

## Degree Project

Level: Bachelor's

### Sleuthing for Post-War America

---

**A New Historicist Analysis of How and Why Nancy Drew  
and *The Secret of the Old Clock* Was Rewritten as a  
Children's Novel in 1959.**

Author:	Louise Vedin
Supervisor:	Carmen Zamorano Llena
Examiner:	Billy Gray
Subject/main field of study:	English literature
Course code:	EN2028
Credits:	15 ECTS
Date of examination:	2024-01-09

At Dalarna University it is possible to publish the student thesis in full text in DiVA. The publishing is open access, which means the work will be freely accessible to read and download on the internet. This will significantly increase the dissemination and visibility of the student thesis.

Open access is becoming the standard route for spreading scientific and academic information on the internet. Dalarna University recommends that both researchers as well as students publish their work open access.

I give my/we give our consent for full text publishing (freely accessible on the internet, open access):

Yes ☒

No ☐

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
New Historicism and Children's Literature .....	6
Nancy Drew and the Post-War Family .....	9
Nancy Drew and the Post-War Teenager.....	16
Nancy Drew and the Middle Grade Novel.....	20
Conclusion.....	26
Works Cited.....	29

## Introduction

In 1959, Nancy Drew smiled at her father and said “I think I’ll take a walk in the fresh air and clear the cobwebs from my brain” (Keene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 56). The book series character of Nancy Drew, however, got more than fresh air that year. A total revision was made of the first novel, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, originally published in 1930. In the 1959 edition Nancy Drew was given a new beginning, a new personality and new adventures, and a new audience of younger readers was targeted. Nevertheless, it seems that these changes were received with little or no attention by young readers and loyal fans, and probably with even less interest from critics and scholars of the era.

When the publishing house of the Stratemeyer Syndicate first created *The Nancy Drew Mysteries* in 1930, it became an immediate commercial success, and it is estimated that at least 80 million copies were sold worldwide during the first 60 years of publishing (Caprio 1). Nevertheless, Nancy Drew novels were often criticized due to being series books, they were “books [that] were often the bane of librarians and educators who considered them ‘trash’ (Inness 5). For the first four decades the novels were not to be found in American public libraries, nor were they “listed in the *Children’s Catalog* and other selection guides from which public and school librarians made their purchases” (Green Bierbaum 163). The critique against book series was mainly directed towards the genre, a type of literature with roots in cheap, mass-produced, adult books, known as “dime novels” (Inness 4). Series books were regarded to lack originality and style as they were written in a fast pace, for commercial reasons, based on repetitive, formulaic plots featuring less developed characters (2). In the course of more than 70 years of releasing new Nancy

Drew Mysteries, Nancy and her kinsmen did not age or die, nor were they ever affected by past events. The paradox of the Nancy Drew Mysteries and other book series was that while the readers loved them for "being predictable, like a reliable friend, an experience to repeat over and over" (Stewart Dyer, and Tillman Romalov 91), this was also what critics disliked the most.

Nancy Drew's creator, Edward Stratemeyer, owner of the Stratemeyer Syndicate and creator of nearly 100 book series (Johnson 29), was not bothered by literary critics. Stratemeyer's business idea, which later would be described as the concept of "book packaging", was to come up with characters and plots which ghost writers turned into novels. The writer handed the finished novel over, together with all the rights to the work and sworn secrecy, to Stratemeyer, who paid 75-125 USD for the job, no matter how many copies were sold (Lapin 54). Stratemeyer also invented the pseudonym for an author to each of his series. Most Nancy Drew readers knew Carolyn Keene to be the author of the 175 novels, but few of them realized that she was as fictional as Nancy herself. In 1980, however, legal processes about the rights to the Stratemeyer books, revealed that Mildred Wirt Benson wrote the first Nancy Drew novels (Johnson, et al. 50).

Wirt Benson, in 1930 a young journalist student from Iowa, designed the blond, brave, confident, and independent 16-year-old girl detective with her blue roadster. According to Wirt Benson, Stratemeyer was not impressed by the first manuscripts, saying that "the heroine was much too flip and would never be well received" (Wirt Benson 62). Wirt Benson also observed that "when the first three volumes hit the market they were an immediate cash-register success for the syndicate. By 1969 the series was printed in seventeen languages and, according to a published report, achieved sales of more than 30,000,000 copies," (62). Wirt

Benson continued to work for the syndicate and came to write 23 of the first 30 Nancy Drew books during the period of 1930 to 1953 (Stewart Dyer, and Tillman Romalov 249).

Edward Stratemeyer died the same year Nancy Drew made her entrance. He was succeeded as leader of the Stratemeyer Syndicate by his two daughters (Wirt Benson 61). Harriet Stratemeyer Adams replaced her father as the editor of the Nancy Drew series and until her death in 1982 she wrote most of the Nancy Drew synopses. In 1959, Adams initiated the re-writings and modernisations of the earliest Nancy Drew books. Adams' revised editions came to be a total makeover as events of the plot were altered, as were the characters. According to Betsy Caprio, Nancy Drew, who once was the heroine and role model for American girls aged 10-15, now became a star among readers aged 8-12 (Caprio 22). From here on there were different Nancy Drews for different generations, and there were also two versions of how it all started with *The Secret of the Old Clock*.

Despite the commercial success, Nancy Drew did not arouse scholarly interest for many years. By 2017, 1,342 doctoral dissertations and theses were to be found with the phrase "Nancy Drew" in *Dissertations and Theses*, but only "155 of them were written before 1990" (Still 77). The lack of early studies of Nancy Drew was partly because of a lack of scholarly interest in popular culture as a whole. Dennis R. Hall argues that "scholarly work on popular culture had been appearing since the early 1950's" but it was not until 1967 that it got its first serious platform in the *Journal of Popular Culture* (Hall 19-20). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s interest in popular culture had exploded and nearly 20,000 courses about popular culture were given nationwide in American colleges and universities (22).

According to Carolyn Stewart Dyer, the boom of Nancy Drew studies originated more or less by coincidence, as Susan Redfern, an “undergraduate secretary in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa” (Stewart Dyer 1), cleaned the school’s Alumni files and found the act of Mildred Wirt Benson, recognizing the name of the first Nancy Drew writer. Together with several other scholars and former Nancy Drew fans, Redfern started a campaign for installing Wirt Benson into the school’s Hall of Fame and arranged a very first Nancy Drew conference at the University. The conference “attracted about 500 people ranging in age from four to ninety, about 15 percent of them boys and men” (4). The conference also resulted in the compilation *Rediscovering Nancy Drew* featuring essays like Carolyn G. Heilbrun’s “Nancy Drew: A moment in Feminist History”, and Donnarae MacCann’s “Nancy Drew and the Myth of White Supremacy”. It also contained texts about the readers, the collectors, the creation of the series and spin-offs and adaptations of the Nancy Drew Mysteries book series.

With more than 1300 different dissertations and theses there are few stones left unturned regarding Nancy Drew. Scholarly studies of Nancy Drew have mainly focused on “independence and self-sufficiency, sexual identity and orientation, racial and ethnic stereotypes, and business and legal issues” (Still 78). Nancy has been studied as a girl detective, as a Supergirl, as a daddy’s girl, as a girlfriend, and as a phenomenon from perspectives of race, class, and gender. In the anthology *Nancy Drew and Company* her impact on girl series is analysed mainly through the theories of feminism and gender studies. The anthology includes essays such as Nancy Tillman Romalov’s “Mobile and Modern Heroines: Early Twentieth-Century Girls’ Automobile Series”, on the importance of Nancy’s car, the roadster which made Nancy independent and mobile. Deborah L. Siegel, in the same book, chooses

to analyse Nancy Drew as “New Girl Wonder: Solving It All for the 1930s”, focusing on the character of Nancy Drew in the original 1930s editions. In her book *Girl Sleuth on the Coach: The Mystery of Nancy Drew*, Betsy Caprio psychoanalyses Nancy Drew and the other main characters from a Jungian perspective. Caprio’s work is probably the most profound study of how Nancy Drew has been characterized through the decades.

Nancy Drew is often studied in relationship to other characters in the series. Julie O’Reilly’s essay “The Legacy of George and Bess: Sidekicks as Normalizing Agents for the Girl Sleuth” concludes that Nancy’s sidekicks, the tomboy George, and the girlish Bess are introduced in 1931 to provide Nancy with the feminine as well as the masculine sides she lacks in herself. Nancy’s sexuality, or rather lack thereof, has given rise to many studies, where Brittney Brown’s “Nancy Drew, Sexual Deviancy, and Rewrites in Twentieth-Century America” is but one worth mentioning.

Most studies focus, like Caprio’s, on the Nancy Drew series as a whole. Some of the 34 rewrites are sometimes mentioned, e. g. *The Hidden Staircase*, *The Bungalow Mystery*, and *The Mystery of the Lilac Inn*, but analyses of single novels, rewritten or not, are rare if not non-existent. This essay will, however, make a deeper analysis of the rewriting of the very first Nancy Drew novel as a vast number of editorial changes created a new novel for a new generation of readers. Through the theories of new historicism this essay will examine why and how the post-war American way of living became apparent in the 1959 edition of *The Secret of The Old Clock*, claiming that the new socioeconomic context forced Harriet Adams to transform the young adult book series star Nancy Drew into a children’s literature character to secure the series’ survival.

## New Historicism and Children's Literature

This essay focuses on how the differences of the two editions of *The Secret of the Old Clock* coincide with their historical contexts, making the editions what new historicists would call representations of their societies. The analysis is inspired by the new historicist theory that given events and texts are all products of their culture (Tyson 269). Lois Tyson argues that new historicists consider “history a text that can be interpreted the same way literary critics interpret literary texts, and conversely” (272). Regarding literary texts as cultural artefacts makes it possible to understand “something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the same time and place in which those texts were written” (272).

New historicists emphasize that historical values change over time, and that history always is subjective as all humans live in a particular time and place, and their interpretation of both current and past events are influenced more or less consciously by their own experiences. History is, by new historicists, regarded not as a linear progression of events, but as a series of diversified, societal fluctuations, progressions and regressions, judged by its viewer (269). The fluctuations in discourses and power can be traced in literature created within a certain time and place by analysing the stories, or the lies, cultures tell themselves about themselves (274).

There are, however, problems with using a new historicist approach when analysing texts. Stephen Greenblatt, one of the most prominent founders of the new historicist movement has stated “that new historicism is not a repeatable methodology or a literary critical program” (Gallagher, and Greenblatt 19). Lacking

an established methodology may provide scholarly freedom but the lack of supporting structures can devalue the analysis. Without guidance there is a risk that anything can be connected with anything just to prove a point (Hickling 54). The selection of themes studied within a historical context is vital for the relevance and validity of the analysis. Still, this selection will never be anything but subjective according to new historicism. Despite Greenblatt's statement, there are some methods often used when analysing literature in its historical context. Being a theory of interdisciplinarity, new historicism has borrowed the term of 'thick descriptions' from anthropology, "analysing the conditions of cultural production" (Pattersson 96) through the process of 'parallel reading' literary and non-literary texts of an era, examining the ideology and discourse of that time and place in history.

New historicism is tightly connected to the thoughts on power by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, power is an omnipresent force that can be found in all social interactions (Lynch 15). Power is "produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, qtd in Lynch 21). Power is mainly discursive as it determines what is appropriate to say as well as appropriate to do. Tyson argues that power according to Foucault circulates in all directions through the exchange of material goods, exchange of people and exchange of ideas (Tyson 270). Power is thus altered by activities such as buying and selling, gambling, and taxation where economical resources are relocated between people. Power is also fluctuating through institutions such as marriage, and through discourses and customs produced within a society, which in turn leads to normalization. Normalization is the concept of institutionalizing the norm, i.e. what counts as normal and appropriate within a society, thereby stating what is abnormal and inappropriate. Matt Hickling explains

the connection between Foucault and new historicism by engaging in the emphasis on the power relations of its time and by giving more attention to the less normative or even marginalized groups of a society, such as post-war American people of colour, non-Christians, women, and children (Hickling 54).

To link back to Foucault this essay will show how the socioeconomic, demographic, and ideological context of post-war America led to new power relations, forcing the Stratemeyer Syndicate to reedit the existing Young Adult novel, transforming it into a children's novel, appropriate for a new generation. Turning it into a children's book, however, did not make it less relevant, as children's book of one era has shaped the adults of the next, making them important representations in historical studies of power and discourses. Peter Hunt argues that children's books are to be regarded as:

overtly important educationally and commercially – with consequences across the culture, from language to politics: most adults, and almost certainly the vast majority of those in positions of power and influence, read children's books as children, and it is inconceivable that the ideologies permeating those books had no influence on their development. (1)

Children's books, according to Kathleen Wallace, provide excellent proofs of prevailing views of childhood as well as the discourse of the day as they always have been regarded as a major influence on the sensible, reading child, resulting in overtly didactic, often censored literature (Wallace 24). Wallace argues that the term 'appropriate' is important to children's literature in three ways. Authors and publishers use 'appropriate' to the design of the book, educators use it about what

is good for developing the child's mind, but perhaps the most important use of 'appropriate' concerns the morally correct, or incorrect, content of the book. This third area is often the main concern of society and guardians, deeply associated with Foucault's theories of normalization and the discourse of the historical context. The child's dependence and vulnerability in relation to adults' power makes children's books representations of its historical context, "describing culture in action" (Veesser xi), and therefore they are relevant for exposing "the manifold ways culture and society affect each other" (Veesser xii).

## **Nancy Drew and the Post-War Family**

Foucault's theory that power is distributed through the exchange of material, people and ideas can be traced through the socioeconomic changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, affecting power relations within American families (Foucault, et al. 451). The socioeconomic situation in post-war America was very different from 1930. Never had economic growth favoured so many citizens as it did after World War II. Unemployment rates were historically low, and the disposable income for most Americans grew higher (McKay 961). The labour market changed. Thanks to technological advancements fewer people were needed in the farming and forestry sectors. More and more Americans worked in service, sales, and administration (Fisk 1). Gender roles became more divided and pronounced after World War II, as men became salary workers and family providers and women progressively became housewives and mothers (Miller 396). These roles were not new but in the past economic landscape of farming and self-catering, families had worked together as a unit, even if men, women, and children were responsible for different tasks. In post-

war America families lived together but men worked away from home, women worked in the home, and most children did not work at all as the importance of education increased. This new, more segregated family life of the 1950s made the Nancy Drew series seem out of date as the characters no longer represented the American family way of living. The Stratemeyer strategy of avoiding historical markers to keep the series modern and constantly possible for new readers to identify themselves with, no longer achieved its purpose in this new domestic landscape, and the main characters needed an upgrade to fit 1959.

One of the most notable changes in character relates to Nancy's father Carson Drew, who Adams chose to remodel according to the new ideal for fatherhood in the 1950s. Rachel Devlin argues that a new theory of an eroticised father-daughter relationship emerged during the post-war era. As Devlin notes, this new intimate father-daughter ideal soon became part of the post-war popular culture where fathers were portrayed as providers for their daughters coming-of-age processes. Fathers provided the money needed for adolescent necessities like dresses and make up (Devlin 83). A post-war father was expected to be engaged in his daughter's dates, protective towards his precious princess. The father also became vital to a girl's sweet-sixteen party, her graduation and not to forget her wedding (10). In the terms of Foucault, this new father-daughter relationship ideal changed the norms and the power relations, normalizing something of a return to the historical guardianship of women. The new father ideal was difficult to include in the series books where there was no room for coming-of-age rituals, and the Nancy Drew concept did not include romantic or sexual emotions, nor personal growth. In *The Secret of the Old Clock* there is nothing but Nancy's stated age and her ability to legally drive a car that confirms her age. As for rituals of coming-of-age there is not even a date that Carson

can interfere with, but to prepare him for Nancy's future dates in later novels he was remade as a more nurturing father figure, matching the prevailing stereotypes of 1959.

A co-partner father like Carson Drew of the 1930 edition, with a rather narrow focus on his daughter's detective adventures, was far from the ideal of 1959. The father-daughter relationship was, however, essential in creating the concept of an independent adolescent girl sleuth. In 1930 Nancy lives in the fictional town of River Heights, somewhere in the US Midwest, with her widowed father. Nancy and her father are close. Their relationship is heartfelt, mutually respectful, tender and resembles a form of adult companionship. The famous and successful lawyer Carson Drew never gets irritated or impatient with his daughter, not even when she disturbs him with sleuthing fantasies as he reads his evening paper. He just "smiles indulgently" and gives her "his respectful attention" (Keene 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1). The famous attorney does not even object to his daughter mischievously tweaking his ear when he does not listen carefully enough. Carson Drew is proud of having taught his daughter "to think for herself and to think logically" (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 6). The lawyer often discusses "interesting cases" and shares "confidential information" with his sixteen-year-old-daughter. If needed, Carson Drew uses his connections to help his girl in her detective missions. Thus, for example, at the beginning of *The Secret of the Old Clock* Carson Drew, not yet professionally involved in the case of Mr Crowley's will, makes the necessary arrangements for Nancy to meet with the right people to help her solve her case. This loving, affectionate, and unconditional support is also noticeable when Nancy eagerly tells him how she got her hands on the precious old clock:

When she had finished, Carson Drew stared at her with mingled pride and amusement.

“You’re a regular detective, Nancy.”

“You’re making fun of me.”

Carson Drew’s face sobered.

“No, I’m proud of what you’ve done, Nancy. I couldn’t have done better myself – perhaps not so well. You took a real risk when you encountered those robbers, but so long as you are back home safe and sound, it doesn’t matter.”

(1<sup>st</sup> ed. 180-81)

Not many fathers would have stayed this calm after being informed that robbers had locked their daughter in a closet in an abandoned house, that the daughter singlehandedly had followed these thieves, recaptured stolen goods, and then withheld the goods from the police. Carson Drew of 1930 does not even react to Nancy being directly involved in a car chase where the thieves are forced off the road after a gunfight. Carson Drew is never anything but supporting.

The tone of the new version is, however, different. In the same scene the 1959 Carson Drew still looks affectionately at Nancy, but he speaks in a less admiring, more patronising, tone: “Yes, it is, Nancy. But unless a will written later turns up, that’s the way it has to be” (Keene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 13). In this new version it is Carson Drew that informs Nancy about Mr Crowley and the known facts about the will. The new Carson is a father-knows-best daddy. Where Nancy in the first edition found out facts for herself, she is now informed by her father, or another adult. There is a more parental, protective tone in Carson’s words of 1959: “My dear, you were in serious danger when you encountered those thieves. I don’t like to have you take such risks”

(2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 150). This change in tone corresponds well to the conservative post-war idea that a daughter's behaviour, choices, and acts reflect her father's capability as a parent. Devlin argues that "Popularity in high school and personal attractiveness were attributed to a father's capacity to give his daughter all of the emotional and financial equipment necessary to achieve the look of 'natural confidence' that magazines for teenage girls like *Seventeen* endorsed" (Devlin 13). Adams' new dad of 1959 is simply more authoritarian and protective than Wirt Benson's father of 1930, more of a father for the post-war era. This revision of her father, in turn, had a major impact on the representation of Nancy's character.

Reforming Nancy's father due to the post-war ideal of fatherhood was one of the necessities in rewriting *The Secret of the Old Clock*; manoeuvring motherhood was another. After World War II the situation for most women changed. According to new historicists there is no objectivity in history and societies progress and regress in various areas during different eras (Tyson 269). In many ways post-war America did progress, but for many women it meant a return from the independence of a job and a salary of their own to unpaid, domestic chores. Certainly, there were more girls and young women in high school and in college than ever before, and married women still worked, but the norm for an ideal middle class career for a young post-war woman was often short and focused on finding a future husband (Kroik 277).

In the 1950s the nuclear family became the dominant family ideal as young families often had the financial resources to buy their own homes in any of the new mass-produced suburbs that expanded on the outskirts of American cities. In 1950, in the suburban one-family-house lived a family with an average of 3.37 members (Reid 423): a father, 1.37 children and a mother. Nancy Drew, however, did not live

in a nuclear family, she was already in 1930 motherless as her mother had died six years earlier (Keene 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 12).

Being motherless was a situation Nancy had managed seemingly well together with her father. In fact, being motherless has by many scholars been regarded as a vital clue for creating that independent girl in 1930 (Siegel 175). Without a mother in the house Nancy had the power and the freedom to come and go in a way most girls could only dream of. Besides freedom from maternal interference, Nancy did not have to go to school or work, she had her own car and an unlimited budget to spend. In 1959 this freedom was no longer appropriate for a young woman. According to Devlin adolescent girls of 1950s were “explicitly *not* independent creatures” (Devlin 10). In the post-war edition Nancy needed a female role model, a mother figure. Adam’s problem, however, was that a new woman in Carson Drew’s life would have had a negative effect on the important father-daughter relation in the series. Adams had to look elsewhere for a motherlike figure for Nancy. The solution was found by reinventing another character, Hannah Gruen, the Drews’ servant, “an elderly maid of all work who had been with them for many years” (Keene 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 12). During the almost thirty years since the novel was first published Hannah Gruen had lived a quiet life as a rather silent character. In the 1930s edition, she has but one line to say and she is only a necessity to perform the practical household chores that Nancy does not bother with herself. In 1930 sixteen-year-old Nancy is the already experienced manager of the rather wealthy Drew household:

Although only sixteen, Nancy was unusually capable, and under her skilful direction everything ran smoothly in the Drew household. On the death of her

mother six years before, she had taken over the entire management of the establishment. [...] The responsibility of the household might have weighed heavily upon Nancy, but she was the type of girl who is capable of accomplishing a great many things in a comparatively short length of time. (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 12)

In 1959, Hannah Gruen was rather in need of a new job description, and therefore Adams let her become the mother-substitute Nancy's readers could accept, thereby killing two birds with one stone. Hannah Gruen is given a prominent role, assuming some of Nancy's previous power as manager of the household. Hannah of 1959 is presented as a pleasant, slightly plump woman who "had helped rear Nancy since the death of the girl's own mother many years before" (Keene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 13). To really accentuate the entrance of the revised character Nancy's affection toward Hannah is often shown through hugs and kisses. In 1959 it is Hannah, not Carson Drew, that is the first to hear about Nancy's adventure with the robbery at Topham's Moon Lake bungalow:

Just as Nancy opened the refrigerator door, she heard steps on the stairs and Hannah Gruen, wearing a sleepy look, appeared in robe and slippers.

"Nancy!" cried the housekeeper, instantly wide awake.

"Surprise, Hannah darling!" Nancy gave the housekeeper an affectionate hug and kiss. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 146)

Then the two of them prepare a chicken sandwich together and sit down at the table where Nancy reveals the adventures of the day. The power relation between the two

of them has changed from Nancy being the employer, the served, and Hannah being the servant. In 1959 they have a mutual and affectionate relation. By adding many small conversations between Hannah and Nancy, sometimes including Carson Drew, Hannah is no longer a silent servant but a more or less equal member of the Drew family.

The need for a mother figure due the new 1950s ideal of the very homogenous nuclear family, is yet another sign of history represented in the rewriting of *The Secret of the Old Clock*. The 1959 set of characters in the Drew household exemplifies Foucault's theory of how power relations are to be found in all social interactions. The power within the family has changed according to the discourse and customs of post-war America, making Carson and Hannah more powerful at the expense of a less autonomous Nancy. Remaking Nancy's father and introducing a mother figure confirmed to the young readers of 1959 that a real family consisted of a mother, a father, and their children.

## **Nancy Drew and the Post-War Teenager**

According to Foucault, power is discursive leading towards normalization of what is regarded as appropriate or not, within a culture. The discursion is visible through customs of an era and new historicists therefore often focuses on "the personal side of history – the history of family dynamics, of leisure activities, of sexual practices, of childrearing customs" (Tyson 274). A vital and relevant clue to the 1950s historical context and social setting is the rise of the new teen culture, a culture Nancy Drew never really became part of, a discrepancy which needed to be taken into consideration in the continued production of the series.

The teenage culture thrived in the flourishing American economy as a result of the post-war baby boom. The number of people aged 14 to 25 in the United States grew from 18.8 million in 1920 to 36.4 million in 1970, becoming an “ever-larger proportion of the overall population” (Reid 424). In a society no longer in need of child labor, children and teenagers gradually transformed from being regarded as “economically useful” to “emotionally priceless” beings (420). Following the general trend of a more segregated society, with homogenic clusters in for example suburban areas, American “teenagers dramatically and self-consciously separated themselves from adults, including their parents, and America became an “age stratified society” (Devlin 4). Teenagers were no longer children but “virtual adults with a strong voice both within and outside the household” (82). Many parents’ main tasks became providing funding, schooling, and opportunities and then they would, according to Devlin, “in the name of sexual liberalism and American freedom, kindly step aside” (5).

Several minor subcultures among teenagers could be identified in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, e. g. the Sub-debs, the Bobby-soxers and the Teenas, but they all reached a limited part of American youngsters, and by 1945 the label “teenager” had replaced most of them (91). With an ever higher disposable income the growing numbers of teenagers became a viable consumer segment. The ever-smaller post-war families, with their increasingly higher standard of living and suburban houses, made it possible for more parents to provide their teenagers with a room of their own. The teen bedroom was preferably furnished and equipped as a “one-room apartment” (Reid 429). The teen bedroom was expected to contain amenities and necessities to entertain friends, study and relax. New and more affordable technology and better financial resources made it common to equip the American

teenage room with radios, record players, TV sets and a private phone. Shopping and spending time in their own room with their new home electronics, alone or with friends, seems to have been the American post-war teenagers' preferred leisure interest. Nancy Drew, however, could never be pictured as a teenage girl, lying on her bed listening to music or just chatting with a friend. A busy teenage sleuth did not have time for movies or music.

The static series' teenage action heroine Nancy Drew faced another obstacle as post-war 'teen-aging' became synonymous with coming-of-age, transitioning, and sexuality. Adolescence became synonymous with a period when a girl's relationship with her parents became complex as she transitioned into adulthood (Devlin 117). Liberating and distancing oneself from her parents became a natural stage in becoming a woman. New coming-of-age theories of the post-war era also made it into commercial culture, combining the maturity process with an increasing sexualization of adolescence (121). Devlin exemplifies the trend of sexualized teenaged girls during the post-war era stating that:

In the 1940s and 1950s teenage girls related as sexual beings not only to boys at school or men in public but to their fathers at home as well. With the eroticization of the father-daughter relationship, girls became sexualized in every context of their lives. (173)

The increasing post-war interest in adolescent girl's sexual maturation came accompanied by "a steady decline in the ages at which girls got married, from 20.5 in 1947 to 20.1 in 1956. By the late 1950s the most common age at which girls married was 18" (4). This trend of ever younger brides gave Adams new problems.

A vital attribute to the Nancy Drew series was her ability to drive around in her own blue cabriolet, solving her mysteries. By 1959 the legal age for a driver's licence was now the same age as when most girls got married. Nancy Drew needed to become older but she could not be married if she was to remain a girl sleuth. Making Nancy a bride would also be difficult due to the series' lack of romance and emotions.

In *The Secret of the Old Clock* neither themes of coming of age nor sexuality are present. There are also no conflicts between daughter and father, and there are no boys. Karen Coats argues that Nancy Drew and other series painted a picture of adolescence as a time of excitement and adventure and their teenager protagonists, regardless of sex, were overwhelmingly competent. Coats also claims that whether they are fighting pirates or solving crimes, they "don't spend their time moping or fighting with their parents, and their risky behavior is championed as necessary and nearly always rewarded with success." (Coats 31). Being an adventure novel words like 'dates' and 'love' are not relevant in either edition of *The Secret of The Old Clock*. It is rarely possible to identify Nancy's feelings and thoughts, other than when it comes to her investigation of the case. O'Reilly argues that this is no coincidence since "descriptions of Nancy are generally vague" (O'Reilly 62), and that Nancy is an atypical teenager "with a near-singular obsession with mysteries, strictly practical interest in shopping [...], and a mostly casual interest in boyfriend Ned" (65). The future boyfriend, Ned Nickerson, however, is not even yet introduced in *The Secret of the Old Clock*. Nancy's desaturated interest in boys has rendered questions about hidden homosexuality, but besides her thinking affectionately about friends, this can only be regarded as speculation. Brittney Brown, who has studied Nancy's possible sexual deviance in the first five novels,

can only come to the conclusion that “the text remains vague” (Brown 84), about her romantic interests.

During the 1950s the entrance of the teenage culture made its mark on all youth culture. In accordance with the Foucauldian terminology this meant that the younger generation opposed against the power relations of the earlier decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The new discourse meant a normalization of more sexualised teenagers resulting in for example a lowered age of marriage, making the original teenage Nancy Drew appear outdated and atypical, and less relevant as a teenage heroine. The Stratemeyer Syndicate needed a plan to secure its main cash cow and Adams came up with a creative and contemporary solution that helped the series survive until 2003 when the last novel was released.

## **Nancy Drew and the Middle Grade Novel**

As Nancy Drew’s resemblance to a real-life American teenager diminished, she became less interesting for her former young adult readers. Adams thus chose to rewrite the series for a younger audience, the middle graders. Mitzi Myers means that a new historicism of children’s literature needs to examine “a book’s material production, its publishing history, its audiences and their reading practices” (Myers 42). It is therefore relevant that the Stratemeyer Syndicate decided to overcome the problems with the outdated novels of 1930 through a strategic business decision. Targeting a younger audience gave the Nancy Drew series many new potential readers as over 75 million children were born in the United States between 1946 and 1964 (Colby, and Ortman 2). The growing number of children became, like the teenagers, a powerful consumer segment as Munn stated in 1958: “children

influenced parental purchases in nine of 10 homes.” (Munn qtd in Alexander, et al. 3). This also meant more children who could buy their own cheap series books, books that were desired by bookworms but were not to be found in the libraries. The increasing purchasing power of children and their families transformed the economy of post-war America where consumer goods became vital to the creation of a mass-market. Shelley Nickles argues that in this mass-market “men generally held the purse string” (Nickles 588), but as she quotes *This is Your Market: America Today 1954* “whether she has a job outside the home or not, the wage earner wife decides most family purchases or investments.” (588). Hence, children’s books found a new revival through suburban mothers who were encouraged to offer their children books as an alternative to television. Paul Witty argued already in 1957 that “TV is not often the single cause of a poor reading” but “[c]hildren should be encouraged to read widely from materials associated with their interests. To do this effectively parents and teachers must become acquainted with many excellent recently published books” (Witty 16).

Reading an appropriately written book was assumed to benefit the child’s development and the children’s book character Nancy Drew needed to be appropriate to a specific segment to survive. Thus, didactic, discursive elements have been included in the 1959 version of *The Secret of the Old Clock*. We learn that Nancy had “been taught never to gossip.” (Keene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 7), but we also learn the importance of good hygiene as she “hurried to wash her hands and comb her hair” (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 13) before dinner. Nancy of 1930 would not have gossiped as she “could be trusted with confidential information” (Keene 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 6), and in that narrative the sixteen-year-old Nancy was too sophisticated and mature to ever have to clean her hands and tell her audience about it. The changed distribution of roles

between Nancy and Hannah in 1959 also makes it possible to display the importance of helping out at home since Nancy willingly asks Hannah: “Any errands for me?” (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 21), while in the original texts she is merely consulting Hannah “concerning the work of the day.” (Keene 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 12). The post-war view of the innocent “emotionally priceless” child subordinated to its adults is visible in the rewritten novel, making the new Nancy an appropriate role model for young American girls of the era.

In a conservative cold-war America censorship followed in the fear of improper texts and messages, and book burnings occurred in several American states during the early 1950s (Puaca). Avoiding improper topics in their children’s novels became important for the Stratemeyer Syndicate since being labelled as un-American or immoral could have devastating consequences for sales figures. In the original *The Secret of the Old Clock* words like ‘alcoholic’, ‘drinking orgy’, ‘revolver’, ‘weapons’, and ‘jail’ are used. This was an inappropriate glossary for a children’s book in an era where Americans believed in an image of “America as wholesome cheerful, and churchgoing” (Devlin 5). A character that originally played a big part in the novel, Jeff Tucker, is also more or less erased from the new book. Jeff is originally an Afro-American caretaker of Tophams’ Moon Lake bungalow. In 1930 he has been lured away from the bungalow to make way for the thieves, but he is also easily lured into drinking and when Nancy meets him, he is still really drunk. The sixteen-year-old Nancy, who has just been released from being locked in a closet, now has to deal with a drunken stranger, and she does that with an authority many adults would lack:

“Well, Miss, it was dis heah way : I was out in dah yard a-chorin’ around last night and a-thinkin’ how I wished I was someplace whah I wasn’t – just any place, I didn’t mind wheah. I was just fed up bein’ a caih-taker, and takin’ caih o’ all dis truck from mornin’ till night. It ain’t such an excitin’ life, Miss, and while I’s done sowed all mah wild oats, I still sow a little rye now and den.”

“Yes, Jeff – I can smell that on your breath right now.” (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 141)

Nancy is so frank she makes the grown man cry, lecturing him with comments like “It would be only what you deserve, Jeff. You were unfaithful to your trust.” (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 143). The original character of Jeff Tucker would be inappropriate in many ways in the new children’s book of 1959. Not only is he drunk, but he is also portrayed with a cartoonish, prejudicial language of an uneducated Afro-American man, something many readers’ parents had protested against since the late 1940s. The original Jeff Tucker also has a history of repeatedly being caught by the police for drunken behaviour.

“Bettah slow down now, Miss,” Jeff cautioned. “De marshal of this town is mighty persnickitty about how folks acts. He’s run me in mo’n once.”

“For speeding?”

“No, just fo’ enjoyin’ myself.” (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 147)

Jeff’s character became a problem for Adams in 1959 and she chose the easy way of removing all coloured people to avoid being criticized for racism. Jeff Tucker himself becomes an older white man, who just has misplaced his keys in the wrong pocket. Embarrassed by the situation he explains his absence during the burglary of

1959: “I was plain hornswoggled by those critters, Miss Drew. They pulled up here in a movin’ van, and told me I’d better get after some trespassers they’d seen nearby.” (Keene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 117). By making Jeff white, sober, and elderly he became more suitable for the new audience, and at the same time the racial problem with the original book was somewhat solved.

Nancy was in 1930 advertised for 10-15 years old, or young adult, readers (Caprio 22). Young adult novels are distinguished by, among other things, the complexity of the issues that the protagonist deals with. Alcohol and drugs, romance and identity are common themes in young adult novels and Kathleen Ahrens means that it is important to give a protagonist problems that can be “life-threatening to the character who is trapped in the throes of adolescence” (Ahrens XX). In young adult literature it is the tough questions about life and love that are important. Nancy Drew could save herself from physically dangerous situations like gunfights, failing boat engines, and being locked up to starve to death, but tough questions about life and love were never her cup of tea. Rewriting Nancy Drew as an appropriate, modern young adult series must have seemed too complex a task in 1959, which is why making it a children’s series was an easier way out.

There are several guidelines of how to write a children’s book. Ahrens suggests that middle-grade novels are written broadly for those between the ages of 8 and 12 and should contain 20000-40000 words (Ahrens XXII). This amount of words became the Stratemeyer Syndicate’s standard during the 1950s when many of their old pre-war series got a makeover similar to Nancy Drew’s (Johnson, et al. 48). The 1959 edition of *The Secret of the Old Clock* contains a little over 35000 words, which is approximately 10%, less than the original. The new novel also contained illustrations, depicting the daring situations Nancy was exposed to. These

illustrations were not needed for her former, slightly older, audience. According to Ahrens, 8-12 year old readers are not “impressed by flowery language and breathtaking scene descriptions” (Ahrens XIX), they want to be drawn into their story and engaged in such a way that they “can’t put the book down.” (Ahrens XXII). This need for excitement was met by the new novel at the expense of the livelier depictions that set the tone of the first edition. Younger readers were not expected to appreciate the more poetic language of the original novel:

Selecting the shortest route to her destination, Nancy deftly shifted gears and was off. As she rode along the gravel road her eyes traveled to the fields on either side of the high-way. Like a true daughter of the Middle West, Nancy Drew took pride in the fertility of her State and saw beauty in a crop of waving green corn as well as in the rolling hills and the expanse of prairie land. (Keene 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 26)

In the new edition the language was more efficient: “Nancy had chosen a route which would take her to River Road. Half an hour later she turned into the beautiful country road which wound in and out of the Muskoka River.” (Keene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 36). Nancy Drew of the rewritings is also generally considered to be more “frenetic”, and Caprio suggests that “her pace accelerated as if to match the pace of that new competitor for young people’s attention, television” (21). Already in the very first chapter of the 1959 edition the now eighteen-year-old Nancy almost collides with a van, saves a young, orphaned girl, befriends the girl’s guardians, is informed of the Crowley will, detects a silver theft, and reports it at the police station. The middle-grade reader was effectively drawn into the thrilling novel.

The 1959 edition of *The Secret of the Old Clock* can definitely be defined as a Children's book. Besides fewer developed depictions of the scenery, less violence and fewer inappropriate elements such as alcohol and racism, we find pictures and a more suitable glossary for a children's novel, e. g. applesauce, chocolate frosting, music, dancing, playing, and dolls. With a different glossary, a pluckier Nancy, a more protective father, and a nurturing housekeeper offering motherly love, the revised *Nancy Drew Mysteries* were well designed to fit the demands on a 'proper' reading experience for post-war middle school girls. A comparison of the novel's two editions displays how "literary work always exists in a complex of different contexts at any given time" (Hawthorn 13) and reveals the importance of considering how historical values change over time. Foucault's theories of fluctuations in discourse and power can be traced in literature by analysing what is considered appropriate within a society. For Nancy Drew this meant that what was appropriate in a young adult novel in 1930 became inappropriate in a children's novel of 1959.

## Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to analyse a seemingly timeless Nancy Drew novel using a new historical perspective, placing it into a historical context by studying some of the editorial changes that were made in the second version of *The Secret of the Old Clock*. The essay has shown how socioeconomic, technological, and demographic changes in post-war America can be traced in the new characters, narrative, and language of the 1959 edition of the novel. The two different editions

tell us, as new historicism would say, about the interplay of discourses of the time and place they were written.

According to Michel Foucault's theories, power is an omnipresent force, present in all social interactions, circulated through a redistribution of goods, people and ideas. The socioeconomically thriving post-war America led to changes in how many American families lived, as families became smaller while their material resources grew. The rise of the suburban nuclear family meant that new family ideals and gender stereotypes became part of the ideology of the conservative 1950s. The changes in norms and family ideal were met in the new edition with the rewriting of the characters Carson Drew and Hannah Gruen to give the new Nancy an appropriate domestic situation. The 1959 *Secret of The Old Clock* reveals a new power distribution in the American family compared to the original novel.

Economic and technological development after the war led to the development of a new teenage culture. This culture was characterized by a longing for independence from adult society. The meaning of life for post-war teenage girls was often portrayed as finding a suitable husband and creating the best home for the family as a whole, but especially for her future children. During the 1950s young girls were fed both culturally and commercially with the message that interests in relationships, romance, dating, and boys were typically girlish. Nancy Drew did not share many of the characteristics of the post-war teenage girl. No longer relevant for the 10-15 years readers, it became necessary to change the concept and the Stratemeyer Syndicate turned to a younger audience.

The post-war baby boom meant a new profitable market for children's goods and ideas, and companies like Disney, Mattel and Hanna Barbera found their way into American homes thanks to the growth of mass media, making larger profits than

ever before. The television boom offered easy access to fast-paced entertainment, in turn influencing the narrative of other types of media, e. g. children's literature. Post-war America, however, was characterized by conservative ideals, and making appropriate choices became increasingly important. New discourses and ideas institutionalized what was regarded as normal and appropriate within the post-war American society. The rewrites of Nancy Drew were targeting the new profitable market of 8–12-year-old children, but appropriate changes in narrative, characters and language were needed. The new Nancy Drew became a less mature character, securely nurtured in the loving nuclear family, performing heroic deeds at a fast pace, in a world of innocence and applesauce.

Placing the editions of *The Secret of the Old Clock* in their historical context proves the novels to be what new historicists call representations of their times. New historicism believes that “[a]ny given event – whether it be a political election or a children's cartoon show – is a product of its culture, but it also affects that culture in return” (Tyson 269). The intertwining of history and literature is there to be found, even if the Stratemeyer Syndicate deliberately avoided time markers like war, politics, and events. However, if Nancy Drew had not been modernized according to the signs of the post-war times, the story of one of the most successful book series would probably never have been told.

## Works Cited

- Ahrens, Kathleen. "Writing for Children and Young Adults." *A Companion to Creative Writing*, Wiley Blackwell, 2013, pp. XIX - XXXIII. *Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture* ; 83.
- Alexander, Alison et al. "'We'll Be Back in a Moment': A Content Analysis of Advertisements in Children's Television in the 1950s." *Journal of advertising*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1998, pp. 1-9, doi:10.1080/00913367.1998.10673558.
- Brown, Brittney. "Nancy Drew, Sexual Deviancy, and Rewrites in Twentieth-Century America." *Clues (Bowling Green, Ohio)*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2019, pp. 81-90.
- Caprio, Betsy. *The Mystery of Nancy Drew : Girl Sleuth on the Couch*. Source Books, 1992.
- Coats, Karen. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Colby, Sandra L. and Jennifer M. Ortman. "The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060." *Current Population Reports Population Estimates and Projections*, Translated by U.S. Department of Commerce, Issued May 2014, pp. P 25-1141.
- Devlin, Rachel. *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture (Gender and American Culture) [Elektronisk Resurs]*. University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Fisk, Donald M. "American Labor in the 20th Century." *Compensation and Working Conditions*, vol. Fall 2001, 2001.
- Foucault, Michel et al. *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984. : Vol. 2, Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*. Penguin, 2000.
- Gallagher, Catherine and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Green Bierbaum, Esther. "A Bibliographic Mystery: Missing Books, Missing Authors." *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp. 163-69.

Hall, Dennis R. "The Study of Popular Culture: Origin and Developments." *Studies in popular culture (Online)*, 1983.

Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Cunning Passages : New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Marxism in the Contemporary Literary Debate*. Arnold, 1996. *Interrogating Texts*.

Hickling, Matt. "New Historicism." *Brock Education Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018, doi:10.26522/brocked.v27i2.577.

Hunt, Peter. *Understanding Children's Literature*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.

Inness, Sherrie A., editor. *Nancy Drew and Company : Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997.

Johnson, Deidre. "From Paragraphs to Pages: The Writing and Development of the Stratemeyer Syndicate Series." *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, vol. 12, University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp. 29-40.

Johnson, Deidre et al. "The History of the Stratemeyer Books: Questions and Answers." *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp. 47-51.

Keene, Carolyn. *The Hidden Staircase*. Grosset And Dunlap, 2014.

---. *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*. Grosset And Dunlap, 2015.

---. *The Secret of the Old Clock*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. ed., Grosset & Dunlap, 1959. 2014.

---. *The Secret of the Old Clock*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. ed., Grosset & Dunlap, 1930. 1991.

Keene, Carolyn et al. *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*. Grosset & Dunlap, 2014.

Kroik, Polina. "The Limits of Popular Representation: Postwar Working Girls in Rona Jaffe's the Best of Everything (1958) and Helen Gurley Brown's Sex and the Single Girl (1962)." *Merchants, Barons, Sellers and Suits: The*

*Changing Images of the Businessman through Literature*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 277-93.

Lapin, Geoffrey S. "Searching for Carolyn Keene." *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp. 52-89.

Lynch, Richard A. "Foucault's Theory of Power." *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, Acumen, 2011.

McKay, John P. *A History of World Societies*. Bedford / St. Martin's :, 2012.

Miller, Laura J. "Family Togetherness and the Suburban Ideal." *Sociological forum (Randolph, N.J.)*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1995, pp. 393-418, doi:10.1007/BF02095828.

Myers, Mitzi. "Missed Opportunities and Critical Malpractice: New Historicism and Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1988, pp. 41-43, doi:10.1353/chq.0.0126.

Nickles, Shelley. "More Is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America." *American quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2002, pp. 581-622, doi:10.1353/aq.2002.0040.

O'Reilly, Julie D. "The Legacy of George and Bess: Sidekicks as Normalizing Agents for the Girl Sleuth." *Clues (Bowling Green, Ohio)*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2009, p. 61.

Pattersson, Lee. "Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature." *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism : A Reader*, Arnold, 1996, pp. 92-102.

Puaca, Brian. "Echoes of the Past: The Legacies of 1950s Comic Censorship in the *Maus* Controversy." *The Comic Journal*, 2022.

Reid, Jason. "'My Room! Private! Keep Out! This Means You!': A Brief Overview of the Emergence of the Autonomous Teen Bedroom in Post-World War II America." *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2012, pp. 419-43, doi:10.1353/hcy.2012.0034.

Siegel, Deborah L. "Nancy Drew as New Girl Wonder: Solving It All for the 1930s." *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, pp. 159-82.

Stewart Dyer, Carolyn. "The Nancy Drew Phenomenon: Rediscoverings Nancy Drew in Iowa." *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp. 1-9.

Stewart Dyer, Carolyn and Nancy Tillman Romalov, editors. *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*. University of Iowa Press, 1995.

Still, Julie. "Nancy Drew and the Ivory Tower: Early Academic Study of the Girl Detective." *Clues (Bowling Green, Ohio)*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2017, p. 75.

Tillman Romalov, Nancy. "Mobile and Modern Heroines: Early Twentieth-Century Girls' Automobile Series." *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, pp. 75-88.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Garland, 1999. *Garland Reference Library of the Humanities*, 2070.

Veesser, Harold. *The New Historicism*. Routledge, 1989.

Wallace, Kathleen. "Appropriate." *Brock Education Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018, doi:10.26522/brocked.v27i2.584.

Wirt Benson, Mildred. "Fulfilling a Quest for Adventure." *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp. 59-65.

Witty, Paul. "Children, Tv and Reading." *The Reading teacher*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1957, pp. 11-16.