powerful identification writing, “This paradoxical Nancy helps us understand the phenomenon of ‘identification.’ One of the traditional ways of accounting for Nancy’s appeal has been to say that readers – at least white, middle-class readers-

could identify with her” (5). She continues later, “Nancy Drew is less a source of identification than an object of projection. Partly because of her superficial characterization, partly because of the orderly workings of her universe, Nancy is to readers a mannequin that they can dress in their own fantasies. Once dressed, this model allows readers to test out adulthood without actually taking risks” (5). Whether she is a means of identification or projection, she connected with her reading audience and impacted them into change, movement, and that makes her a worthwhile study as far as rhetoric is concerned.

Other is significant to postmodernism because it represents the suppressed, the less powerful, or rather the *powerless*. But the question and topic of *other* becomes a question of power, which is of high importance to postmodernists who seek to distribute “power” and “generally seeks to complicate the idea of simple unities and identities” (Schutz 218). In this pursuit, no single dominating group will hold all of the power. Larrain’s article explains Foucault’s perspective of power. He writes, “Foucault thus affirms the omnipresence of power and the fact that power is not something that is acquired or seized or which is in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relations. Power is something that circulates, that is never precisely localized or appropriated as a commodity, ‘power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere’” (293). This omnipresence and circulation of power becomes most obvious in later remakings of Nancy like the college series of Nancy Drew where the power that has also been solely Nancy’s is given to other

characters, like Ned, where Nancy now, more believably, occasionally can't hold all of the power and needs to rely on other secondary characters to save her and/or solve the problem.

Larrain brings the argument full circle that power is determined by truth and truth is determined by culture. "For him [Foucault] discourses are not in themselves true or false, scientific or ideological. Each society has its own regime of truth, its own accepted discourses which function as true, its own mechanisms and procedures for deciding which counts as truth. Truth is not outside power" (295). This then leads to important questions for postmodernism: ontological, as opposed to the previous epistemological questions of modernism. The Nancy Drew body of works becomes increasingly interesting here. Readers, depending on their unique situation, will of course perceive the series differently. But also, the series will be perceived differently depending on 1) the particular piece in question because of the large time span the works cover but also 2) the readers' knowledge and perception of the characters and plot events as mirror of either history or imagination. Therefore, "as postmodernism questions our ability to reach a truth which is not relative to a particular discourse, and doubts the existence of fundamental social relations and contradictions, the epistemological judgment implicit in ideology critique becomes impossible" (Larrain 297). This impossibility becomes increasingly obvious when considering the multiple angles with which a reader can approach the works in terms of social questions. Because of this, "Ideology must be eliminated because it undermines the plurality of discourses, in other words, it

undermines democracy. Clearly, then, Keane believes that cognitive and ethical relativism is a precondition of democracy” (307). Dybicz agrees with Larrain “such an occurrence serves as a postmodern definition of oppression: Individuals are robbed of their freedoms to configure events” (349). Postmodern readers are encouraged to impose their own reading or interpretation of any product and in this way they are given liberation. Likewise, the mothers who passed Nancy books on to their daughters are not imposing the same Nancy on the new young readers, who, instead have their own interpretation because the culture in which they read is different, the reader is different, and even the Nancy may be different.

Like Larrain, this contradiction finds fallacy with our approach because if the readers’ perspective of the text is important to understanding its reception and value, then whatever cultural dominancy occurs in the text is likely to occur in the readership audience as well and therefore does not create any accurate balance because the suppressed is still suppressed in the fictional representation of the real world. Larrain concludes “postmodernism not only contradicts itself but also becomes a convenient ideology of the status quo” (313). However, a postmodern approach to the Nancy Drew series is most appropriate. Wicke and Ferguson write “the task of reading each discourse through the lens of the other, putting each term under the pressure of a conjunction across disciplinary and political lines. Feminist theory and practice, in the materialist sense outlined above, now require an understanding of the transformations of postmodernity” (3-4). Postmodernism allows for the exploration of the building and remaking of the

series, allowing for analysis for when the series surprisingly overthrows the dominant voice becoming an “other” and also when the work submits. Then it creates a space to discuss: was this received by the audience? Why?

While “other” seems like a derogatory term, it is essential to feminism. Lisa Cosgrove writes in “Feminism, Postmodernism, and Psychological Research” that “a conceptualization of gender identity as stable and coherent undermines an appreciation for our own otherness, for gendered subjectivity is inevitably the site of multiple and contradictory effects” (92). Therefore, the reader is called upon to deconstruct those supposedly stable identities that lie within genders. Ebert draws from Linda Alcoff’s study explaining, “an effective poststructuralist feminist...can only be a ‘wholly negative feminism, deconstructing everything and refusing to construct anything’ because,...if ‘A woman cannot be,’ that is if she is always already the negative representation, the ‘other,’ then ‘It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say ‘that’s not it’ and ‘that’s still not it’ and ‘rejecting everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society’” (qtd in Ebert 895). She then explains that negative isn’t *negative*; it’s a “Hegelian concept meaning negation and surpassing” (895). Ebert writes, “It is this patriarchal regime of decidable representations that produces the male as the privileged, empowered term and subjugates woman as the excluded other” (Ebert 896). Pelt agrees: “a parallel distinction appears in feminist discourses discussing woman as Other, particularly those discourses opposing patriarchy. Where political rights are at issue,

discourses refer both to woman as an Other human being and to the Subject as a political entity, a theoretical move that unifies the ‘Subject’ as a *person*” and later citing “‘humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him...He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other’” (3). Up to now, the term *other* has been used to highlight an inferior. Ebert highlights that its only “other” because of the initial dismissal, and remains other only because of that and now provides identity beyond even just the too simple dichotomy.

The Nancy Drew series does its part to dispel inferiority by making Nancy do both and more obviously in the 1960 edition. Harriet Stratemeyer Adams writes, “The young sleuth did some rapid thinking. If she left for River Heights late that afternoon she could still fulfill her promise to Laura to meet her guardian and arrive home in time to cook Hannah’s supper” (Keene 29). Nancy is using her feminist power of sleuth-like thinking, but in this case is including her domestic obligations to tend for Hannah who has recently been injured. Even though the character is certainly making decisions in order to fulfill duties that have been considered to belong in women’s sphere, she is also presented in this same text as entirely independent. “After lunch,” Keene writes, “Nancy packed her suitcase, put it in the car, and paid her motel bill. Soon it was time for her and Helen to leave for the Montewago Hotel” (Keene 30). She makes decisions independently of the other female characters, seemingly manages her own affairs without seeking permission to do so, and operates solely to fulfill her obligations, those feminist and those from traditional women’s roles.

At times, in the original 1930s editions, Nancy has capabilities that seem like they would be limited from the female group entirely. Keene writes, “‘I wish I had brought dad’s revolver,’ she thought. ‘I may need it before I get through’” (Keene 93). I’m uncertain how many women were capable or trained to safely handle a revolver, but it seems that this wouldn’t have been the norm, especially for an 18-year-old, which makes this scene establish Nancy as *other* from women and maybe from some young men. More obviously, in the 1960 edition, Keene writes, “‘Well, Miss Drew,’ he said mockingly, ‘we meet again. You’ve gotten in my way once too often!’” (Keene 124). Stumpy Dowd, the criminal, is acknowledging that Nancy, Miss Drew, is the consistent obstacle he has had to overcome to retrieve Laura’s inheritance. She is an equal opponent to the man alone. Of course, he is the villain, so she must be set in contrast as the heroine because Stumpy is *other* by the mere fact that he is the villain, without moral principle, defying morality: “He was ruthless and unprincipled, and would think nothing of shooting her down if she made a break for the stairway” (Keene 135). Karen Coats writes, “One may also argue that the villains in Nancy Drew come from groups of people who might be considered socially or morally abject, often because of their ethnicity or class” (193). This 1930s edition scene makes Dowd *other* from even the reader, a modern quality of the work. Another case for Nancy being presented as *other* from men is in the victim, Mr. Aborn, who is actually Laura’s guardian that the villain Stumpy Dowd is impersonating in order to steal her inheritance and Mr. Aborn’s funds as well. Adams writes in the 1960s, “Mr. Aborn, white as starch, sank into a nearby chair and buried his head in his

hands. 'Nearly all my securities were in there,' he said. One quick glance at him told Nancy that the man was on the verge of a complete collapse. She could not leave him alone, yet how could she get help without doing so?" (Keene 145-146). And later, "The terrifying thought that he might become a prisoner again had been too much for the exhausted man" (Keene 147). Nancy is contrasted as *other* from Mr. Aborn in her calm exterior, and is not only contrasted but is made to save him, too. He expresses gratitude to her later, labeling her as *other* from women saying in the 1960 edition, "'First time a girl ever risked her life for me!' he said" (Keene 176). She is presented as some sort of super human in her abilities to not panic or show physical expression of fear or worry, as though these are weak characteristics.

By examining the various incarnations and editions of Nancy, we can see how otherness is revealed in the series. Melanie Rehak's research on the Nancy Drew book series and Stratemeyer Syndicate reveals that the series was rewritten for a number of reasons chief of which was to make the series more socially acceptable and to update the series' expression of race and gender. While they were making these changes, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams made other changes as well but those are secondary to the primary reason for even beginning rewriting. But she was rushed, many sources determining the rewrites not only a waste, but also ineffective. Why not just create a different series? This idea of remaking is postmodern and is a rejection of modernism. The period of modernism prided itself on the invention of the new while postmodernism prides itself of the remaking of the former, which is exactly what the publishers and culture have done to

the Nancy of the 1930s. The methods taken by the publishers at the time and later by Nancy's surrounding culture does exactly what Ebert describes: "Feminist rewriting thus not only needs to reveal the concealed other" which is women in the feminist agenda "but also to ask why it has been suppressed" (889). The irony in seeking the *other* in the original 1930s Nancy is that Wirt Benson was already seeking to expose the *other*. What we find is that Wirt Benson made the other characters *other* from Nancy. Ebert writes, "It [the process of rewriting] needs to examine what is at stake in its exclusion and what the political consequences of its articulation are: what practices, ideologies, and relations its silence legitimates and reinforces. Then it needs to articulate the social struggles in which difference is inscribed in order to activate old and new sites of resistance, opposition, and change" (889). It seems Wirt Benson was unaware of what she was exposing, it wouldn't be until the next edition, where Nancy isn't always *other*, that Wirt Benson's work was appreciated specifically for this quality.

We know that in this period, the question of women was certainly of concern and part of the dime series' success is because it uncovered the *other* and allowed a young girl to be hero; it uncovered an additional other, teenagers, who had previously been ostracized as a societal hormonal danger, and made that *other* heroic. Boesky writes, "If the child had evolved in earlier periods as the 'other' of the adult, the new adolescent emerged as both the 'other' of the adult (mature, reasonable) and of the child (innocent, untainted)" (187). Furthermore, "these new 'juveniles of distinction' featured middle-class protagonists confronting modern innovations and adventures. However lighthearted

their plots, these novels displayed morals and manners fit for middle-class emulation” (187). This revelation is certainly made clear through studying the remakings of Nancy and reading of critical articles because in the later editions Nancy is not as solely *other* as she first appears in the 30s edition.

Further historical otherness is drawn from the term “girl.” Sally Mitchell writes, “the term ‘girl’ identified that status. The ‘office girl’ in her twenties or thirties was unmarried and therefore controlled her own income and her own time. A ‘working woman’ of the same age was burdened then as now, by the double day. And as we are further reminded, the concept – and status – of the ‘girl’ was increasingly juvenilized as the twentieth century took hold” (357). Not only were females other from males, but also even within the identity of female differentiating woman from girl became another way Nancy met the postmodern term *other*. Rather than simply rejecting both, she is resisting and submitting simultaneously. Russell writes, “Because Nancy is locked between girl and woman, ‘She always has it both ways – protected and free’” (74). She is both woman and girl, yet neither fully woman nor girl. She is *other*.

The other rejection of structure is in the character of Nancy, pastiched through the different women who wrote her, and evident between the 1930s and 1960s editions. Here, Nancy is feminist when she should be feminine and feminine when she should be feminist. She’s against the grain on feminist culture constantly. Ebert defines this as key in postmodern feminism. Ebert writes, “They are concerned not with the *difference between* but with the *difference within*. Thus no entity, whether an individual or the

category of women, is an autonomous, self-contained, self-same identity; rather it is always different from itself, divided by its other” (892). For example, *The Bungalow Mystery* 1960s edition, chapter 1 establishes Nancy as *other*. Keene writes,

Twice she tried to bring the boat alongside the swimmer, but failed. The third time, as the craft swept past, Nancy lunged forward and caught the side of it. She dragged Helen along, supporting her with one hand until she, too, secured a hold. ‘Can you climb aboard?’ their rescuer asked. ‘I’ll balance the boat while you get in.’ Nancy explained about the submerged motorboat and Helen’s useless arms (Keene 8).

The initial “she” in the text that is failing is not Nancy, it is another female character, Laura Pendleton, who Nancy is trying to save through the entirety of this mystery. Despite the fact that Laura is in a boat and hasn’t been floundering in the water for what seems to be some time, she is unable to fulfill the task. Nancy, however, who has been submerged in a violent boating accident due to severe weather and trying to keep her moderately decent swimmer friend afloat, commandeers the ship to save them with merely her arms! She is presented as a woman among girls, as *other*.

In seeing Nancy in this way, we can draw upon Ebert’s discussion of language as symbolic and language decidability. She writes, “‘Difference between’ constructs identities by delineating the clearly marked boundaries between coherent entities or individuals that are self-same, identical with themselves, in their difference from the other” (892). So, in this sense, it’s not that Nancy is feminist or not feminist; it’s that

Nancy is *other* and both. Ebert further writes, “Postmodern difference overturns identity and displaces the ground of decidability. And, of course, the question for feminism is how can it build a transformative politics on a postmodern difference that throws out certainty and destabilizes identity” (Ebert 892). In the boating scene, all three female characters are presented as young girls and all are worried about the fearsome storm. Yet, Nancy is distinguished by page 8 in the book as the hero under the circumstances.

What would have been lost by allowing Laura the strength to steer the boat alongside the stranded swimmers? Nancy’s heroics -- which must be presented in contrast, as *other* from the other female characters that blend to the culture norm. They aren’t shamed for being supporting characters; Nancy adores them! While all three girls are presented as young and in a flattering light, Nancy becomes further *other* because “Nancy Drew’s body is not merely a beautiful object to be viewed; instead, it is a vehicle through which she can carry out her desires to solve crimes. Nancy Drew’s recipe for success involves the antithesis of passivity, therein promoting the idea of outward action and effectively serving as a subversively positive role model for young female readers” (Woolston 173). But Nancy’s chums are included in this because they are on these mystery hunts with Nancy. Woolston elaborates how an active body challenges patriarchy by writing “the maternal body can escape patriarchal marginalization by becoming active, assertive, and visible. Carolyn Keene, as an author, provides readers with...both the call for women to write themselves into texts and the minds of future female writers who can enjoy and identify with the lengthy series of books” (175).

Women are not to be passive beings, but the active bodies, like men, yet the characters presented are *other* from both of these because they maintain feminine description and interests. Schutz agrees that postmodernism is seeking to break up duality and pose *other*: “the writing practices of postmodern writers tend to foreground the ways in which their texts aim at intervening in and *changing* the world, creating’ new spaces, practices, and values” (219). Postmodern deconstructs identity where formerly Nancy would identify as more or less feminist; in postmodernism though, she is a pastiche and therefore a remaking that establishes her as part of postmodern culture that doesn’t submit to either dominating theory.

At times, though, her character does rely on the modernist dichotomy, which suggests either this or that, but nothing in between, or other. Between the first and second editions of *The Bungalow Mystery* and also into the 1960s when postmodernism was actually considered “in action,” the question of a third party is evident. The 1930s edition focuses on making Nancy *other* from her chums. While the later edition integrates more characters to the same plot, but their existence (male characters) create Nancy as a third *other* because she identifies between the female and male characters. For example, in the 1930s edition by Benson, she writes, “Nancy Drew was an excellent swimmer. But, as Nancy knew, Helen Corning was barely able to keep herself afloat in a quiet pool. With crushing, smothering waves bearing down upon her, she would be helpless” (Keene 8). This clearly is a dichotomy within the group of girls.

While the comparison within the group of women remains throughout the 1960s, it adds the hierarchy, or rather deconstructs the hierarchy that men were in a class incomparable to women by creating male characters that Nancy works with and not for. Yet, modernist values are still prevalent in analyzing the relationship between Nancy and her father Carson Drew. This relationship both reveals her submission to him but also her teamwork and ability to him. In the 1960s edition of *The Bungalow Mystery*, “Her father, a well-known lawyer, had trained her to be self-reliant. He frequently handled mystery cases, and Nancy had often helped him in unearthing valuable clues” (Keene 13). Here the text reveals that Nancy is *other* from young girls in that she is trained to be self-reliant like a young man, and that her father trains her like most would a son. But it doesn’t make her quite her father’s equal because of the word “helped.” It’s clear she is submissive to Carson Drew. But in other scenes, her seeming apprenticeship to Carson Drew makes her *other* outside of the dichotomy. In a conversation with her chum Helen in the 1960s edition, Nancy says “‘In the case of a minor,’ said Nancy, ‘an inheritance is held in trust until she is twenty-one, Dad says. That’s five years for Mr. Aborn. I hope he’ll be a wise guardian’” (Keene 26). This scene certainly contrasts her from Helen as Helen doesn’t know any of the legalities, but it also places Nancy as superior of other adult figures, some of which are male, in the mystery. However, she is still submitting to Carson, “Dad says.” Woolston writes, “Carson Drew, Nancy’s father, is the person who must grant approval, and he always yields to her wishes. Instead of being confined by the rules (or laws) of the father, Nancy is allowed to engage in adventures of her own

choosing, thereby proving to be active within the adult world of decision-making...assumes the role of the mother..." (175-176). But he seems to be the only character she submits to. And even if she assumes the role of the mother by decision-making, she doesn't fulfill the mother's role in any of the gender role traditional sense.

The division within the group of women, but from other women, at times addresses the culturally assigned labels of women. These labels are especially evident in the 1930s edition by Wirt Benson when Nancy and Laura are trying to drive home in the rain after moving the fallen tree log from the road. Nancy is telling Laura to relax and that they will make it home soon. She writes, "Laura attempted to obey, but it was obvious that she was suffering from a nervous shock. Nancy Drew longed to question her concerning her troubles, but she felt it would be unwise, for Laura was on the verge of becoming hysterical. What she needed was quiet and rest" (Keene 60). While reading the scene, Laura doesn't appear to be hysterical at all, at least my interpretation of the scene. She seems rightfully worried about the bizarre weather that so frequently occurs near River Heights. However, Nancy treats her as the hysterical woman, the label that has for so long presented women as unable to make difficult decisions in high-stakes, emotional situations. But, this portrayal of Laura is made evident in the 1960s edition revisions by Stratemeyer Adams still, but presented slightly different. She writes, "'Come in, Nancy,' the housekeeper invited urgently. 'Laura's been waiting for you over an hour. She's terribly upset - '... 'Oh, I'm so unhappy!' she sobbed. That's why I ran away!' Nancy gently stroked Laura's hair and waited for the hysterical girl to calm down. Then she said

quietly...” (Keene 75-76). Nancy is described as *other* in contrast to both Laura and Helen at times creating a mental and emotional superiority. Near the end of the 1930s edition, Laura is completely at odds with Nancy’s plan, an *other* in complete discomfort. Wirt Benson writes, “Nancy’s quiet voice at the other end of the wire reassured her. However, as she listened to her friend’s daring plan, she was somewhat alarmed. Still, other than to warn Nancy to be careful, she made no protest, for she felt that her friend’s judgment was probably better than her own” (Keene 164). Nancy is so superior that her supporting characters do not question her even in the face of danger.

Even in subtle implications in the 1960s editions, Nancy is contrasted from Laura in her less feminist scenes. The 1960s plot remaking, which will be further discussed in a later chapter, added the character Don Cameron whose role appears only to exist as a romantic interest, a former and potential date later, and also to assist Nancy and Carson with the thieves at the end of the mystery. Don had already asked Nancy to be his date for his sister’s wedding, but given Laura’s sad and hysterical state and the urgent need to solve the mystery, Nancy provides Don with a substitute date. The 1960s edition has it this way: “‘Wow! A real mystery!’ he remarked. ‘If I didn’t know what sleuthing means to you, Nancy, I’d say you were just trying to brush me off. But you have me feeling sorry for this Laura Pendleton, too...I’m sure sorry you can’t make it...’Thanks, Don...Of course, if Laura won’t go, I’ll keep the date” (Keene 85). This scene reflects the feminism and anti-feminism, the emergence of postmodernism, into the series. First, because the character Don didn’t even exist in the 1930s edition, a message is sent about

either or both Mildred Wirt Benson versus Harriet Stratemeyer Adams or the culture of the 1930s versus the 1960s. Nancy is completely unwilling to let Don be dateless. She will miss her pressing sleuthing obligations (her passion) to ensure that he has a date. She makes herself other from the movement of feminism by making her last statement: “I’ll keep the date” (Keene 85). However, she is rejecting the date and prioritizing what is most important and pressing for her to complete, but she materializes her friend Laura, believing that a date night will cure all of the emotional trauma Laura has endured with her mother’s death and alleged guardian who turns out to be a manipulative fraud. While a distraction is sometimes a healthy way to step back from a problem, it should not be overlooked that Laura survives just fine in the 1930s edition without the existence of Don and that here, Stratemeyer Adams is inadvertently suggesting that a date with Don is what will heighten sad Laura’s spirits. This makes Nancy *other* from Laura in that Nancy is able to process independent of the help of man, but she is still always man’s helper, first Carson’s, and now in the 1960s, she is evidentially date insurance for Don. Yet, as Boesky writes, “She has full access to adult privilege with none of the encumbrances of adult life – no bills to pay, no boss, no restrictions on her freedom. She runs the Drew household, but has Hannah Gruen, her devoted housekeeper, to handle the actual labor such supervision entails” (190). Despite the possibly completely unnecessary invention of Don’s character and date, Nancy’s independence of patriarchy may slip a little, but in the end, she is the woman sleuthing, not because a date is anti-feminist, but because to go on a date would suppress what Nancy wanted for what Don wanted.

A concluding irony is that with every establishment of the *other* often comes the eventual norming of that other. Schutz writes, “a fundamental paradox of the postmodern moment, however, is that there can be no coherent agency without entry into social practices. ‘The paradox of subjectification,’ of the creation of an ‘agent’ ... ‘is precisely that the subject would resist...norms is itself enabled, if not produced by...norms’” (226). From the onset of the series in the 30s, those groups that were *other* and were therefore not initially considered, having become increasingly normed and are therefore given an earlier thought. With each cultural remaking of Nancy, this was part of the process, the *other* is initially “other” and new, but eventually will become more normed and its voice gains more and more “strength,” “volume,” or “influence” possibly becoming one of the dominating grand narratives that postmodernism seeks to reject, hunting instead the amplification of an *other*.

Nancy Drew’s success has resulted not from the solid interpretation of her character in one single light, but in the varied perspectives, strengths and weakness, varying through historical movements and from individual to individual. In this way, the series grants freedom. By this, a reading won’t only be feminist, and it won’t be feminist or anti-feminist; it instead will deconstruct into a multitude of interpretations that vary in degree rather than being a duality.

In transitioning to the topic of postmodern recursion in the next chapter of this thesis, the threads of *other* are usually farther-reaching than perceived. Nancy didn’t invent anything new. Postmodernism, though most critics don’t cite its beginnings until

the 1960s, is evident in works like *Alice in Wonderland* published in 1865, so postmodernism is evident in works even before it dominated culture. Likewise, consider Nancy but one place on a long thread. Women and works before her shaped the ideas that influenced and shaped Edward, Mildred, and Harriet, and after Nancy was read those ideas were further put forward along the thread. Woolston writes, “Nancy’s personal freedom [her *other*] gives way to physical pursuits that frame her not only as a portrayal of the desires of her creators but also as an active representation of Cixous’s ideas...” (178). In this way, Woolston first helps provide research of the Nancy Drew products as *other* in many aspects, yet also shows that while it appears unique to Nancy (given the number of scholarly sources who have explored this topic), it is actually only a message that Nancy is recursively reproducing from history and into history – a type of postmodern recursion and a new term for this topic: cultural recursion.

CHAPTER III

RECURSION

As culture adapts to the *other*, the idea of that specific *other* becomes increasingly common. It soon becomes more apparent in culture. The ideas that seemed so revolutionary were just spawns of earlier ideas. If a person were to be interested in learning about recursion and did a simple, basic, online search of “recursion,” that person would find a number of sites. Interestingly, these sites are not related to postmodernism or literature at all. In fact, the only humanities related field link was a description of linguistic recursion and explored the recursive nature of speech patterns. Most of the sites dealt with mathematics. This is an interesting revelation considering two of the most widely known postmodern novels: *Infinite Jest* and *Alice in Wonderland* are immersed in the world of mathematics with an abundance of scholarly articles exploring the hidden mathematic genius (which is recursive) as well as articles that also prove the writers, David Foster Wallace and Lewis Carroll, were avid mathematicians. Why do I mention these novels and authors seemingly unrelated to Nancy Drew and postmodern feminism? They provide an interesting parallel that will help situate Nancy Drew and her authorial team in terms of postmodernism as well as tendencies of the work en route to postmodernism, yet not fully obtaining the postmodern label.

This chapter will deal with recursion, providing another postmodern term applicable to the works of the icon Nancy Drew and her path to becoming a leading influence on feminists. This chapter of the thesis will introduce a few new terms to this topic: *mimesis*, *allusion*, *recursion*, and lastly *catharsis*. First, we start with the discussion of mimesis, which broken down into word parts, means simply to mimic or imitate. This is an entry into the idea of allusion and recursion; it involves a type of imitation of something previous. Allusion, though, is more a reference to something outside of itself. Recursion is certainly mimicry on some level, but postmodernism's recursion is more of a self-reference, an actual doubling over on oneself. Lastly, catharsis is where the chapter will conclude because ideally the act of utilizing postmodern techniques like recursion will ultimately result in a cathartic reading. Entertainment culture is crawling with examples of postmodern recursion. From music referencing previous albums and songs, to movies that sneak in the writer, director, or the book the characters are reading turns out to be the book being literally read by the reader. But what may appear to be the confusing looping of postmodernism is not intended to be purposeless (how *modernist* of me). Aaron Schutz writes in "Teaching Freedom? Postmodern Perspectives" "that examining who one is, telling a story about oneself, involves not just self-discovery but invariably a creative process of self-invention" (233). Understanding postmodernism as a route of self-invention and self-discovery explains why entertainment culture would ever be interested in recursion. As Schutz writes, this self-invention is one way that postmodernism allows the reader to adventure through the artist's or work's journey, a

self-discovery for the viewer while simultaneously allowing the inventor to continue to invent themselves in ways that also link to the past or previous work. The next paragraph will discuss the specific means of self-referencing previous work, but it's important before reading these scenes to recognize that Schutz is saying it is more than an advertising plug (though it is that); it's also a means of identification for Nancy to reiterate to the reader *who she is*. It helps her readers discover her.

For instance, this thesis focuses on the third novel of the series *The Bungalow Mystery*. The second and third terms mentioned, allusion and recursion, both occur here. It's an allusion because this novel is making direct reference to the previous two novels of the series. However, because these previous novels are still Nancy Drew, it's also self-reference, or recursion. In the 1930s edition ghostwritten by Mildred Wirt Benson she writes, "Certainly Nancy Drew never missed an opportunity for a thrilling adventure. She had established herself as a clever detective by solving the mystery of the queer old clock. Her adventures in this connection are related in the first volume of the series, entitled, 'The Secret of the Old Clock'" (Keene 12). A few postmodern elements occur here: of chief concern is the recursive element of Nancy, in *The Bungalow Mystery* having a mental reference back to an earlier mystery which causes her to mention the mystery to the reader. She doesn't mention the mystery by name at first. Initially, it appears as more of a mental musing down memory lane where this third mystery in the series doubles back to the first mystery novel.

The other postmodern element to mention in passing is the nature of the second part of this scene. When Keene (Wirt Benson) writes “Her adventures in this connection,” the discourse shifts from being a matter of the mystery series to becoming more of an author/consumer conversation rather than an author/reader conversation. It seemingly “breaks down the fourth wall” where the entertainment communicates directly to the audience, like an aside in a play. This postmodern element occurs in many television shows like *The Office*. At the end of *The Bungalow Mystery* when the crime is solved, both the 1930 and 1960 make mention of the next mystery, an advertising plug. Stratemeyer Adams writes in the 1960s edition, “because her work on the case was at an end. Would another mystery come her way to solve? She wondered. And it did. In less than a week, Nancy was facing up to the challenge of *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*” (Keene 179). This isn’t recursive because it’s only mentioning the next, later work. However, it later does move recursively when Laura offers her gift of gratitude, which is one of the main scenes from the beginning of the mystery. Benson writes, “In the girl’s hand was the beautiful aquamarine ring Nancy had admired earlier in the week” (180). The 1930s edition doubles back in the plot and therefore demonstrates recursion. Benson writes, “‘...Unless I give you money I don’t know how to reward you.’...‘My daughter...has made a point never to take pay for her work,’ Mr. Drew explained, coming to Nancy’s rescue...Nancy has accepted a number of souvenirs, as reminders of her various adventures.’...’I did take a mantel clock for solving the mystery of the missing Crowley

will,' Nancy admitted. 'And I accepted a silver urn for discovering the ghost of the Turnbull mansion'" (Keene 200-201).

While these shameless advertising plugs provide some interesting discussion in terms of postmodernism and how it drastically affected the means in which entertainment was portrayed, there are some stronger elements of cultural recursion because of the Nancy Drew series. In this further discussion of recursion, specifically cultural recursion, Nancy Drew's recursion doesn't exactly present itself in the specific, self-referencing way of postmodernism. However, this thesis chapter will argue that it should be considered as a kind of step towards what would become postmodernism in the transition from modernism. Even though it is likely in later works that she double back on herself, that a writer cleverly wrote a crime as a recursion to see if any true fans noticed, this analysis is more concerned with the cultural play and its impact on not only shaping the work initially, but also evidence that culture doubled back and changed what it wanted in its heroine; and therefore, Nancy was changed.

Allowing this type of flexibility, broadening the perspective, and returning the discussion to the postmodern movement, helps analyze how movements come into being if we can view cultural recursion as a preliminary version of recursion. For example, research papers are reminiscent of recursion, in a sense, because of their constant reference to original works. Jorge Larrain in "The Postmodern Critique of Ideology" writes "In a move reminiscent of Nietzsche, Foucault goes on to affirm that power cannot be conceived apart from knowledge. He wants to abandon the humanist idea that

knowledge can only be acquired in the absence of power” (293-294). First, Larrain demonstrates that Foucault is mimicking a similar rhetorical move of Nietzsche. This is probably a diluted precursor to what would become recursion. But Larrain is also pointing to one of the advantages of recursion. Recursion seems similar to allusion in that not all of the readers or viewers will be aware that its happening, only those that are aware of previous work and historical points. In this way, it’s a little reward for those who have the prior knowledge to even be aware that this postmodern technique is even occurring. They differ in that allusion is a reference to something outside of the work, while recursion is a reference within the work.

When these ideas are transcended into cultural movements, like feminism, the first and probably most important point is what was aforementioned: revolutions are spawns of earlier ideas. So, a type of recursion is occurring within the movement providing an important irrelevance to who the speaker is and focus on the message. It also attests to the nature of culture and individuality where one member can almost customize their culture. Of course, their initial influences, those chosen by their parents, before they are capable of choosing on their own, are of consequence because parents do impact and shape their children’s adult choices, preferences, and even peeves. Phillip Dybicz writes, “History and culture serve to circumscribe a person’s world and thus influence how these universal values are particularly expressed” (344). Dybicz’s article “Mimesis: Linking Postmodern Theory to Human Behavior” discusses how imitation is important for analysis. “The universal supporting mimesis is that of value concepts

common (i.e., universal) to all cultures; understanding of human action arises from understanding of an individual's particular expression of these universal values organized as a plot (social constructionism)" (344). He goes on to write, "Within mimesis, themes arise reflecting the universal values that people choose to embrace; these themes capture the various purposes, goals, dreams, and so forth that guide individuals' lives" (344). These ideas didn't originate within *that* society but rather are recurring from a prior speaker.

Recursion can be done for greater rhetorical purpose than self-discovery or self-invention as explained by Schutz earlier. Dybicz explores the notion of catharsis, writing: "Catharsis is what hopefully occurs among the audience members who view the play or listen to the epic poem. Catharsis is best described as a moment of intellectual insight facilitated by the plot" (345). When a work doubles back on the earlier cultural influencers, especially for social movements, like feminism, it can provide a unifying audience catharsis. "The explicit goal of the author is to induce such a catharsis among the audience members so that they can in turn lead a better life," he writes (Dybicz 346). Here, it's clear that culture influences the work, the work influences the audience, the audience is changed, and then culture is changed because people make culture. Discourse involves a cyclical process evolving with each movement between reading audience and speaker.

Yet here, we find our own discussion doubling back to postmodern ideology of language as symbolic. Dybicz, for example, writes:

Humans' very being firmly exists within language, and it is through acts of understanding that the world opens to individuals. People continually engage their worlds via lived experience; and it is through the attempts to organize and order this lived experience that understanding takes place. Thus, there is a creative component to a person's world in that he or she is able to shape it through acts of understanding (Dybicz 346).

Recursion couldn't be more culturally grounded. We create argument and rhetoric by our invented language of symbols that mean specific things, but also carry connotative meanings that are directly shaped by that specific individuals experience, their world. "...in configuring events," Dybicz writes, "he or she chooses from actual lived experiences" (347). Ebert, too, adds "Meaning, then, is the result of a chain of signifiers without signifieds or referents. Language, in short, is nonrepresentational... We thus have no direct access to what is commonsensically called reality; our knowledge of the world is always mediated by language" (893). Here, Ebert points to the fluidity of final meaning that makes postmodernism so unique. She also notes, "As Derrida says, 'all experience is the experience of meaning'" (893). The experience is what shapes meaning, yet the experience is also unique and varying which makes defining more challenging in this culture.

In order to create some type of structure, binaries have traditionally been used to create a sense of knowing and comparison, but as stated in the previous chapter, postmodernism seeks to destroy this idea as it is innately problematic to postmodernism.

Ebert writes, “the dominant concepts and knowledge used to make sense of – to construct – reality in the West are all organized in terms of binary oppositions between two seemingly different, self-contained identities – such as ‘man/woman,’ ‘Logos/Pathos,’ to borrow a list from the French feminist critic Helene Cixous” (893). As established earlier, postmodernism creates an “other” category that dismantles this binary and some of its problems. But it also adds great wealth to this thesis’s discussion of Nancy Drew as a transitional postmodern work and a step toward postmodern feminism. The traditional binary is destroyed due to the postmodern approach, but the initial cultural binary ideology cannot be ignored at the birth of the series. So, where Nancy currently stands, an icon that entertainment is even now continuing to try to use, she stands in contradiction to what she was, but her feminist message resounds; her feminist discourse is evidenced through cultural recursion even after deconstruction of the culture she was born into.

Feminism, in and of itself, has not only changed through history, but has recurred with multiple strands of feminism generating under the same term but also rejecting each other. Feminism, for this reason, begs the question of *other*, while also pointing most importantly to the recursive nature of feminism and postmodern culture. Despite the fact that it has become more popular in cultural and academic discourse, it still maintains close contact to its original threads. The arousal of new questions though: like if addressing gender is actually ironically highlighting difference rather than seeking an ungendered society.

In “The ‘Difference’ of Postmodern Feminism” Teresa L. Ebert writes, “...feminism is an ongoing process of contestations and rewritings of difference in the struggle against patriarchy...there has been considerable distress over...the contestations within feminism itself over social, political, theoretical, and strategic priorities” (889). Postmodernism has aided feminism by writing, “Rewriting is a (post)modern strategy for what I call ‘activating’ the ‘other’ suppressed and concealed by dominant modes of knowing...Thus, in inscribing gender, feminism disrupts patriarchal power and intervenes in the operation of patriarchal ideology,” said Ebert (888). Postmodernism’s benefit to feminism by allowing, even encouraging the rewriting, is relevant to this thesis because it parallels Nancy Drew’s process of writing and rewriting and remaking, and the multitude of influences.

One convincing argument for viewing the series as a duplication of the ideals in culture and this act of duplication as a type of recursion is the fact that gender binary ideals from before Nancy, to the 1930s, the 1960s, and after haven’t disappeared. There are still sects of culture that view gender roles as binary. “Some might argue that this analysis of the Nancy Drew series is unfairly critical,” Elizabeth Marshall writes, “that the original mystery series represents a particular moment in US history, and subsequently, dated ideas about race. While it might be true the books stand as historical artifacts, it is also the case that these texts remain in high circulation around the globe” (219). It may be that some readers set aside the problematic areas of the text as just appropriate to the historical context (despite the later editions that are available). Because

the remakes co-exist with the original version that was deemed inappropriate though, it stands to reason that what has actually happened is different ideals were imposed upon her character, to meet the needs and in the end: two versions exist, two Nancys 1) Nancy of the 1930s culture and 2) Nancy of the 1960s culture.

But this is no surprise if entertainment mirrors culture. Nancy Drew's remade editions, as discussed, were not the result of anything other than a need to make adjustments that would appease the reading culture. In the case of Nancy Drew, "The editorial changes in the books suggest that among other changes made to the series, including stripping Nancy of her independence, any elements suggesting lesbianism were censored from the text," writes Elizabeth Marshall in "Red, White, and Drew: The All-American Girl and the Case of Gendered Childhood" (209). These changes are further explained in an article that discusses the cultural happenings at that time. In the article "Girls and Their Ways" Sally Mitchell explains the cultural tides:

After the first World War, she argues, college became more commonplace and fiction needed new devices. In addition, the culture grew suspicious of female friendships; boys from nearby men's schools were brought in to generate heterosexual plots. Even more distressingly, novels from the 1920s and 1930s began to paint an unhappy portrait of state universities dominated by athletics and male interest. The joyous female world dwindles; sororities practice snobbery and lightheadedness; and college women are presented as 'intruders into the male space' ... Three of these

four books forcefully remind us that there was an earlier period of intense interest in girls and girlhood a century ago (355; 357).

These articles certainly demonstrate that entertainment and cultural icons are only mirrors of the actual culture and can be seen as an extension of postmodern recursion. The changes to the Nancy Drew product were only the result of cultural changes that were occurring even at the beginning of her character and are cause for the many remakings of Nancy Drew, as well as the publisher's continued efforts to reap a profit from the series. In an attempt to make Nancy heroic, but also identifiable, Nancy combines unique qualities but undoubtedly references these historical happenings in American youth.

Recursion also undoubtedly occurs in later cultural influences whose messages recur that are evident in Nancy's text. Jennifer Woolston's article "Nancy Drew's Body: The Case of the Autonomous Female Sleuth" generates a powerful parallel between the French feminist Cixous and Nancy Drew. But she also broadens the scope of possibility for recursion back to the series. "Here, it is central to note that the volumes of Nancy Drew fiction were written by not merely a woman, but many women through several decades of publication" (Woolston 174). It's interesting to explore the likelihood that these women writing could have been writing and speaking from motivation that was inspired by the same source. Woolston argues, "Nancy Drew prefigures many key ideas presented by Cixous regarding women's action and agency in the realm of writing...Nancy's personal freedom gives way to physical pursuits that frame her...as an active representation of Cixous's ideas regarding female autonomy" referring to the way

Nancy physically takes herself into action (Woolston 178). Woolston discusses the many women's voices who agree with Cixous's message for women to speak, but better yet write about women and for women and by doing so would move women into a position of speaking...if they would only speak/do.

Here Woolston draws powerful attention to 1) the recursion occurring historically for women gaining voice, but also 2) proof of the pastiche to be discussed later. She parallels the bold words of Cixous "for women to write themselves into history by openly expressing their wants, needs, and desires without apology" to the actions of Nancy as representative of the writers speaking through the book and through the character (174). Woolston then defines those writing Nancy as "arguably feminist due to their ability to provide voices for their authorial mothers – while simultaneously acting as a strong template for young female readers to admire and (perhaps) emulate" (174). She specifically references Carolyn Keene writing, "Carolyn Keene, under the ideas set forth concerning women's writing and its nourishing aspects, provides readers of *Nancy Drew* with a mythos, written by a group of female authors, that showcases the title character as a further illustration of Cixous's notions of feminine agency" (175). She specifically draws attention to the cultural recursion at hand. Woolston, referring back to Dybicz from the opening of this chapter, mentions the obvious self-invention that was happening when the author's pen which crafted Nancy and the obvious overlap that occurred between their own person and the person of Nancy. Second, the intent was always rhetorical that Nancy might be a beacon to emulate, like Cixous later, and so the feminist discourse

calling women to speak becomes a culturally recursive message within the realm of feminism, but also presents itself here through a very postmodern theoretical lens. She also later acknowledges that the village of voices creating Nancy is exactly what outweighs the patriarchal voice and “the recognition of the community of women’s voices present in Nancy Drew’s development effectively serves to shatter the (seemingly) overwhelming anti-feminist messages...” (Woolston 174). As Nancy Drew sales increased, the female readership increased, and, as we know, employment for women would continue improving.

A tenet of feminism is that women claim their own bodies. So, ultimately, Nancy’s physical body is what grants her ultimate freedom because she has taken ownership. Woolston writes, “Her body is a vehicle through which she can pursue her curiosity, where she feels physical reactions pertaining to her adventures, and where numerous (primarily male) villains seek to restrain her” (Woolston 178). Recursion here is evident because Cixous’s message is merely repeating, mimicking, the actions of the women real or fictional (like Nancy) who took action. Cixous is also further proof of the *other* development post Nancy Drew publication. Nancy Drew scrambles the male/female binary. Like Wirt Benson and Stratemeyer Adams who resist the feminist label, Cixous, too, resists the labels on women. Bizzell and Herzberg provide evidence that not only was Cixous recursive in the message of *other*, but she was also recursive in their movement to resist labels. They write, the 1968 feminist movement uprisings in France caused Cixous to “[describe] herself as being ‘in complete solidarity’ with the

women's movement, a phrasing that carefully avoids claiming membership in the movement" (Bizzell 1523). Cixous message to take action and stand in solidarity while refusing the label is clearly one recurring from Stratemeyer himself, Stratemeyer Adams, and Wirt Benson. But they are only relics ensconcing an important message for young women to read.

While cultures may analyze the text differently, modernists drawing upon the virtuous and moral qualities of goodness and truth of Nancy and postmodernists drawing upon the deconstructed binary, the similarity is the recursive message for women to speak and act through Nancy Drew. Nancy is part of both modern and postmodern cultures. But others see her more as an intermediary step. "Nancy Drew was, and is still, often recommended as role model for girls," Ellen Brown writes, "adventurous and smart, active and brave, yet always guided by the principles of fair play, compassion, and good manners, she's a bridge between the two worlds traditionally assigned as masculine and feminine principles in our society. But that's her trick" (Brown 7). Brown goes on to argue that Nancy's freedom is merely moved by the patriarchy (Brown 8). Despite the freedom that Nancy appears to have, that freedom is contingent upon the male role of Carson Drew in her life. Therefore, women lose power and become *other* because "women cannot rely on men to give them a platform on which to speak... women should fight against the impending silence by writing and sharing their experiences in the world" (Woolston 181). She writes, "By appearing as an original risk-taker" the proof of recursion is written into the syntax of the sentence, "By appearing." Nancy wasn't the

original, she wasn't even the second; Nancy is an example of postmodern recursion where a feminist discourse to speak and act is re-presenting itself even beyond the women who wrote Nancy and paralleling the later discourse of a French feminist (Woolston 181).

In focusing specifically on the pre-cursor step to how we came to have Nancy Drew, we should look more closely at Mildred Wirt Benson and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams. Ironically, though recursion seeks to show a similar thread (which Nancy in part does, she remains *Nancy*), Nancy's character does change throughout. It's actually part of the reason she's become iconic. Rehak writes, in reference to readers perhaps overlooking Nancy's changing character: "what her fans didn't realize was that Nancy Drew had not remained static on the page, either" (*xii*). Nancy's character does generate recursive tendencies for the feminist movement, creating cultural recursion.

Nancy even created mimesis that in turn spurred recursion in the world of fiction. Among the first imitators, according to Rehak, were the Dana Girls series, published by Nancy's publishers and written by Carolyn Keene (Rehak 162). The two women, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams and Mildred Wirt Benson, though living in the same time, have unique experiences and so the "recursion" that happens may be from different feminist influences. The publishers mimicked the structure and the plot, and the message in the culture of feminism is also recurring.

Because Wirt Benson was the initial writer, we will explore what recursive tendencies befell Nancy's character at Wirt Benson's hand. In the case of Wirt Benson's

mother, and many women dating back to even Adam and Eve, women were helpmates to their husband. Wirt Benson's mother was a great help to her father, in much the same way that Nancy helps her own father, Carson. When Wirt Benson went to college and was a member of the swim team, she became aware of preferential gender treatment regarding swim equipment. Rehak reveals Wirt Benson as not only speaking but also writing and publishing about the Iowa women's swim team being neglected for swim equipment despite their obvious superior success to the men's team who received a new pool. Swimming was a very important success in Wirt Benson's life (86). She was a very accomplished swimmer and this is a quality to be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis, pastiche. But, as this was a chief interest, there is a reference made in the 1930s edition that seems to be a direct reference to another woman's daring swimming success. Wirt Benson writes, "You certainly swim very well, Helen. But of course it takes practice to make perfect. I don't think you want to swim across the lake just yet" (Keene 45). Rehak's book mentions that during the time that Wirt Benson was swimming and breaking records, another woman had also accomplished a milestone; she was the first woman to swim the English Channel. It wouldn't be until a little later after *The Bungalow Mystery* was published that swimming across the lake would be a much more tangible goal for a woman (Rehak 75). Though Wirt Benson didn't claim any part of the feminist movement, she certainly displays revolutionary behavior in the discourse she created and which was published and also in her actions.

Wirt Benson, like Cixous and Nancy, believed in women speaking and acting...in this case, swimming. But, characteristic of the culture, there was an expectation of woman to be modest. Wirt Benson writes in the 1930 edition, “‘Nancy Drew’s modest, that’s all. She wouldn’t tell you about the way she helped the Horner girls get their inheritance!’” (Keene 32). Beyond modesty, a few comic values are also presented in the text. Wirt Benson wrote, “His bad manners and occasional slips of grammar puzzled her a bit” (Keene 75). Of course, this is further proof of the previous chapter of *other*, where Nancy is certainly putting forward a superior class, but she’s also showing some distinct cultural values that even occur now, and therefore serve as a better argument for recursion in this thesis. Further cultural recursion of the 1930s woman is evident when she writes, “‘How mean! Why, you’re not strong enough to do hard work,’ Nancy protested. ‘I thought your mother left an ample allowance for your needs’” (Keene 65). This scene from the novel recurs a message of conflicting feminism; on the one hand, Nancy is rejecting the notion that women should do all of the housework, but she is also submitting to the need of an allowance. This isn’t read as anti-feminist, but cultural recursion. Like the women of that culture, the idea of the traditional woman was completely meant to be flattering, in fact, this is still a characteristic sought after in some aspects of culture now (another cultural recursion).

Interestingly, Wirt Benson would denounce the feminist label later in the book. “For all her nay-saying, Mildred was a feminist at heart, even if she preferred not to be labeled one” (Rehak 269). Later, however, Rehak quotes a source interviewing Wirt

Benson as saying, “...She avoided all household tasks, and indeed, might rate as a pioneer of Women’s Lib. In a way, she started a movement.’ But perhaps because the word wasn’t coined until decades after she wrote the Nancy Drew series, Benson said she doesn’t consider herself a feminist. ‘But I do believe in equality,’ she says emphatically. ‘Which, by the way, women still do not have!’” (304). Here, is the proof of the recursive cultural ideals. Terminology will continue to change, but Wirt Benson, like women before and after her were aware that there were limitations, culturally imposed, that did limit their lives. This is what distinguishes this particular discussion from pastiche. The feminist discourse and agenda, the idea of women speaking so that they can speak, is what is evident, but nothing *specific* from Wirt Benson in this particular instance.

Recursion also occurs from Stratemeyer Adams to Nancy. As Rehak writes: “On one occasion, when a reporter was present, she [Stratemeyer Adams] couldn’t help revealing her regret about the restraints put on her by society and family in her childhood and adolescence” (Rehak 18). This is evident as recursion because it’s the core of the entire movement. Whatever the feeling, regret, rage, depression, these emotions were caused by the realization that there were limitations. Some women may not have even known they were longing for anything, but were just aware something was lacking. In her young adulthood, Stratemeyer Adams received several job offers that her father made her turn down, but despite his opinion that she shouldn’t work, he was proud that she received the offers. Likewise, Nancy, though not necessarily forced to do anything by her father, is dependent upon her father, which is certainly part of history (Rehak 70). Keene

writes in the 1960 edition, “Don hurried to the telephone to notify his parents of the plan, while Laura went for a coat” (Keene 134). This could be evidence of an interesting pastiche for the relationship between Stratemeyer Adams and Edward Stratemeyer; however, notice the character is Don calling his parents. After the acceptance of the adolescence in society, parent and child relationships become increasingly apparent in literature. To further iterate this cultural recursion, Stratemeyer Adams also later writes, “Don wanted to know what the plan would be when they reached the bungalow. Mr. Drew said they would...’Next,’ Nancy added...Right, Dad?” (Keene 158). Formerly, Nancy solved her own cases though her father is present in solving the case in the 1930 edition, he is affirming Nancy with “you’re right!,” and Nancy is not asking for his approval, but by the 1960s, she checks with dad to confirm. It’s important to remember that though the 1960s is when the postmodern movement it dated by scholar McHale to have begun, Stratemeyer Adams was born and raised in the modernist period and lived through the transition. So, her childhood and adolescence were spent learning lessons from parents in a modernist age, lessons of truth. This, too, is recurred in the book. Stratemeyer Adams writes in the 1960 edition, “Their friendliness seems forced, and their promises don’t ring true” as a means of personal attack upon the characters of whom she is speaking (Keene 36). While children have little if any influence on their parents/guardians preferences, those tendencies are often visible from parent to child.

Later, when Stratemeyer Adams took over the Stratemeyer Syndicate, she learned the writing formula of the syndicate. Formulas are quite recursive. This chapter

mentioned earlier postmodern writer David Foster Wallace whose entire *Infinite Jest* is written in the formulaic structure of a fractal (McCarthy). Rhetoricians continue to frame successful arguments using formulas of old. The stories, Nancy, had a formula that was honed and developed from earlier Syndicate series and learned by ghostwriters. Stratemeyer Adams, like other women's libbers, was ambitious. "For Harriet," Rehak writes, "it was the chance of a lifetime. She had always loved a challenge, and this one was hard to pass up" (135). This is in reference to Stratemeyer Adams taking over the Syndicate. While Stratemeyer Adams receives much recognition for her feminist role in the Nancy Drew series, even being called "Nancy Drew," she isn't the only woman to fight for her own abilities in the face of a challenge. Many women did. Nancy Drew is simply the recursive fictional manifestation of these efforts. Stratemeyer Adams describes the situation, "'But my husband and I talked it over and he agreed with me...Oh, it was a radical thing to do all right, and some of my friends didn't think I should work. But my children have turned out all right, so I guess I was right'" (Rehak 136). The decision leading Stratemeyer Adams to Nancy reveals an important truth that many feminists neglect to vocalize: There were men supporting women. While it can appear that women were the only ones fighting for women, there are many historical counts of husbands who were married to women who made choices because it was what *she* wanted to do. Stratemeyer Adams' husband did that here. Rehak's presentation of the information doesn't lead a reader to believe that he ever had any qualms with Stratemeyer Adams and it was chiefly her decision.

When Stratemeyer Adams took over and changed Nancy's character, there were cultural influences on Stratemeyer Adams that created a repetitive recursive pattern that was actually problematic in terms of feminist theory. Stratemeyer Adams didn't imagine how Nancy should be the same as Wirt Benson, even citing Nancy as "too bold and too bossy." When Stratemeyer Adams made Nancy more conducive to her own ideal perception, Chamberlain writes that Nancy became less individual and even a blank slate for readers to imprint their own Nancy (Chamberlain 4). Certain qualities that were pastiched from the writers were evidence of cultural recursion. Stratemeyer Adams' character is the product of the experiences of her own life. "As edited by Harriet and Edna instead of their father, she [Nancy] acquired a new patina of modesty" which we know to be the way that Edward raised his daughters based on his parenting of them in their young adult years (Rehak 143). And along the way, while Stratemeyer Adams and her sister are trying to get a handle on the Syndicate and its series, culture was reacting to the series, too. "In later years the Syndicate was much maligned for such politically incorrect scenes," Rehak writes, "which were eventually edited out, but as Mildred herself point out in the 1990s, 'at the time, long before animal rights or violence became an issue, [they] seemed quite natural'" (144). It seemed natural because those were the ideas that were passed to them, that they "inherited."

The argument for recursion both suffers and benefits because "the postmodernism that can be spoken is not the postmodernism that is, because words (or, 'words') don't 'really' have 'settled meanings.' Still, some general statements about postmodernism are

possible. If it has any single core belief, it's that truth is never objective, but is always and everywhere socially and culturally constructed" (Zencey 42). And recursion reflects culture. So it is acceptable that the definition of recursion as used here is not fully postmodern, the argument that culture has created "truths" in discourse in the modern period and later deconstructs truth and even within the argument of feminist theory, which has many strands that do not agree and often war, there is a strand that recurs historically and is evident here in Nancy Drew: women's voice is established when women speak and take action. And as Cixous wrote, spoken words are only spoken and heard for a time, but those that are written are forever recorded. Rehak writes, "'it's hard to accept that Nancy Drew is dead,' mourned one obituary writer. But she had it wrong. Though Mildred and Harriet are both gone, Nancy is anything but. She turned seventy-five in April of 2005" (Rehak 312-313). And if one were to disagree that Nancy is a means of creating recursion and impose their own "truth," that argument would then breakdown in the face of postmodernism because there isn't an objective truth, only constructed reality, which is exactly what Nancy's recursion demonstrates, and that between modernism and postmodernism allows for a self-invented truth from whatever, often "whatever" is culture. In the case of Nancy Drew as a conduit for cultural recursion specifically in feminist culture, it's evident that because of the remakings that postmodern culture embraced, many different conclusions are gleaned from the readers of Nancy Drew, but the recursive message that women should speak and act remains the

same though she may be less feminist in the later editions and though she may have boyfriends and more clothing and makeup, she, Nancy, is still speaking and doing.

Nancy Drew, as discussed in the next chapter, can also be seen as a pastiche of the women who wrote her. Pastiche is another postmodern term for this thesis. Though in this chapter Nancy is analyzed for the cultural message that she inherited and taught, in the next chapter she will be analyzed as a postmodern duplication, a pastiche, of Wirt Benson and Stratemeyer Adams' lives in part.

CHAPTER IV

PASTICHE

Postmodernism prides itself on the remaking. Modernism required that something be made *new*. This specific distinction separates Nancy Drew from her modernist Goodness and Truth, to the core of her success; Nancy Drew's success can be understood in terms of the postmodern term pastiche. Ramona Curry's article "Madonna from Marilyn to Marlene – Pastiche and/or Parody?" provides a very interesting commentary on the technique of pastiche because she too explores cultural icons. She cites Frederic Jameson as saying "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask...but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without a parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter...Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor..." (qtd in Currey 15). Pastiche, in this view, is best visualized as a patchwork quilt. It is an intentional effort to praise multiple styles and not generate something new, but rather to re-generate something already made and to honor it in a way. Exploring the possibility of postmodern pastiche

creating the character Nancy Drew from specific characteristics of Mildred Wirt Benson and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams helps show the unique postmodern qualities that Nancy does exhibit though she is only partially postmodern; evidence of pastiche shows scholars that there is a transition period between cultural movements and entertainment culture reflects these interesting cases.

It's no surprise that this happens with cultural icons fictional and nonfictional. While modern culture would probably more embrace the former popular perspective that "culture is ornamental, secondary if not a frivolous distraction from the real business of life" (Williams 1). However, there has been a re-conception of culture as Jeffrey J. Williams continues to explain in his article "The Ubiquity of Culture" where "culture of course has another familiar sense: rather than the flowers of human experience, it encompasses a broad range of human experiences and products" (1). Giuliana Bruno's article explains: "Pastiche, as an aesthetic of quotation, incorporates dead styles; it attempts a recollection of the past, of memory, and of history" (67). The Stratemeyer Syndicate started by Edward Stratemeyer, who created the dime novel series and the idea of ghostwriters, worked to create such ambiguities that were timely for the reader of that day, but they also were cognizant that any real concrete connection would forever date the text. Eventually, Jeffrey J. Williams writes, "Nearly fifty years ago, Raymond Williams charged criticism to understand the conjunction of 'culture and society.' Now it seems that culture *is* society, interchangeable as a synonym for social interests, groups, and bases" (2). Ramona Curry's argument is that "meanings of any given texts arise not

predominantly in readers' experience of its construction but in their discursive interactions with it in the context of myriad associated texts" (16). Williams' assessment that culture is now society is a demonstration of postmodern culture's tendency to blur the lines of reality, identifying reality possibly as areas that aren't actually reality like a cyber-life, for example.

Curry's analysis of Madonna as pastiche or parody finds

the irony in the dialogue with star images doubles back on itself, for the repeated use of variation as a parodic technique can itself become a feature of a star image. After all, a chameleon is a specific animal. Thus, the ability to encompass a variable array of star images has... become a mark of Madonna's originality, her uniqueness as a star. The act of destroying the concept of the unique star gradually creates another star concept; thus over time, an initially parodic moment is lost and what remains may seem pastiche (25).

Nancy Drew is, in one way, a cultural product that followed similar previous products: Dana Girls and Ruth Fielding to mention a few. So, these previous fictional characters and assignments influenced her making. A smart businessman like Stratemeyer would obviously draw upon the strengths of these former experiences and implement those same patterns and characteristics into the Nancy Drew series...pastiche. After the Syndicate's success with Nancy Drew, they realized they had a winning formula and "were flooding the market with Nancy Drew-inspired girls... 'Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys were

doing so well that the Syndicate decided to launch a new series which would combine the best features of both” (Rehak 162-163). The remakes of the original series also established their own formula and then the later editions to the series of college Nancy. Her remakings though were not meant to criticize the original form of the series but rather present a different form of Nancy, existing simultaneously with the original. Giulana Bruno writes, “Pastiche is ultimately a redemption of history, which implies the transformation and reinterpretation in tension between loss and desire. It retraces history, deconstructing its order, uniqueness, specificity, and diachrony” (74). Nancy’s creators have instilled this redemptive and transformative pastiche in the series. Nancy began as a bolder feminist when it was less common to be, and in her rewritings 20 years later, when it was more common, she became less, reverting back to Wellesley College values.

Here, however, is where the argument will stretch the definition of pastiche. In postmodernism, a musical piece can be postmodern and pay tribute to several genres of music. A successful example of pastiche meshing musical genres is “Bohemian Rhapsody” by Queen. In this case, the song is speculated to be tribute to each of the genres. Nancy Drew is a much more personal cultural product than some others. Her pastiche extends beyond just a successful mystery crime heroine, but is also a pastiche of the women’s lives that created the fictional world of Nancy Drew for so many other real life young women. This personal investment is possibly what has made the series so iconic. Pastiche can “also function as an oppositional strategy, not only to *personal* obsolescence, but also to the tendency of signifiers to be reduced to the cliché through the

patterns of exhaustive repetition and consumption in postmodern media” (Curry 28). The later remakings of Nancy don’t reach obsolescence; however, some do find them less impactful than the original series which is in progression to obsolescence, especially when considering the two TV shows of Nancy that both failed to air for various reasons. As the personal pastiche was masked over by other cultural and social movements of the later time periods for Nancy, she became less impactful determined by the fact that the sales were less successful.

Writing is easily seen as one of the most personal investments a person makes. Even if the writing’s content is not directly personal, that writing is still a clear record of a person’s thoughts, opinions, and perspectives. If anyone were to argue that writing is impersonal, they would quickly change their minds when a reviewer provided critical feedback. Writing is a personal investment, one that we often hang on to for years and years even in small forms like cards, or even speeches, notes, and many other forms. These elements can be used in fiction pieces to help demonstrate how pastiche can be subtly portrayed by “quoting from different real cities, postcards, advertising, movies...,” writes Bruno (66). Authors can insert many different worlds and subtleties in this way.

Nancy Drew was a particularly personal creation because the collaborators on the series invested bits of their actual lives into her (Nancy’s) story and possibly received scrutiny for the decision to leave the homestead. While they certainly received praise later for the success of the Nancy Drew series, there was the added criticism that came with the territory of working in children’s literature publication. Rehak describes the

dedication that went into the success of Nancy Drew: “The combination of Stratemeyer’s outline and editing with Wirt Benson’s efforts had produced a fantasy girl with a few touches of the real – possibly touches of the Mildred, who had added some of Nancy’s bolder moves and snappier dialogue to Stratemeyer’s outline” (Rehak 119). However, the website “The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew” suggests that the pastiche may be so, but it’s not limited to Stratemeyer Adams and Wirt Benson. The site attributes praise and specific character manifestation from Edward Stratemeyer, publishers Grosset & Dunlap, and even the generations of women passing the books down. It seems the old cliché “It takes a village,” applies to Nancy Drew.

This pastiche from her writers is further evidence of the nostalgia that still makes Nancy a prominent cultural icon. Rehak writes “She [Nancy] had been through two different writers and a host of editors, all of whom tried to imprint on her with their own beliefs about who America’s preeminent teen detective should be” (*xiii*). “The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew” further explain the nostalgia, “For over 80 years, Nancy Drew has trailblazed through generations, her enduring and forever timeless quality a huge part of her appeal.” Though Nancy debuted in a modern culture in the 1930s, by the time that she was revised to be socially correct, and further remade later, she was being introduced to a new culture, a postmodern culture, and it is because of this culture that she became iconic. Regardless, readers maintain a sense of nostalgia for the character.

Cultural pastiche also manifested in the Nancy Drew series. This type of pastiche is evident in any of the major works of a period canonizing it for study and marking the trends of any given period. For Nancy, the publishers became the mediator dictating what the public/culture wanted and if the manuscript was predicted to meet these desires. Rehak cites Street & Smith editors as saying ““We believe a rollicking story along humorous lines can be written for juvenile readers without anything that would tend to make the parents frown.’...Their ‘wants,’ it turned out, ran to the true crime – as long as it was tasteful, apparently – or at least to the idea that truth is stranger and more compelling than fiction”” (10). While this statement isn’t surprising given the rejection from library shelves initially, the publishers must have done something to appeal to the reading culture. “The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew” reports that, “The original publishers, Grosset & Dunlap, played a huge role in the success of Nancy Drew. From their marketing strategies to their many salesmen, they kept the series in widespread distribution...” This point is distinct from the previous chapter discussing cultural recursion because the publisher would be very specific about what was desirable and what would be considered un-publishable. It cannot be overlooked that these editors and publishers pastiched their own beliefs and values in the series, too, because they were the writers’ superiors and had final say.

Other important cultural pastiche is evident from focus on women of the time in general. Female culture, as Rehak writes, was changing, and “...by 1880, nearly a third of all college students were women – forty thousand of them in total” (50). Yet, despite

the numbers of growth in female college students, their studies were still largely based upon cultural expectations of what areas a female should excel. For example, Rehak mentions the first female professor of MIT as believing that homemaking was a required skill for young women, “too complex and too important,” and the university was responsible for transferring to the young female college students “the most up-to-date scientific knowledge” to use in their homemaking (Rehak 50). These ideals are evident in Nancy through Edward Stratemeyer. Though women now appeared on university campuses, their attention was still to be toward homemaking, which created a very interesting contradiction. We must recognize, too, as part of Nancy’s pastiche: a man created her. “The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew” reports, “Edward was a traditionalist as far as women and their place in society were concerned. When Nancy was created, it had only been nine years since women had been given the right to vote, having gained the Constitutional right in 1920. Many of the female heroines of Edward’s pre-Nancy books had some independence and had their own adventures yet they were still more domestic and traditional.” Women were surrounded by higher education and the height of academia, yet were encouraged to only challenge themselves in the sciences of a home. These were ideals that Mr. Stratemeyer certainly taught his daughter Stratemeyer Adams, and that Stratemeyer Adams pastiched into her “daughter,” Nancy.

But change has a way of sneaking up. Even with the precedent set for gender roles, women continued to push the envelope (cultural pastiche evident in Nancy Drew’s character and plot lines). Pastiche is exactly the vehicle to do this. Bruno writes: “With

pastiche there is an effacement of key boundaries and separations, a process of erosion of distinctions. Pastiche is intended as an aesthetic of quotations pushed to the limit; it is an incorporation of forms, an imitation of dead styles deprived of any satirical impulse” (62). While the people and events discussed in this chapter may be nods to the events and impact of Nancy Drew, pastiche becomes impossible to ignore when comparing the details of the lives of Mildred Wirt Benson, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, and Nancy Drew.

Wirt Benson, the one to write the original Nancy into existence, she describes her off-beat person much like Nancy. “...Mildred remembered her mother always encouraging her but also trying to make her ‘into a traditional person. But I resisted that. I just was born wanting to be myself” (Rehak 35). An individualism that is not only evident in Nancy Drew, but also one of the characteristics that could be attributed to her immortalized cultural icon status. “The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew” reports that “[Benson], tired of what she like to call the ‘namby-pamby’ style of girls’ series books, she had no intention of characterizing Nancy as namby-pamby. Nancy came to embody the feisty spirit of independence that emanated from Mildred.” A very specific heroic strength that Wirt Benson bestowed on her heroine was the talent for swimming – a trait inherited no doubt.

Perhaps most claim that Nancy is an inadvertent feminist because she solves crimes without any dependency upon a male role (in the original series). Likewise, Wirt Benson wasn’t following second behind any man. Rehak writes, “In a mixed relay with a

man swimming against a woman, Mildred Augustine...’ Even the captain of the men’s team...was no match” (74). Likewise, in the 1960 edition Keene writes, “An excellent swimmer, Nancy managed to get her head above water almost immediately” (Keene 6). This talent of Nancy’s originated from the 1930s edition ghostwritten by Wirt Benson herself, “Nancy Drew was an excellent swimmer” (Keene 8). Benson was more than just an excellent swimmer; she was an all-around athlete. Keene (Adams) writes, “You’re a terrific player, Nancy!” (Keene 24). While Nancy appears to be talented in many areas, her swimming talent is an interesting pastiche very evident in *The Bungalow Mystery*.

Since writing is personal sometimes it becomes difficult for the writer to separate himself or herself from the protagonist. As we know about readers of Nancy, it was also difficult for them not to picture themselves in the role of Nancy. Wirt Benson attended school in Iowa. While this school was certainly revolutionary, it did still have grounding in traditional ideals, as “Iowa students were encouraged to be morally well-rounded human beings” (Rehak 84). Well-roundedness is evident in Nancy’s character as well, pastiche. Her entire premise is to right wrongs and to serve justice. In her journalism program some foundational ideals were drilled into the students: “‘make sacrifices to the truth and in furtherance of truth. Write nothing that you do not know to be true. Check and double-check your facts. Do not crucify the truth for the sake of a good story.’...At the age of eighty-eight, Mildred could repeat these fundamentals as if she had graduated just the week before” (Rehak 88). Nancy seems driven solely by an insatiable need to uncover the truth. Keene (Benson) writes in the 1930 edition, “His stories, which were

obvious untruths, disgusted the girls, but for Laura's sake they listened politely" (Keene 39). Her disgust with untruth is another inherited pastiche from her ancestor, Wirt Benson. But more importantly, Wirt Benson sought the truth and wrote the truth no matter what the cost.

Nancy's forthcoming is an attribute that disappears between the 1930s and 1960s editions of *The Bungalow Mystery* as Nancy is less forthcoming with "Jacob Aborn" as to the whereabouts of Laura. In the 1930s, Keene (Benson) writes, "'Now just a minute, Mr. Aborn!' Nancy's voice was quiet, but it held a quality, which warned the man he had gone too far. 'I'll not permit you to call me a sneak thief. When you get through ranting around, I'll tell you why I came here'" (Keene 84). In the 1960s edition, Nancy makes up a clever story. While it's understandable that the clever story is for her own safety, Wirt Benson is clearly pastiched in Nancy here by holding no reservations from the truth. Later, in the same edition, Nancy refuses to lie, "'Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't'" (Keene 86). She is truthful in that she doesn't trust Mr. Aborn where exactly Laura is; she holds no reservation in this pursuit. Nancy's determination is clearly a quality she inherited from her "pen mother." Later Rehak writes, "These girls talked the way Mildred talked, with an edge that served them well in a world where men and boys were still mostly in control" (182). And later, "Exhausted, she had allowed her own troubles to seep into the charmed world of River Heights, most noticeably in the character of Nancy herself" (219). Wirt Benson filtered in further similarities of her life to the Nancy world, including characteristics of those close relationships around her. However, as we know, a

later edition followed, not written by Wirt Benson. “The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew” explains it, as well as the evidence of postmodern pastiche here: “Her ideas of what Nancy should be were different from the more traditional finishing-girl style of Harriet Adams, and as the series went on. As a result of these differences, Nancy underwent changes at the direction of Harriet and later under Harriet’s revision.” The website argues that these changes were merely the result of pastiche from different individuals’ values – values that seem to be a sort of pastiche from parents, specifically Edward Stratemeyer.

Though Edward Stratemeyer planned for one type of heroine, the very daughter he raised, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, described a heroine a little differently, pastiching a different feminine hero. Rehak describes the pastiche writing, “In the process, they [Harriet and Edna Stratemeyer] were putting their mark on his [Edward Stratemeyer’s] company and his books, transforming both, bit by bit, into their own endeavors” (Rehak 137-138). This changed not only how the company functioned, but also how it was perceived and most importantly for this thesis, how Nancy was perceived.

Stratemeyer Adams attended Wellesley College where the school’s curricular virtues, just like those at Iowa College instilled in Wirt Benson, became important to Stratemeyer Adams. Stratemeyer Adams so identified with Nancy that the school’s motto “‘Not to be ministered unto but to minister to’ – became Harriet’s motto in all things, and she mentioned it on numerous occasions. Eventually, she claimed it for Nancy Drew, too, saying: “‘Why is Nancy Drew so good? Because of the Wellesley College motto,’ and

telling reporters that she was sure that had Nancy ever gone to college, she would have been a Wellesley girl” (Rehak 32). Nancy demonstrates a behavior in the 1960 edition that seems to demonstrate this quote from Wellesley in action. Keene writes, “Although Nancy thought the stranded motorist was being extremely rude, she, nevertheless, suggested that the woman telephone a nearby service station. ‘I’m sure they’ll send someone out to help you’” (Keene 19). It is unknown if the publishers wrote that Nancy Drew attended Wellesley College in the later series where she goes to college, but the parallel heroics and in this example, her ministering unto someone who she frankly didn’t think deserved it is significant for this thesis. Stratemeyer Adams clearly valued the school’s motto as a way to live, and in Stratemeyer Adams’ perspective possibly her way to pastiche heroics from Stratemeyer Adams to Nancy.

While Stratemeyer Adams was at Wellesley College, there was a fire. “A school janitor...was nothing short of awestruck at the girls’ behavior in a moment of crisis...‘For they were calm, determined, and unafraid, and chatted in quiet tones as they worked in the cold damp morning, performing feats that would be tests for young men of their years’” (Rehak 68). Even though Nancy Drew was already a fearless hero in the 1930s, before Stratemeyer Adams’ influence, in *The Bungalow Mystery* there is a scene where Nancy rushes toward a wrecked vehicle on verge of exploding to salvage Laura’s inheritance. It’s interesting to imagine if Edward Stratemeyer, while creating the plot line and editing the last novel he would edit, smiled proudly at the parallel to his own daughter’s brave heroics in a similar situation.

Harriet Stratemeyer Adams was no doubt influential in Nancy's success. The argument for postmodern pastiche becomes especially convincing when "Nancy became Harriet's baby – she considered Nancy like a daughter" ("The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew"). But Stratemeyer Adams wasn't solely good for Nancy. It's said that we grow into versions of our parents. It's also that what commonly we don't "get" things from our parents, but rather "catch" them. This means that those less praiseworthy characteristics are usually what are most apparent. Despite the praise attributed to Stratemeyer Adams for being a CEO in a time when it was uncommon, Stratemeyer Adams' upbringing warred against this decision. "The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew" reports "Being the traditionalist that he was, Edward had not approved of Harriet working outside the home and she helped edit for him at home until her marriage. Marriage and family kept her busy..." ("The Mysterious History of Nancy Drew"). These values were certainly ingrained in Stratemeyer Adams; it even manifested in the writing that she was finally able to do. In rewriting *The Secret in the Old Attic*, for example, in order to heighten a sense of military yet also maintain a sense of ambiguity so as not to tie the book to a specific time and therefore date the text, Stratemeyer Adams sent instructions to rewrite the story.

...'In order to have the story timely, however, we have introduced a grandfather who was in World War I, and his deceased son, who had joined the American army and had lost his life. In telling this, please do not give the idea he was in the line of battle. Leave it indefinite enough, so

that in years to come the story will not be dated.’ With this character, Harriet immortalized her son. When the book came out in 1944, the fictional son, just like Sunny [Harriet’s son], had ‘lost his life four years ago on a routine training mission’ (Rehak 205).

Stratemeyer Adams hasn’t created anything new, but rather has, in a praising and immortalizing intent, remade the story of her son.

The exploration of the postmodern pastiche in this thesis reveals the personal nature, the custom-culture that postmodernism allows. It’s characteristic for postmodernism to have a blurring between realities; here, Stratemeyer Adams is demonstrating a blurred distinction between Nancy as a means of publishing income and as more than a personal investment, a daughter.

It also becomes clear that absolutes become much more fluid. Even Nancy became more fluid, as a consequence of pastiche, but this will be elaborated in the subsequent chapter of this thesis discussing the postmodern term *remaking*. Nancy’s fluidity is also a reason that Nancy has become the cultural icon that she is. Linda Hutcheon writes that “pastiche plays a crucial role in the postmodern aesthetic of difference and hybridity, especially in its function as a tool of ideological critique that fosters critical thinking” (324). She further elaborates that though these terms’ definitions do expand as time and experience morph the definitions. But because pastiche is part of a process, it helps explain the thread of Nancy Drew this thesis has followed. Because of pastiche “‘It’s hard to accept that Nancy Drew is dead,’ mourned one obituary writer. But

she had it wrong. Though Mildred and Harriet are both gone, Nancy is anything but” (Rehak 312). Here lies the ultimate proof of pastiche. If Nancy were only a copy of pure identification with each woman that wrote her then she would be “dead,” but the technique of pastiche – collaging pieces together, takes only pieces and remakes something new, Nancy Drew, the icon, which is exactly why pastiche has flourished so. It’s allowed for a flexible and gradual challenge of the previous period. Hutcheon writes, “Postmodern challenges to romantic values have made room for pastiche to flourish, of course, as an inherently dialogic and intertextual form” (Hutcheon 324). It’s how the first mingling of high and low culture was viewed as something other than abomination and ultimately Nancy Drew shows the progression to this point. Her character is unarguably the “high culture” and Nancy seems to police the “low culture,” but Nancy isn’t frowned upon for her mingling with low culture. Granted, she is trying to punish the low culture principles, but she is still actively interacting with lower culture.

While it seems that pastiche is simplified here in this cultural example and that pastiche is merely a copy and paste endeavor, it’s much more rhetorically significant. Pastiche creates a means of identification. The readers need a realistic and relatable character. What easier way to find these stories than in one’s own life? So, the women pastiche traits, and sometimes exact same stories, strengths, or interests into Nancy Drew. Ellen Brown writes, “The feminist reader hopes that other women will recognize themselves in her story, and join her in her struggle to transform the culture” (11). This ambition circles back to the ideas of self-invention from Aaron Schutz in the previous

chapter revealing that a postmodern process, in this case, is dependent upon embracing a process starting with invention and defining and redefining. Sally Mitchell writes describing an ideal discourse, “when the audience is imagined as ‘girls’ and when it is ‘women’ – that is, a comparison of values, techniques, ideals, and emotions across a span of ages at a single time” (358). This is exactly what pastiche has given the reading audience, and now the viewing audience, of Nancy Drew.

Postmodernism, introducing pastiche, has given a means to appreciate the collaborative efforts creating the American icon. Ebert writes, “Through textualizing strategies such as parody and pastiche, they seek to drive a wedge...and thus vacate the established relations between language and the world. This results in a rhetorical or textual politics aimed at obscuring prevailing meanings and disrupting the oppressive totality...” (887). Due to this slippage, as Ebert defines it, she writes that when deconstructing identities and because “language is a nonrepresentational system of differences” these gaps appear (893). Gaps that are heavily criticized in Nancy Drew because, though they give her character everything, they also seemingly make her unrealistic, but it seems that a better academic criticism would be through postmodernism, here pastiche, the gaps and spaces between the characteristics from Wirt Benson and Stratemeyer Adams have given Nancy the ability to “[construct] a new identity” and to span more than 60 years. Even now, there will be TV shows and maybe even individuals that have direct pastiche from the Nancy Drew series. Woolston writes, “Just as the collection of female authors served to give birth to the character, through her

uncompromising commitment to action, Nancy Drew herself becomes an iconic ideal 'mother' figure that may train readers to accept nothing less than complete personal freedom" (176). We have already witnessed Nancy's feminist ideals utilize postmodern recursion to multiply, so it is not an extension to imagine that postmodern culture could be evidence of pastiche from Nancy as Nancy is evidence of pastiche from both Stratemeyer Adams and Wirt Benson.

CHAPTER V

REMAKING

The remakings of Nancy Drew have been cause for much of the academic discourse surrounding the series and the icon. Without the later edition and other plots derived from the series, the remakings, this thesis would be limited to only discussing the original 1930 series of Nancy Drew. Fortunately, the remakings do exist and have served as basis for most of this thesis's discussion. This chapter will elaborate the remaking occurring between the 1930 and 1960 editions. It's been no secret with the uncovering of so many Stratemeyer secrets that the plots had a certain design, a winning formula, as it has occasionally been called. Designed by Edward Stratemeyer, learned by Stratemeyer Adams and Wirt Benson, read by many, it takes on some postmodern qualities unintentionally. And probably, were it not for this analysis looking for minor postmodern details these features would go unnoticed. A minor characteristic of some postmodern work is to have an internal structure, like fractals. Phillip Dybicz describes it this way: "The events are organized around a plot. The plots yield themes of the story. It is an organizing mechanism that allows various meanings to arise from the work as a whole," (344). This sounds like an explanation for the winning formula developed by Edward. These plot patterns were utilized after Edward noticed the earlier failures of other girls series like Dorothy Dale. Dybicz's article is specifically about human behavior as result of postmodern theory, but it's interesting to consider it in terms of readers' actions when

revisiting their childhood fiction world. He writes, “When people reflect on past events of their lives, they do not do so in an episodic fashion, always beginning with birth. Rather, they create a narrative...” which is how people recount their experience with Nancy Drew (346). They identify with the character, and the plot allows them to do this by not firmly establishing a characterization because readers so easily view themselves in place of her.

The Syndicate learned one of the series’ most defining plot points, that the protagonist cannot age, as consequence of one of Nancy’s precursors, Dorothy Dale’s, quick demise. Melanie Rehak explains “at the book’s end she [Dorothy] pledges to wait for him [Gerry] to earn a fortune. In that instant, Dorothy’s devoted readers lost interest and sales dropped off, a lesson the Syndicate never forgot. Much later Harriet wrote herself some general guidelines on writing stories for young people. Among the key points was this one: ‘Must appeal to children. This excludes love element, adult hardships. Marrying off Nancy is disastrous’” (94). This point here explains why Stratemeyer Adams’s decision to seek fictional romantic advice from her children for Nancy and Ned and actually write it into the series is so shocking. It was completely forbidden in former plot structures. In the original series even small nuances, like Nancy’s body language with Ned in contrast to her friends, led readers to believe that he just wasn’t her priority. Despite the later break in *mis-en-abyme* (a postmodern term) where Nancy does seem to have a romantic purpose as well as a detective purpose, there was clearly, as demonstrated here, an expectation of zero romance originally. In *The*

Bungalow Mystery there is no evidence of any relationship with Ned because his character had not appeared in the series by the third novel; however, the addition of characters Don Cameron and Jim Donnell in the second edition of *The Bungalow Mystery* and that these characters are asking Nancy on dates and described as having “twinkling eyes” demonstrate that Stratemeyer Adams was intentionally integrating romance into the series.

With the change of pen between the hands of Wirt Benson and Stratemeyer Adams it created some problems. Rehak describes one change: “There was...one new wrinkle in Nancy’s character. As edited by Harriet and Edna instead of their father, she acquired a new patina of modesty” (Rehak 143). Wirt Benson later explains when she stepped forward during the case between the Syndicate and publishers to claim the titles she was responsible for writing that it wasn’t that she and Stratemeyer Adams shared Nancy, but with each new contribution, each pastiche, she (Nancy) was remade and that just as “there had been two Carolyn Keenes...there had simply been two Nancys” (Rehak 297). Here Wirt Benson clarifies that the pastiche of qualities that she believed constituted a heroine differed from the qualities pastiched by Stratemeyer Adams as those constituting a heroine.

Stratemeyer Adams sought aid in creating a romantic storyline in the series. Melanie Rehak’s book mentions Stratemeyer Adams’ need to change the text, to update the plot and characterization in terms of romance. But Stratemeyer Adams knew that this wasn’t her strong suit. Therefore:

presumably thanks to the help of her [Stratemeyer Adams'] children, the courtship of Ned and Nancy took on new and serious proportions in *Old Attic*. Nancy, who previously could not have been bothered to put anything off for Ned, spends a considerable amount of time hoping he'll invite her to the 'big dance' at Emerson College, showing some uncharacteristic signs of insecurity in the process...Nancy has a girlish moment in which she faints in Ned's 'strong arms,' then mystery and romance are duly resolved. 'I was pretty scared for a while, I admit, but when you came – Ned, maybe you don't know it, but you saved my life! I shall always be thankful to you'...'It would have been a very great loss if I hadn't,' he said fervently, and again she flushed crimson.' Alive and well and in love, the handsome pair dances the night away at Emerson, locked in chaste happiness (Rehak 207).

This lengthy scene is included because it demonstrates how the constant remakings of the character have prompted ontological questioning. Though this scene appears in a different book than *The Bungalow Mystery*. Any Nancy Drew fan is in shock that this scene is even in the text at all and immediately searches for a copyright date. In other words, what world was this Nancy written during? Which ghostwriter's world? And inversely, which version of myself is to read this? From what time period should I read the text?

In bibliographic research utilizing *The Bungalow Mystery*, the 1930 and 1960 editions, a few instances of these “remaking” trends become obvious. As mentioned earlier, this third novel is used because it is the last novel, the third in the series, that Edward Stratemeyer served as editor of in the 1930 edition, so it is the last novel that can serve as an example of the original expectations and visions that Edward Stratemeyer had for Nancy before his daughters began editing the series.

Right from the onset of the book, chapter one, the plot begins much quicker in the 1960 edition. In the 1960 edition, Nancy’s appearance is immediate and intentional, a trait apparent throughout the entire edition. The 1960 edition makes any reaction on Nancy’s part heightened by use of italics. In chapter one, the 1960s edition stalls to mention Nancy’s fear, while declaring Helen’s fear more than before, and then in an italicized sentence proclaims the danger of the scene through waiting to reveal Nancy’s fear. The 1960 edition reads, “The girls leaned forward, trying to get their bearings. As a jagged ribbon of lightning illuminated the path ahead, Helen screamed, ‘About!’ *Nancy froze with horror. A tremendous log was floating directly into the path of the motorboat!*” (Keene 3). Here there is also a slight plot change. Previously, Nancy gives the nautical command “About!” in the 1930 edition; however, by adjusting the speaker in the 1960 edition its intent appears to be to heighten Nancy’s reaction, who is seemingly calmer than in the 1930 edition (Keene 5). The italicized emphasis is done throughout the 1960s edition and never appears in the 1930 edition. Another example using italics and appearing later in the 1960 edition, “*The creaky window in the ground-floor library was*

being opened! Someone was entering the house!” (Keene 48). Each first chapter ends in panic, but with the increased plot, in the 1960 edition the reader has already been introduced to the character Laura Pendleton who isn’t introduced until chapter three in the 1930 edition (Keene 22). The three girls are quickly closing in on a jagged boulder in a tumultuous sea (Keene 10). However, in the 1930 edition, “Already the two girls were standing in water over their ankles, and each instant the boat was settling lower. A big wave bore down upon them, and Nancy, who saw it coming, realized that it meant the end. A deluge of water poured in over the sides” (Keene 7). The action-filled 1960 edition is a quicker read because of the quickened plotline; however, some impressions on characters are lost because of it.

In places, the two editions have interesting similarities: in this portion of the text, both use the word “deluge.” The chapter closes, “‘We’re lost!’ Helen cried. ‘We’re lo-‘ The words ended in a choking gurgle as the waters closed over her head” (Keene 7). The differences in the first chapter demonstrate the different writers and also a different Nancy, and different impact upon the readers. In the 1930 edition, Nancy seems to be near drowning, and in the following chapter, makes a valiant effort through her interior dialogue to decide to do whatever she could to save Helen from drowning. In later parts of the 1930s edition, she is also described as impatient, another flaw, but one that benefits her by creating haste in the case (149 Keene). Nancy is allowed human error, which makes her decisions to be heroic, more heroic than the 1960s where she sometimes appears to innately be heroic, a trait she can’t seem to help.

Because of the slower pace of the 1930 edition and therefore the more detailed background story and explanation, in chapter two of the 1960 edition, Laura is already sharing her personal issues with Nancy: “I feel I’m not wanted. The letter wasn’t cordial. Oh dear, what shall I do?” Nancy gave Laura a hug. ‘You’ll be at school and during vacation you can visit friends. And you have a new friend named Nancy Drew!’” (Keene 17). Nancy’s response seems less personable than her actions in the 1930 edition because to the readers it seems like she couldn’t possibly know what will make Laura feel better as she has just met her.

Another consequence of the quickened and shortened 1960 edition is that because the detail is shortened, Nancy’s characteristics and decisions appear plot driven. At different points in the plots of these two editions, Nancy is in a setting where the lights are turned off and she is to have matches on her person to help save the situation. The 1930 edition reads, “she glanced down and noticed that she was still clutching the lantern which she had snatched from the table as she ran. She had picked it up purely on impulse, without thinking that she might use it later... There was only one drawback – it was not lighted (Keene 118).

On the following page it explains,

As she stood gazing moodily at the old, deserted house, a thought came to her. Eagerly she began to search through her pickets. To her delight, after thrusting her hand into the last picked, she brought a small box of matches. She had used the matches while in camp at Moon Lake, keeping

them in a waterproof container for an emergency. She had carelessly left them in her dress pocket, and upon returning home had forgotten all about them. For once her negligence had been to her advantage (Keene 119).

This edition humanizes Nancy, taking what Nancy describes to be negligence, a folly, and having it work to her advantage in the scene. In this way, Nancy becomes more realistic and relatable. How common is it to leave something in pockets?

The 1960s version, however, due to its brevity, presents Nancy differently. “Eagerly she reached into the pocket of her dress, recalling that at dinner she had taken a pack of matches from the hotel dining table for her souvenir collection. Good! The pack was still there!” (Keene 116). After she finds the matches that she evidentially collects (maybe this was more of a convention then than it is now as matches are even outdated now), the lamp is luckily full of oil. At another point in the 1960 edition, Laura is in the vehicle with Carson Drew tracking Dowd. While driving there, the characters haven’t made the connection that Dowd is in fact the fraud impersonating Mr. Aborn. “‘What do the Dowds look like?’ Laura asked. In reply, the lawyer took two photographs from his breast pocket and handed them to her. Laura held the pictures toward the light on the dashboard. She shook her head in disbelief. ‘There are the Dowds?’ she repeated. ‘Yes, why? Have you seen them before?’ Laura said in a tense voice, ‘I know them as Mr. and Mrs. Aborn...’” (Keene 138). Carson Drew just happens to be carrying an identifying photo on his person. Maybe, given his and Nancy’s dealings with the investigation, this isn’t that abnormal, but it certainly appears plot driven.

In the 1930 edition, this realization is made more subtly. Nancy is gone out and Laura is home worrying. She goes out to shop to distract herself, returns and then Carson Drew returns home shortly unaware that Laura is there or even who she is. The 1930s edition reads, “‘You’re entirely welcome to our hospitality,’ Mr. Drew assured her cordially...Tell me more about that guardian of yours. What does he look like?’ Laura gave a detailed description of the man. ‘H-m! Did you say that his name is Jacob Aborn? Wait a minute.’ Walking over to the desk he began to rummage in a drawer...After a brief search, Carson Drew brought out a small photograph and handed it to Laura...” (Keene 165-166). Carson Drew is a lawyer, not a detective. It seems much more fitting that it would be tucked away in a desk, and given the fact that he was helping people in a case of fraud, he would likely have a photo of the criminal as he was still at large and relevant to Drew’s current case.

Earlier, this thesis explored the term *recursion*. While recursion in the postmodern sense isn’t exactly what is happening in Nancy, the idea of some type of cultural recursion is interesting in specific points of plot differentiation. In the 1930 edition, Keene writes, “The windows of the bungalow were dark. That suited Nancy’s purpose, for she had no intention of attempting to enter the house if Jacob Aborn were at home. Although courageous, she was not foolhardy” (Keene 95). It’s a complete contradiction to the 1960s edition where Keene writes, “‘The Aborns are out, I guess,’ she told herself. ‘Well, that means I can do some looking around’” (Keene 104). Once she climbs in through the window, a car pulls up and she has to hide. This is similar to the 1930 edition

where she also climbs through a window that Laura had told her she had left open. She had also asked Laura permission to enter the house prior to this so she had Laura's word if Nancy were to be caught, that she had permission to be in the bungalow.

The key difference is in the 1930s there is a moment of accountability and awareness of the crime of breaking and entering, which is what Nancy does. The 1930s edition reads, "Now that she had reached the bungalow, Nancy asked herself what course she should follow. She comprehended the risk she must take if she entered the house. Should Jacob Aborn catch her in the act, he would probably cause her arrest. Would it be wise to take the chance? 'I'll try it anyway,' she decided resolutely. 'I must help Laura.'" (Keene 95). Just this small description of Nancy making the decision for her next action helps the reader understand exactly how attune Nancy is with her current situation and makes her more sleuth-like than snoop-like.

Another remaking tendency between the editions is seen in Nancy's chums. In the 1930 edition, her other girl friends are able to be heroic. In the 1960 edition, if Nancy shares heroic moments, they are with male supporting characters that do not exist in the 1930 edition. For example, in the 1930 edition, while Laura is rescuing the girls, the 1930 edition writes, "The strange girl who had braved the elements to rescue Nancy Drew and Helen Corning, permitted herself only a brief rest" (Keene 18). Laura is praised more overtly in the 1930 edition, though later in both editions, Nancy justifies her help in the case of *The Bungalow Mystery* as a compensation for Laura saving their lives. Nancy is definitely still heroic in the 1930 edition. However, the dialogue in this opening chapter

with the boat at risk for waves doesn't clarify the speaker so it's not certain if Nancy is the one with all of the answers (Keene 19-20). In the 1960 edition, Laura is still helpful, but Nancy is still commanding. Keene writes, "'We'll be killed!' gasped Helen. 'Row to the left, Laura!' Nancy commanded" (Keene 11). Laura spots the cove that leads to their rescue but only after Nancy saves all three of them.

In Harriet Stratemeyer Adams' editing of the 1960 edition, she spends considerably more attention on detail, but not in relation to the plot. Stratemeyer Adams's elaborations focus solely on appearances. She writes, "When the three girls stepped outside, Nancy took a deep breath of air. She loved the earthy smell of the forests surrounding the lake resort, particularly the scent of the tall pines" (Keene 23). Though these are interesting characterizations of Nancy, they seem cheap in comparison to the 1930 pacing that establishes relationships. The 1930 edition writes, "'You frequently take long walks?' Nancy encouraged her, for she sensed that something was worrying her new friend, and she hoped to draw out her story. 'I do when I'm lonely and discouraged,' Laura answered soberly. She hesitated a moment and then added 'You see, I've recently lost my mother.' 'Oh,' Nancy murmured gently. 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to remind you. I should have known -'" (Keene 23). Not only does this scene create a more realistic growth in friendship between the two characters than the 1960, but it also allows the reader to involve themselves in the indirect characterization of Nancy rather than the direct characterization that the 1960 edition tends to rely on. This allows the reader to feel

as though they have a genuine know-how about Nancy because they have observed these characteristics in her personality on their own through the pages of the text.

The end of chapter four of the 1930 edition demonstrates the blossoming friendship, “Laura Pendleton arose and walked over to the window. She stood gazing out across the lake for a moment, and then resolutely turned and faced Nancy and Helen, who were regarding her anxiously. ‘You mustn’t mind my despondent moods,’ she told them, with a sad smile. ‘I promise you that if you will come to visit me at my hotel, I’ll be more cheerful. Will you come?’ ‘We certainly will,’ Nancy and Helen declared together...Laura’s relief was evident. As she said good-bye she pressed Nancy Drew’s hand gratefully” (Keene 33-34).

A specific area of remaking that also needs to be discussed is the attention to Nancy’s description. Earlier in this thesis, I cited an article by Hope E. Burwell “Nancy Drew, Girl Detective, Nascent Female, and Family Therapist” in which she mentions the description of Nancy was never missed or important because to her as a reader, that description was completely lost in her “absolute identification with the character” (Burwell 52). Evidence from the 1930s edition confirms why Burwell viewed Nancy this way – Nancy didn’t care much about her appearance either. The 1930s edition reads, “As she entered the lobby, a number of persons turned and stared at her curiously. Nancy Drew was well aware that her hair was in disorder and that her clothing was in disarray, but she was indifferent to her appearance” (Keene157). The 1960 edition, however, reads, “Nancy took out a two-piece navy-blue dress which made her look older than her

eighteen years. Next, she found a pair of comfortable low heeled pumps” (Keene 58). This detail in addition to the “pink and white kitchen” suggests that by the 1960s, there may have been a new set of priorities for women (Keene 46). Or maybe just that *that* woman editing had a different set of priorities, and a new attention to Nancy’s physical appeal.

The 1960s edition later reads, “‘My, how pretty you look, Nancy!’ said the efficient young woman” (Keene 69). This compliment is from a co-worker of Carson Drew’s for the past five years. Later, “After parking her car, she smoothed her hair and got out” (Keene 70). Beyond her own appearance, the 1960 edition draws further into Nancy’s femininity. “‘Why, this is the most beautiful collection I’ve ever seen!’ Nancy exclaimed. She pointed to a ring set with a perfect aquamarine. ‘I love this!’” (Keene 87). Later in the novel, she actually addresses what Stratemeyer Adams’ remake did. Keene writes, “As a red-haired young man began to walk toward Nancy with an invitation in his eyes for her to dance, she hastily when to her room. Chuckling to herself, Nancy said aloud, ‘Romance and detective work won’t mix tonight!’” (103). It’s almost ironic that this line is printed in the 1960s because any reader of the original series may be wondering why it was mixed, a mixture that is apparent in almost every current crime detective TV show.

Another major change in the remaking, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is the 1960s edition of other young supporting characters, the most involved of which are young male characters that assist Nancy in her crime *The Bungalow Mystery* but also

suggest the potential that Nancy has and may in the future date these characters. In this novel, Nancy is leaving; there is a slight difference in plot as to where she is leaving. In the 1930, she is leaving camp, but in the 1960 she leaving the hotel. In the 1930, this leads to her first strong indication that Laura is in real danger as another rain storm sweeps the area of River Heights and Laura is out running away from her new guardian. Laura helps Nancy move the tree that has blocked her roadster from passing the road to home. In the 1960:

As another low roll of thunder broke the quietness of the woods, Nancy was delighted to see headlights approaching. A moment later a small jeep pulled up behind her car. The driver's door opened and a young man's voice said, 'Hello there! Having trouble?' 'I sure am,' said Nancy as he walked toward her and stood outlined in the convertible's headlights. He appeared to be about seventeen, had dark hair, and twinkling eyes.

Quickly Nancy explained about the fallen tree... The brother and sister were Jim and Cathy Donnell (Keene 39-40).

Jim and Cathy's main purpose in the novel is not his twinkling eyes, but to be a link to their neighbors, the real Aborns, which is how Nancy is able to make contact with the real Mrs. Aborn.

Another male character added to the 1960 plot who better demonstrates the new interest in creating a love life for Nancy is in the character of Don Cameron. The 1960 edition reads, "To her surprise, she saw Don Cameron, who had been a fellow student in

River Heights High School. Nancy had, in fact, gone to the Spring Prom with the tall, black-haired boy” (Keene 61). The reader is introduced to the character and immediately made aware of the couple’s outing. On the next page Don says, “I intended calling you later today. If you’re free Thursday afternoon and evening I’d like to have you go to a barbeque party with me” (Keene 62). After this offer, which Nancy agrees to (she makes a connection to the host of the party and one of the names her father gave her to investigate for the embezzlement case), “he offered to drive Nancy home, and she hopped in beside him” (Keene 62). Nancy was in the middle of investigating the list of names that her father had given her. Although Herbert Brown is next on her list and conveniently hosting the rehearsal dinner party to which she was just invited, it’s also obvious that she quits her work to accept a ride home from Don. Later in the book, Don and Laura (Nancy’s substitute date) return from the barbeque, they realize that Nancy hasn’t checked in. Unlike the 1930s where Don Cameron doesn’t even exist, and Carson Drew’s role is greatly minimized, the 1960 edition has the male characters showing great concern for Nancy. “Don, greatly concerned, went at once to the telephone. Impatiently the young man waited for a response to his ring. The hotel telephone operator answered. When Don asked for Nancy Drew, the girl said, ‘Just a moment.’ It was nearly five minutes before she told him: ‘We are unable to reach your party. Miss Drew is not in the hotel...Don Cameron hung up, a drawn expression on his face” (Keene 132). A moment later in the 1960 edition it reads, “Carson Drew’s anxiety deepened” (Keene 133).

Later in the 1960 edition, Don serves as a source of praise and affirmation for Nancy. “‘Good thinking, Nancy,’ said Don admiringly. ‘You’re a whiz of a detective, all right’” (Keene 173). While what he’s saying is obviously nice, does Nancy need to be admired? The fact that the character and line are added to this subsequent edition is significant because prior to this edition, Nancy didn’t need his praise. A reader can interpret this remaking in their own way, and certainly, depending on their own experiences will view the remaking differently, but it’s clear that by 1960s, Don Cameron’s admiration of Nancy was something Stratemeyer Adams thought Nancy needed. Jim Donnell is only one of the new characters to this edition.

The integration of male characters more prominently into the 1960 edition of *The Bungalow Mystery* also makes Nancy physically weaker. In the 1930 edition, Nancy and Laura move a tree log fallen across the road by themselves in the early chapters. In the 1960s edition, Laura, and Jim and his sister Cathy move the log from the road during the rain storm at the beginning of the novel (which is how she meets them and later learns of their relationship with their neighbors, the real Aborns). As well as later in the book, when the criminals are wrecked in their car and the heroes are trying to save them from explosion, Nancy also appears weaker. The 1960 edition reads, “With frantic haste Don and Mr. Drew dragged the man out, while Nancy tugged at the woman’s body” (Keene 167). This strength “tugging” is in contrast to the 1930 edition where Nancy and Laura move the fallen tree themselves from the road. It seems unbalanced that Nancy can move

a tree with the assistance of one character, who is described as weak looking, yet is unable to move the body of a woman in the presence of male characters.

Despite these changes, which require Nancy sleuth with male support, she does also still demonstrate what appears to be a very independent young adult life. Later in that same chapter, “‘Where did Dad go?’ ‘To the state capital,’ Hannah replied, ‘and that reminds me, dear – you’re to call Mr. Drew at eight tonight-’ She gave Nancy a slip of paper with a telephone number on it... Mr. Drew wishes you to help him with an embezzlement case he’s investigating!’” (Keene 44). Mr. Drew and Nancy, in this scene, appear to function like roommates, coming and going as they please and leaving phone messages. But most importantly, Carson Drew involves Nancy in his very serious, and seemingly confidential, cases. But Carson Drew plays a much more involved role in the case in the 1960 edition than in the 1930. The 1960 edition writes, “When the lawyer heard about Laura Pendleton and the Aborns, he frowned. ‘I agree with you, Nancy, it does sound strange,’ he said. ‘But you should not interfere with Laura and her guardians unless she asks you to. They may turn out to be very nice people’” (Keene 52). It seems that they are working together, but Carson Drew is certainly parenting on some level in this scene, warning Nancy. In the very next chapter of this edition, Nancy is in the kitchen with Hannah. “Nancy grinned mischievously and teased, ‘You mean you hate to have anyone else but you reign in your kitchen. Don’t worry, Hannah, I’ll be neat.’... Humming softly, Nancy went to the modern pink-and-white kitchen” (Keene 45-46). This scene in the later edition edited by Stratemeyer Adams demonstrates the

balancing act required by Nancy; she worked in the kitchen and she sleuthed embezzlement cases for her dad in the same evening. This 1960 in contrast to the 1930 edition where Carson Drew isn't even mentioned until page 31 due to the longer length of the tumultuous boating incident, and in that it's only to say what her dad does. He also is mentioned on pages 62-63, here it is to explain why he isn't at home and when he will be home. He appears in this way several times, and makes his first actual appearance at the end of the novel. "'Hello, there,' a voice called out. 'What's the matter?' With a start, Nancy Drew recognized the voice" (Keene 161). At this point, Nancy has already saved a sinking friend, moved a log from the road during the rain and provided a friend a home, hidden in a closet while the fraud dug around the room, and rescued the real Mr. Aborn from a basement and called to get Mr. Aborn help as well as the police.

This thesis's purpose has been to explore the icon Nancy Drew through postmodern theory. Its argument is that because the icon bridges between modernism and postmodernism, due to the fact that she was *remade* through these two periods. While the bibliographic research between the 1930 and 1960 edition of *The Bungalow Mystery* and the historical research of the culture, Stratemeyer Adams and Wirt Benson, and the Syndicate have been foundational in this argument, postmodern culture has supplied even more remakings of Nancy.

When Warner Bros took over the film rights, Nancy was changed yet again to suit a new audience and its values. Rehak writes: "In it, Nancy comes off as both bossier and yet somehow more traditionally feminine than she does in her books. She has none of the

gracious elegance that defines her in print...” (Rehak 192). The values of the culture permeated entertainment, as it does, and so Nancy became malleable once again, but she was only reflecting, recurring, those tendencies of the culture viewing her. When the World War occurred, it was expected that things would change, “but they had underestimated the allure of Nancy Drew, which was about to grow even stronger as America, and its women, emerged from another world war more powerful than ever” (Rehak 196). Then, the war did change Nancy, or rather the way the writers handled the war. “For the first time in its thirty-four year history, the Stratemeyer Syndicate had run up against a reality it couldn’t ignore” (Rehak 197). Rehak explains the transition:

In light of all this, the Syndicate had come up with a better way to acknowledge the events unfolding across the ocean than simply having characters ride their bikes more frequently. ‘As you no doubt know from your own series, it is difficult to know what to do with certain characters in war time,’ Harriet wrote to Mildred. ‘We find it best to leave the war out of stories like the Nancys, but some of the readers wonder about this. Will you please, without mentioning the war, announce that Ned Nickerson is not appearing because he is in Europe. Also, note here and there that Nancy is taking an airplane lesson, and infer that this has something to do with the war effort, without mentioning the war (200-201).

More recently, Nancy has been the subject of more remaking. According to *BBC News Magazine*, an article by Taylor Kate Brown “A black Nancy Drew? Rebooting old favourites with new faces” the headline reads, “Beloved detective Nancy Drew is returning to TV – but she’ll look different from how fans remember. American network CBS is pledging that the new Nancy Drew won’t be white” (Brown). And even more recently (six months later), another website article by Carly Lane titled “CBS Passes on Nancy Drew Adaptation For Testing ‘Too Female’ For Lineup.” Lane writes, “CBS has decided to pass on the pilot, which would have had Nancy Drew reimagined as a thirty-something NYPD detective.” Lane is clearly disappointed as is Sarah Shahi, the actress who was cast for the part, according to Lane. Lane writes, “Now, according to reports, CBS is seeking other potential buyers for the show – and obviously *someone* needs to save this one, please... If there’s one thing I know about Nancy Drew, it’s that she doesn’t go down without a fight, so hopefully this won’t be one of those pilots that goes to the vanishing point forever.” The first posting is evidence of both remaking and cultural recursion in regards to needs racial equality/awareness; Nancy Drew is officially postmodern. Even though CBS declined the pilot, this too is an example of cultural recursion and remaking in regards to women because it’s not feminist enough for the 21st century Nancy to be sleuthing and staying home, now she needs to be a career woman, a woman of position, and the NYPD remaking gives her those strengths.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

While Nancy Drew, just Nancy, is modernist enough; when considering the multiple Nancys as a collective Nancy, a collective work, she's contradictory at times in large ways making it important to ask ontological questions of which *self*, author and editor, created the Nancy text, and what world was that text was written in. She's a timeless recursive message of all women seeking to gain voice and take ownership while also confessing cultural advances and backslides. Yet, she's also the personal voice of the two women who crafted her from their own hand. There are many qualities of postmodernism, but those discussed in this thesis are the most defining of postmodernist work.

Nancy posits a few other postmodern characteristics that will be discussed in this conclusion chapter collectively as there isn't any reason to use these minor categories as proof that the entire collection is postmodern, but they're interesting features to discuss. Nancy Drew's collective body demonstrates postmodernism in prompting ontological questioning, constituting a mega-fiction structure that breaks down into mis-en-abyme, in glimpses touches upon magical realism, and lastly potentially constructs cyborg Nancy.

Many have noted the structure of the series, the magic formula, which sounds like mis-en-abyme. Truly postmodern works are more discreet. Perhaps the critical discussion surrounding works like these encouraged the postmodernist writers to challenge critics to

find their hidden fractals. Likewise, Ellen Brown agrees, “But with all her freedom, Nancy is frozen in place: she’s been eighteen for sixty years, and her life is repetitive and formulaic” (7). In this way, Nancy, because of the volume of novels in her entire body of texts and because the structure is mostly maintained, demonstrates both qualities of postmodern writing as mega-fiction (stories within stories, though hers are connected unlike some other postmodern work) and mis-en-abyme with a hidden structure, though critics have certainly cracked the code.

The Nancy Drew series has all sorts of potential to continue to change. Anita Susan Grossman writes, “juvenile mysteries, like those for adults, appeal to our taste for exciting adventures narrated in a formulaic way that combines superficial realism with underlying fantasy” (176). This is certainly the case with Nancy Drew. While the plot is only mildly convincing as to explaining all of Nancy’s freedoms, it still is an adored series. Though the Nancy Drew series does have some criticism, it has survived the criticism. Given entertainment culture’s extremely postmodern fascination with remaking popular culture’s works, especially those childhood pieces, it is surprising perhaps that the series could enter the realm of magical realism. It also wouldn’t be a surprise if Nancy became Cyborg Nancy. To now, she has had no problem adding a new Nancy to her persona, so as technology only permeates culture at a more alarming rate every day, it’s only logical that any future remakes would include a Nancy immersing herself into the technologically advanced detective.

In fact, the immersion has already begun. Elizabeth Marshall writes, “In the earlier series, contact with the stranger happened when girls traveled to River Heights; in this contemporary example, Nancy Drew makes contact through technology” (220). Rehak even cites a woman who agrees, “Taking her passion to the extreme, another woman wrote, ‘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’” (279). This potential even exceeds just the cyborg Nancy postmodern potential by also providing the opportunity to present a meta-reality where it sounds like Nancy would communicate the mystery with the audience watching, making them part of the “reality.”

Though these are only small speculations to minor postmodern developments in the series, they do pose interesting questions regarding where the series may land in the future when her publishers remake her for a special anniversary edition. However, her postmodern development largely lies in the earlier discussed chapters, but if Nancy has been 18 for sixty years, who knows how many more years she can be 18? And true to form, she will adapt to the culture she is being remade for.

Nancy Drew’s cultural icon status over the decades is intriguing for literary study. Her character has lived through many cultural movement changes, and yet remains as adored as her first debut. Her contradictory characteristics, derived from the anachronistic qualities, are the result of postmodern techniques. First, Nancy posited the opportunity of

an “other” for women. Then, through her constant remakings, and because she has lived through several decades, is able to provide cultural recursion, drawing upon and inspiring influential writing and movements. Her character is a pastiched product of those who are responsible for the texts. Lastly, her remakings do and will continue to make her a postmodern product. While Nancy Drew’s message is modern, her entity is iconic because of the postmodern culture that emerged while she was still popular.

Katie Chaple writes a poem in *The Antioch Review* revealing the magnitude appeal Nancy has for her readers. Most importantly, the reader’s awareness of this impossibility; and, therefore, the vision Nancy also provided her audience.

I always did want to be Nancy Drew –
Think, to be that perfect girl with perfect titian hair,
The perfect powder-blue convertible,
To have two trust-worthy (yet not-quite-as-pretty) friends.
But then, to have the cute boyfriend, the daddy lawyer
And still to continually, with no true hesitation,
Seek out the mysterious, the dangerous?
She did have everything, didn’t she? Smart, pretty.
She belonged in the best college, the best sorority,
Not skulking in a moss-covered mansion or an old attic.
I think there is something dark in Drew.
I mean, a girl who, if tied, knows how to clasp her hands together
So she can free them, is a girl who has more
Than a nodding acquaintance with bondage,
Who knows more than she lets on.
But maybe Nancy needed a reckless man,
One with a motorcycle – not that androgynous, blonde Ned,
All chaste pecks and letterman’s jacket.
Maybe, though, Nancy really wanted to fill up the abandoned
And decaying, where she would wind up, alone,
Again and again – in the caves, the towers,
Or maybe, really it was all about her dead mother,
And she was trying to pull the emptiness in –
The swirl of air, dankness – by learning it,

By throwing herself into what, in actuality, terrified her.
But whatever it is, tell me
That a girl who's always using her beautiful slender fingers
To creak open doors, carry heavy flashlights
All to illumine cob-webbed corners, abandoned passageways,
Tell me she is happy with her life (Chaple).

This poem demonstrates several points. The poem shows the continued remaking of Nancy Drew. Here, she is presented in speculation of desiring secret, dark things and as having had experiences and even enjoying bondage. At times, it even seems that Nancy's desire is dark, but then it also explores the possibility of emotional trauma at the absence of her mother which is a thought that wasn't captured in any of the research read for this thesis. Ultimately, the poem reveals the endless possibilities for an audience member to connect to the character. This version doesn't depict a modernist Nancy following truth and goodness as it suggests that she desires the darkness, and the speaker seems to believe that as long as Nancy is happy, then that would be the ultimate fulfillment.

It's these loose interpretations that allow Nancy to exist as whatever version of Nancy the reader wants. They can relate or interpret her in their own way, or just read any version of Nancy from whatever "world" they prefer. Nancy has always been the exception, the "other," the stand alone. Rehak cites Nancy's impact, "'Nancy Drew has entered global culture.' By the mid-nineties, it was more apparent than ever that Nancy Drew represented a certain eternal something to everyone who knew about her, and she remained reassuringly the same in the eyes of her fans" (310). In exploring exactly what quality it is, "'This quality is expressed in her wardrobe. She chooses clear, saturated colors that reflect her moral certainty...'. None of the later versions of Nancy, either in

print or on television, captured the popular imagination the way the original sleuth had” (Rehak 310-311). Her strengths lie in her original modernist certainty, her pure essence. Later, postmodern culture created ample opportunity for culture to remake their beloved sleuth, and with each variation of Nancy she became an ambiguity because she was no longer a pure essence of truth, but represented a conglomerate of different cultural truths. This is the result of the conglomerate writers and publishers who had control of her development.

Geoffrey S. Lapin notes the odd collaborative upbringing that the fictional character had. “Nancy Drew started...from a germ of an idea from the imaginatively prolific Edward Stratemeyer; to the gift of Mildred A. Wirt Benson’s ground-breaking yarn spinning; through Harriet Stratemeyer Adams’ plotting, outlining, writing, and editing; to Nancy S. Axelrad’s updating the character and on to the present. Our 18-year-old icon of Americana is now over 60 years old and is still the number-one-selling teen sleuth” (68). It’s important to see both the immediate scale of influence of these writers listed, but also the broad cultural impact brought on by the surrounding climate.

As postmodernism slowly permeated culture, like all movements, it allowed for the remakings (though these were less successful, and the cause is speculated to be the dilution that happened to Nancy’s truth persona), and this prompted the need for this theoretical discussion “that a strategic engagement between feminism and postmodernism is both possible and desirable. It is desirable because it allows feminist psychologists to negotiate a most slippery slope: *researching gendered experience while simultaneously*

challenging the ontological status of both gender and experience”(Cosgrove 86).

Cosgrove concludes her discussion by saying, “Postmodernism provides a powerful epistemological grounding for deconstructing, rather than regulating, gender difference and gender norms; it can aid and abet feminist psychology by focusing attention on the complex processes and matrices through which gender is *produced* (92). Jennifer Wicke and Margaret Ferguson further attest to the unique power captured by analyzing the entirety of Nancy’s works, the cultural changes and how they manifest in contradiction in Nancy. Their article says, “A materialist feminism above all needs to situate itself, while seeing that situations change over time, needs to keep abreast of the dialectic within feminist theory between the local and the global, and needs to note unflinchingly the limits of the discourse in order to make it better” (Wicke 8). This is exactly what a postmodernist perspective of Nancy does, allows the reader to situate and analyze.

In this way the novels become more than just a series fiction - it becomes personal. “Ultimately the task for a feminist postmodernism or a postmodern feminism is to remain self-aware and self-critical – to be theory, in the strongest definition of the term,” writes Wicke and Ferguson (8). It creates an important flexibility because there no longer is a pure strain of any school of thought. Postmodernism has allowed the breakdown of everything. Nancy’s remakings, though considered by some as failures, are also reason for her continued success and a conduit for discussion on how can social movements prioritizing any thought, like feminism (seemingly anti-postmodern) exist in a culture that refuses to center anything. “A global feminist theory is as yet unformed,”

Wicke and Ferguson continue, “it may look something like a combinations of feminism and postmodernism, or that may be simply a way station” (9). As some have speculated that we have moved beyond postmodernism, it will be interesting to see what comes of the series in the future.

Aaron Schutz explores postmodern theory as means of teaching freedom in writing, “When we discover in this world no earth or rock to stand or walk upon but only shifting sea and sky and wind, the mature response is not to lament the loss of fixity but to learn to sail” (qtd in Schutz 215). With this in mind, Nancy has proven that she will, and we can expect her to continue, to adapt to the needs of culture. The onset of postmodernism allowed for her to have this adaptability, while the foundation of modernism set clear the expectation that she was a character created for young women. Jennifer Woolston writes, “Nancy’s textual exploits have nourished and (and continue to impact) the young women who have read her stories from their creation in the 1930s up until the present day...Nancy’s exploits represent a world of possibilities for young female readers – simultaneously entertaining audience members while serving to teach them about women’s sociocultural abilities” (176). And providing enough means of flexibility to support the many strains of a postmodern culture, due to her postmodern techniques, to meet the culture’s popular demands.

In sum, Nancy’s second edition remaking in the 1960s was more result of nostalgia and political correctness than postmodernism. Brown says, “I guess I truly learned to read with Nancy Drew” demonstrating only a small piece of the adoration that

still holds her young readers captive (6). And with the subtle inclusion of a feminist agenda, a label that the women who wrote her were even hesitant to apply, her stories became more important. Brown writes, “Although I will not realize for another twenty years that I am ‘reading as a woman,’ enacting the role of the ‘resisting reader’ who reads against the cultural codes of what texts tell us heroines [and good little girls] are supposed to do and be, I do as a child reject these fairy-tale characters, these bearers of gender indoctrination” (4). Nancy created identification for the *other*, she is this and that, feminist and anti-feminist, feminine and masculine, independent and dependent. But she was also more than one Nancy. Some critics say she is a complete contradiction. At times, she was an image of the 1930s in the 1960s, an anachronism. And this was completely unexpected which is what makes her such a great tool to explore the envelopment of postmodernism around a truly modern girl who was and continues to be adapted – another lesson for her readers. Brown concludes, “We need a new stove to cook on *we’re cooking with gas now*, diverse and uncommon sources of nourishment to feed our bodies as well as our souls. Otherwise, many women will continue to lead the wasting lives of Nancy Drew, doomed forever to be eighteen, sexually frozen, unmothered and unmothering, married to the masculine world of order and reason, with avocation but no vocation...” (10). Nancy’s character is proof that to be a self-contradiction is not unacceptable; she poses the challenge that women can be both working and mother; she poses that women can change, men can change; she demonstrates how culture undoubtedly changes and women’s voices are an important and

inspiring tool for future endeavors. By speaking or writing, that rhetoric becomes recursive because the ideas do “move,” women of close influence become a type of pastiche on the lives they impact, and suddenly the idea of *other* is less condemning.

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