THE VISUAL REWRITING OF NANCY DREW: AN ANALYSIS OF THE COVER
ART OF THE NANCY DREW MYSTERY SERIES FROM 1930-1999

by
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This study provides a qualitative visual analysis of selected covers from the Nancy Drew Mystery Series from the 1930's until the present. The analysis was conducted using research on non-verbal communication and facial expression as well as research done on composition and perception in order to show a progression in the way that Nancy Drew's character was portrayed.

There are five characterizations of Nancy Drew that become apparent in performing a visual analysis of the artwork. The 1930's Nancy Drew is characterized as bold, capable and independent. She actively seeks out clues, and is shown in the center of the compositions. In subsequent characterizations Nancy Drew becomes progressively weaker, less in control. By the 1990's there is a complete reversal in the representation of her character. She is often shown being chased or threatened, the confidence of the 1930's being replaced by fear.

Headings:

Nancy Drew mystery stories

Series – History

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1929, Edward Stratemeyer, founder of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, a production

factory for series books, was looking for a heroine for a new girls' series. The Syndicate,

begun in 1905, had produced over one hundred different series, many of which enjoyed

unparalleled success, including Tom Swift, the Rover Boys, the Dana Girls, the Happy

Hollisters, Ruth Fielding, the Outdoor Girls, the Bobbsey Twins, and the Hardy Boys

(Watson 50-52). Stratemeyer had introduced the Hardy Boys in 1927 and was looking

for a female counterpart to Joe and Frank Hardy (Plunkett-Powell 17). As Karen

Plunkett-Powell, author of The Nancy Drew Scrapbook describes,

> He dreamed up a character with blond hair, blue eyes, and a dashing roadster—a
> girl with pluck and good sense and a thirst for adventure—a spirited teen who
> would not only satisfy an unmet need, but also sell enough copies to make a
> moderate profit. (17)

The character that he created was Nancy Drew. Edward Stratemeyer drew up outlines for

the series, and gave them to Mildred Wirt Benson, a journalist from Iowa whom he'd

worked with before (Johnson, ed. 62). He asked her to write the first three stories of the

series, and in March of 1930, these titles, The Secret of the Old Clock, The Hidden

Staircase, and The Bungalow Mystery, were published by Grosset & Dunlap. The books

were a huge success and immediately sold out. This was the beginning of the best

known, longest running girls' fiction series of all time (Plunkett-Powell 5).

Nearly seventy years later, the Nancy Drew Mystery Series is still going strong.

What is the reason for this success? Much of Nancy's success appears to be in her ability to change with the times. Nancy has gone from driving a maroon roadster to a blue convertible to a blue mustang, from suits to shirtwaist dresses to designer jeans. In addition, there have been several "rewritings" of the character of Nancy Drew. Some of these changes were a natural result of having a number of ghostwriters who wrote for the series. Other rewritings of her character were requested by Edward Stratemeyer and by publishers of Nancy Drew, who altered her character in order to make her more marketable, to modernize her in order to appeal to the readers in the time period in which they were writing.

While many articles have been written on the evolution of Nancy's character within the text of the stories, few scholars have discussed the changes that Nancy has undergone in the cover art of the series. Accompanying each textual rewriting of Nancy Drew, there has been a "visual rewriting" of Nancy's character via the cover art of the series. Examining the cover art of the Nancy Drew series sheds some light on what the publishers and artist thought would be appealing to 8-12 year old girls at a given period of time. Just as alterations to Nancy's character textually can be ascribed to a variety of factors, the rewriting of Nancy on the covers of the Nancy Drew Mystery Series can be attributed to a number of different factors. Many of the visual changes reflect the character modifications that were made in the text. Additionally, Nancy was cosmetically updated on the cover art in order to keep her in step with fashion changes from decade to decade; however, these changes will not be examined in much detail in this study. The most interesting changes to the pictorial Nancy are not in the cosmetic changes, such as hair and clothing styles, but in her manner and personality.

This paper will look at the ways in which the representations of the character of Nancy Drew have changed from her beginnings in 1930 to the most recent stories published in 1999. By examining Nancy's facial expression and body language in light of scholarship on non-verbal communication, trends will be noted that denote alterations in her character's independence, assertiveness, and motivation. This paper will then chart these trends throughout the history of the series, examining the way that perceptions of Nancy and her role as sleuth are affected by the changes to her visage and body language.

Additionally, the paper will explore where Nancy Drew is placed in relation to the action of the story. Is she a participant? An observer? Is she completely removed from the rest of the picture or is she in the middle of the action? Is Nancy actively pursuing mysteries or attempting to avert danger? By examining Nancy's figure within the composition of the cover art, the paper will look for clues to shed light on the modifications to Nancy's character, and what these changes imply.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Nancy's World

In order to establish a context for looking at the covers of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, it is important to know who Nancy Drew is and the context in which she operates. What is it about the series that has made her so appealing to her readers, most of whom are 8-12 year old girls? In her article, "Nancy Drew, a Modern Elsie Dinsmore," Deidre Johnson (1994) remarks that in reading women's responses to Nancy Drew, "one is struck by how frequently some form of the phrase, 'I wanted to be just like her' appears" (20). In 1993, the University of Iowa sponsored the first Nancy Drew Conference. At this convention, one of the activities included a meeting of over 200 of the registered participants in the conference who gathered together to share their experiences reading Nancy Drew. In " 'Reading' the Stories of Reading: Nancy Drew Testimonials," Bonnie Sunstein (1995) gathers some of the stories into an essay exploring Nancy Drew's influence and reasons for her popularity. Many of them made comments like the following:

> I longed to be Nancy, with her confidence, wealth, independence, loving friends, and indulgent parents. I admired Nancy, who seemed to me to be 'perfect': altruistic and yet assertive, brainy and yet attractive, a big eater and yet thin, supercompetent and single-minded and yet loved by everyone. All the contradictions seemed reconciled in Nancy. (Sunstein 98)

Nancy Drew's success relies not so much on the quality of the writing or even upon thecreepy setting and action-packed plots, but rather on her personality and lifestyle.

For many young readers, Nancy Drew Mysteries allow them to enter an ordered world, where a young adult is respected, exerts control and maintains order.

For young girls, Nancy Drew's world is like nothing they know but everything that they could want. They crave the freedom and independence that Nancy is given by having a father who is a busy lawyer and who indulges her and supports her independent nature. They long for release from expectations of proper womanly behavior that Nancy is given by the absence of a mother figure (Nancy's mother died when she was ten in early stories, three in later stories). One fan recalls, "Nancy had her own car; I didn't even have my own room. She could throw a few things in the trunk and go away for a week; I had to be home in time for dinner" (Felder 30-32). Part of what Nancy's readers crave is her lifestyle: her ability to act independently, to step out from the conventional restrictions of womanly behavior while maintaining her feminitiy, to have a father who is willing to finance exciting trips across country, and to have her own car and the freedom to take it where she likes.

Still another thing that is appealing to readers of the stories is Nancy's ability to battle crooks, right wrongs, and solve mysteries. In the introduction to the Applewood Press facsimile reprint edition of <u>The Sign of the Twisted Candles</u>, Carolyn G. Hart writes that in Nancy Drew she found "independence, a battle for justice, and a puzzle. And I found a world where goodness triumphs…the mystery, in addition to a puzzle and a quest, is a reaffirmation of our faith in goodness." (n. pag.)

Nancy's Accomplishments

The other main factor in Nancy's success is her amazing repertoire of accomplishments. Lee Zacharias notes that

> Nancy succeeds not merely because the reader can identify with her but because the reader wants to identify with her; she is an ever-contemporary projection and fulfillment of the reader. She is everything the reader is not and wishes to be. (1028)

Her accomplishments are indeed truly remarkable. In "Nancy Drew, WASP Supergirl of the 1930's," James Jones gives the following description:

> At sixteen she 'had studied psychology in school and was familiar with the power of suggestion and association.' Nancy was a fine painter, spoke French, and had frequently run motor boats. She was a skilled driver who at sixteen 'flashed into the garage with a skill born of long practice.' The prodigy was a sure shot, an excellent swimmer, skillful oarsman, expert seamstress, gourmet cook, and a fine bridge player. Nancy brilliantly played tennis and golf, and rode like a cowboy. Nancy danced like Ginger Rogers and could administer first aid like the Mayo brothers. (708)

In The Girl Sleuth: A Feminist Guide, Bobbie Ann Mason writes, "She is as immaculate and self-possessed as a Miss America on tour. She is as cool as a Mata Hari and as sweet as Betty Crocker" (50). As far as Nancy's physical appearance, "she had beautiful golden hair 'with a natural curl,' blue eyes, fair skin, and a good figure. Though she was not 'beautiful,' she was 'unusually pretty,' and 'had an unforgettable face that was more interesting than that of her companions.'" (Jones, 707) Nancy, however, does not allow her feminine grace and beauty to hold her s not one to let her looks hold her to a traditionally female role.

Nancy Drew and Feminism

It is truly remarkable to look at the independence and accomplishments of Nancy Drew in relation to the time in which the books first appeared—only ten years after women had first secured the right to vote and one year into the Great Depression (Siegel 160). In her article "Nancy Drew As New Girl Wonder: Solving It All for the 1930s," Deborah Siegel notes that in 1930 and beyond, "the nation was still in the process of

assimilating women's new sociopolitical status, as well as reorienting to the ever-shifting ideological construct of 'the feminine'" (160). Nancy's character, racing across the country in a roadster, often unaccompanied, acting as a partner to her father in solving mysteries that even the police couldn't crack, must have been a shocking heroine. Because of her strong will and independence, her fearlessness and ability to do things of which ordinary girls only dream, many feminists have commented "on what the experience of reading Nancy Drew has meant for constructions of American girlhood across the decades" (Siegel 160).

Carolyn Heilbrun's article, "Nancy Drew, A Moment in Feminist History," discusses the ways in which the Nancy Drew of the 1930's resembles greatly the "newly minted feminist of the seventies," "flinging about the same daring challenges we offered to each other in those early years" (13, 12). Other authors have similarly remarked upon the way in which Nancy was far ahead of her time.

In Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series, edited by Sherrie Inness, Sally Parry writes,

> Nancy, despite her traditionally feminine attributes, such as good looks, a variety of clothes for all social occasions, and an awareness of good housekeeping, is often praised for her seemingly masculine traits…she operates best independently, has the freedom and money to do as she pleases, and outside of a telephone call or two home, seems to live for solving mysteries rather than participating in family life. (148)

It is an interesting characterization: a girl who is allowed to be both completely masculine and feminine at the same time, rejecting roles that would restrict her, yet not turning away entirely from womanly pursuits.

In her essay, "Nancy Drew, Girl Detective, Nascent Feminist, and Family Therapist," Hope Burwell writes that Nancy

…may not have been an intentional feminist, but she certainly provided for many of us an experience so palpable that later in our teens, when someone said, 'Girls can't do that,' we looked back startled, uncomprehending and unmollified, because we had already, indeed, done it. (53)

Ironically, most of the attributes described in the passages above, are taken from the early stories in the series. Many scholars, feminists among them, have noted that Nancy's character has changed as the stories evolved, and not necessarily for the better.

Changes in Nancy Drew: The Revisions

Before diving directly into the changes that have been made in Nancy's character, it would be helpful to briefly outline the history of the series, both in its authorship and publishing history.

The first three outlines for the Nancy Drew stories were produced by Edward Stratemeyer and developed into stories by Mildred Wirt Benson. In 1930, Edward died, and his daughter, Harriet S. Adams took over writing the plot outlines for the series (Plunkett-Powell 33). Harriet's vision of Nancy was stronger than that of her father, and her outlines became more and more lengthy and limiting to Benson. For a brief period (volumes 8-10) the stories were written by Walter Karig. Mildred returned to writing for the syndicate in 1934 and wrote volumes 11-25, stopping with The Clue of the Velvet Mask in 1953 (Plunkett-Powell 33). Following Benson's absence, a series of ghostwriters contributed to the series. In 1959, Grosset & Dunlap, the publisher, began reissuing the first 34 volumes in condensed version, often with many changes and revisions to Nancy's character.

Grosset & Dunlap continued to publish the Nancy Drew Mystery Series through volume 56, The Thirteenth Pearl. In 1979 the Syndicate was sold to Simon & Schuster,

who has continued the Nancy Drew Mystery Series as a paperback under the Wanderer

and Minstrel labels (Plunkett-Powell 3,4). Simon & Schuster has increased the number

of stories published per year, jumping from about one a year to nearly six. The latest title

to date is number 148, On the Trail of Trouble (1999).

 With all of these revisions, rewrites and changes, not only in authorship but in

publishing companies, Nancy Drew's character has changed drastically from the original

Nancy of the 1930's. Unfortunately, many of these changes seem to be a step backward.

Some of the earliest changes to Nancy's character were made in the 1950's revisions of

the early stories in the series. In "The Mystery of Nancy Drew," Jackie Vivelo makes a

very telling list of the revisions of The Secret of the Old Clock:

> In the original version, Nancy is 16, a young adult. Her relationship to Hannah
> Gruen [her housekeeper] is employer/employee. Nancy leaves a list of
> instructions for Hannah, who hardly enters the story. The floor manager of the
> River Heights department store is a woman. When Nancy gives a lift to a police
> official, she drives. In a visit to a summer camp, Nancy and her friends are on
> their own.
>
> In the revised version, Nancy is 18, a teenager. Hannah is clearly Nancy's
> adviser. The housekeeper gives a list of errands to Nancy. They hug. Hannah
> warns and councils her. The floor manager of that same store is now a man. This
> time when the official accepts a ride, Nancy moves over to let him drive her car.
> At camp, in the new version, Nancy and her friends are supervised by the aunt of
> one of the girls. (77)

These revisions are quite significant. They point to a Nancy Drew who has less

independence, less assertiveness, less confidence. Vivelo observes that these changes,

many of them instigated by Harriet Adams, allowed Nancy Drew, once too controversial

for public libraries, to become "accepted—even occasionally recommended—reading"

(76). These changes, however, Vivelo adds, have removed some of Nancy's most

striking qualities (76).

The changes in Nancy continued throughout the series. Her boyfriend, Ned Nickerson, was introduced, and while she did remain independent and often seemingly uninterested in romance, Ned often takes the hero role in getting Nancy out of scrapes that she would previously have gotten out of alone. An example of this was again recorded by Vivelo in the revisions of <u>The Whispering Statue</u> (originally published in 1937):

> *Original version*: Nancy's fingers were not idle as she listened to the amazing tale. Presently she had freed one arm. Then it became easy for her to loosen her other bonds. Next she jerked off the gag.

> *Revised version*: 'Break this open!' Ned ordered Michaels. With no choice but to obey, Michaels jumped inside. From a back pocket he took out a small chisel and hammer. Within a few minutes Nancy's head was exposed. Ned yanked the gag from her mouth. (77)

How strange that as women are gaining more rights and independence, Nancy becomes less self-reliant, more dependent on men in her life to rescue her from the scrapes that she gets into.

Along with Ned Nickerson, Harriet Adams introduced two more characters into the stories, cousins Bess Marvin and George Fayne. These characters were introduced to be foils for Nancy, showing the two sides of her personality. George, a dark-haired tomboy represents Nancy's masculine side, and squeamish, skittish Bess, "blonde, plump, lazy and incurably romantic," represents Nancy's feminine side (Felder, 31). One interesting result of the introduction of these two cousins is that Harriet Adams eventually gave Nancy reddish blonde hair in order to provide an even clearer visual delineation between the three.

The changes in Nancy's character have continued into the eighties and nineties. The situations in which Nancy finds herself have become less Gothic (haunted bridges,

ghosts, missing heirlooms) and more modern and topical (<u>The Email Mystery</u> and <u>The Teen Model Mystery</u>, for example). Some see the evolution of her character as moving slowly from "a symbol of spunky female independence…[into] an image of prolonged childhood, currently evolving toward a Barbie doll detective" (Vivelo, 76). Vivelo makes the argument that Nancy has taken a more passive role in the stories, less of the action being initiated by Nancy. Remarks Vivelo, "Along with a degree of self-reliance and confidence, gone is her alert defense of the underdog. What is left is the glamorous life of a teenage detective, a lucky person to whom exciting things happen" (76).

Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell take a more positive approach to the changes that Nancy has undergone in their article, "Romancing Nancy: Feminist Interrogations of Successive Versions of Nancy Drew." They argue that "Nancy continues to lead heroically/romantically precisely because new generations of readers are situated within new heroics/romances" (Reid-Walsh, Mitchell 444). They see the changes that Nancy has undergone as positive and necessary, being reflections of the time in which the stories are written. For example, they note the way in which the ultra-glamorous and independent Nancy of the 1930's [with] "the strong emphasis on luxury and clothes…could have provided a fantasy dimension for children parallel to the glamour movies of the 1930's which so attracted adults" (Reid-Walsh, Mitchell 448). They continue to defend the changes to Nancy's character, particularly in the development of the Nancy who is "involved with the fashion, beauty routines, rock music, and dating practices of today" (Reid-Walsh, Mitchell 453) as an indication of the needs of a new generation of readers, and they continue to applaud her as a role model for contemporary readers.

Changes to Nancy in the Cover Art

While not much has been done to look at the changes to Nancy Drew in the cover art of the Nancy Drew Mystery Series as it progressed from the 1930's to the present, Karen Plunkett-Powell does provide an intriguing breakdown of the stylistic differences through the ages. As there is nothing else that has been written on this subject, the discussion of the changes in cover art will be a summary of her analysis.

<u>1930's Nancy</u>

Nancy Drew of the 1930's was portrayed as a very sophisticated, glamorous girl/woman with a heart-shaped face and finely-lined brows. Plunkett-Powell refers to this Nancy as the "Classic Ethereal Nancy," noting that Nancy bears a distinct resemblance to movie stars like Carole Lombard (47).

Nancy's artist from the 1930's until 1950 was Russell Tandy, a free-lance commercial artist who illustrated catalog ads for Sears, Montgomery Ward and JcPenney, and following his career with Nancy Drew, he went on to do freelance works for upscale department stores such as Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue (Plunkett-Powell 44-45). This familiarity with the popular fashions of the day can be seen in the stylish clothes that Nancy wears, and the long-lines that Tandy uses in drawing Nancy that suggest to Plunkett-Powell a runway model (43). The Nancy of the 1930's wore "cloches, white gloves, three-quarter length skirts, strapped stiletto heels" (Plunkett-Powell 43). Tandy always insisted on reading the story before designing the cover, and so the covers often depict very specific moments from the stories.

<u>1940's Nancy</u>

Plunkett-Powell notes that the Nancy of the 1940's was influenced by the effect

of the war years—she wears tailored suits and low-heeled pumps, following the fashions

of the time (44). Her hair in the 1940's is longer and less curly, and tends to be tied in a

French knot (44). In addition, the background seems to be "moving steadily toward the

Gothic, with rich, colorful pictures of mansions, ghostly figures, and dastardly villains

lurking in the distance" (44).

<u>1950's- Early 1960's Nancy</u>

In the 1950's, Nancy's character underwent a major transformation. First, Nancy

had a new artist. Bill Gillies was the illustrator for volumes 27-29 (Larilana). Following

Bill Gillies's brief stint, Rudy Nappi took on the job of illustrating the covers for the

Nancy Drew series and other series from the Stratemeyer Syndicate (Plunkett-Powell 46).

He was the longest-running and most prolific of Nancy's illustrators, doing over 150

covers over 30 years for Grosset & Dunlap (46).

When Nappi first began his job at Grosset & Dunlap, the art director specifically

asked him to update Nancy's appearance, her clothes in particular (48). What Nappi

came up with is what Plunkett-Powell refers to as "Bobby-Soxer Nancy." (47). She

wears Peter Pan collars, shirtwaist dresses, and simple blouse and skirt ensembles

(Plunkett-Powell 48). Nancy looks younger, perkier, more like a contemporary 16 year

old. Plunkett-Powell notes that by the early 1960's she took on "the physical

characteristics of Barbie, Gidget and Doris Day" (47). She also lost a lot of the self-

confident, almost smug look of the thirties and forties, exchanging it for a more amazed,

or sometimes even "startled" look (Plunkett-Powell 47).

<u>Mid-1960's to 1970's Nancy</u>

Plunkett-Powell refers to the Nancy of the Mid-1960's to 1970's as "Trendy

Nancy" (48). For example she begins to sport the "flip" haircut (48). Nancy, however,

did not follow many of the other trends of the time. Plunkett points out that this period

was a time in which America was undergoing "major political and sociological

changes…and the women's liberation movement was in full swing" (48). She notes that

"when the baby-boom generation started to wear peace-sign jewelry and plastic love

beads, Nancy stayed with simple pearls and gold bracelets" (48). She also notes that

while Nancy herself remained fairly constant, the compositions of the covers themselves

became simpler, and even occasionally psychedelic, for example, the hot pink cover for

The Crooked Banister. (48). Another reason for this simplification of the cover could

have been that unlike Tandy, Rudy didn't read the novels himself, but rather gave them to

his wife to read. She then provided him with a plot summary (Plunkett-Powell 49).

1980's –Present Nancy

Plunkett-Powell characterizes the modern Nancy as "Debutante Nancy" (50). She

notes that during this time the Syndicate was purchased by Simon & Schuster, who began

issuing the series in a paperback format. During this time there were a number of artists,

including Ruth Sanderson, Paul Frame, and Glen Hastings (51). Plunkett-Powell notes

that

> the covers of the new Nancy Drew mysteries now reflect Nancy as a wealthy,
> privileged sleuth who looks pretty and alert. Her wardrobe runs the gamut from
> western wear to ball gowns. The backdrops are simple but effective. The colors,
> and Nancy's facial features, are often so vivid that some of the covers look more
> like glossy photographs than paintings. (51)

This newest incarnation of Nancy Drew continues all the way into the present.

Book Jacket Illustration

Although there has been little research in which the cover art of a series is

chronicled in the way that this paper will, there have been articles that address the importance of book jacket illustration not only as an art form but as an important means for advertising a book or a series of books, particularly to children.

In Illustrating Children's Books: History, Technique, Production, Henry Pitz provides a brief history of the function of the book jacket. He notes that the book jacket began as a way to protect books from soil and wear (136). Publishers, however, quickly realized the potential of the book jacket as an important design element in the make-up of a book. Pitz writes,

> The picture matter is usually best presented in a simple, bold, and arresting way, for it is the purpose of the jacket to attract the eye and coax the hand to pick up the book. In addition, the picture should create a climate or atmosphere that will arouse interest and convey something of the spirit of the book. Children's book jackets not only do this, they also tend to convey a message to the age group for which the book is suited. (130)

In the case of the Nancy Drew covers, the message provides clues on how to read Nancy's character—it teaches the reader to expect how Nancy will be reacting to the mystery in which she will be involved, her role in the drama, and the amount of fear and suspense that the story will create in the reader.

Jane Charlton's "How to Judge a Book By Its Cover: The Children's Guide for Adults Choosing Books for Children" also addresses the importance of book jacket illustration in selection of a story by children. She comments that "a good title or cover do not mean the children will like what they find within, but at least they will look inside" (30). Charlton works as editor of *Children's Choices of Canadian Books*, a series of reviews based entirely on the opinions of children (Charlton 27). She has determined five aspects that are important to children when choosing books: the title, the cover and inside illustrations, the information on the back cover, the book's physical dimension and

print size, and the author's reputation (27). She has found that when children are

selecting a book, the most commonly noted strengths are books with "likeable characters,

familiar details, believable relationships of various kinds, and events which are a

heightened version of real life" (Charlton 28). She agrees with Pitz that the function of

the book jacket is to capture the reader's attention and to draw them immediately into the

book (30).

In Ways of the Illustrator: Visual Communication in Children's Literature,

Joseph Schwarcz is primarily concerned with the illustration of children's books that

occurs within the book, rather than the cover art of a book. He discusses at length the

various techniques that illustrators use in order to convey metaphor, continuous narrative,

and visible sound (v). In his chapter on "The Role of the Illustration in the Child's

Aesthetic Experience," Schwarcz offers a validation of book illustration as an art form, as

well as a validation of the illustration as an important part of the child's aesthetic

experience in interacting with a book writing,

> It communicates in symbolic language; it expresses its intentions by creating,
> from verbal and visual elements, an aesthetic order carrying content and meaning;
> it creates illusions of realities which are partly similar and partly dissimilar to the
> one that men and women operate in practically; it uses figurative, metaphorical,
> and symbolic means to call forth a deceptive, imaginary world—richer, fuller of
> surprise, more astonishing, more innovative, more serious or humorous, more
> beautiful or else uglier, and also much tenser, dynamic and complex than our
> daily lives. It is supposed to take us away, for a period of time, from this narrow
> existence, and make us react to a deeper level and wider scope of life, beyond
> what we ordinarily accept as reality. (169)

This is an important concept to understand in looking at the cover art for the Nancy Drew

series, as the main function of the cover is to create a world so mysterious and creepy and

a character that is so interesting and enthralling, that the reader cannot help but grab the book and start reading.

Molly Bang's Picture This: Perception and Composition addresses the way in which emotions are created on the part of the viewer by the artist's placement of figures on the canvas. By reducing figures to geometric patterns, Bang analyzes the way in which composition alone, apart from detail and facial expression, can affect the mood of a composition. Her book is meant to be a tool for people to create strong, meaningful pictures; (xi) however, the insights that she provides can also be applied to the analysis of an illustration and can help to answer questions about why a certain illustration creates the feelings that it does on the part of the viewer. She notes that "vertical shapes are more exciting and more active," (58) "diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion or tension," (62) and "the center of the page is the most effective center of attention. It is the point of greatest attraction" (84). She takes these truisms and then provides illustrations which show them at work. While these concepts are relatively simple, it is not always easy to see how they are being used in illustration until they can be identified. This paper will look at how these shapes and compositions are used in the cover art of Nancy Drew stories and the affect that they have on the viewer.

Facial Expression and Non-Verbal Communication

Analysis of Nancy's facial expressions will be based largely on the work done by Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen in their Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues. This book examines many variations of facial expressions created in response to emotions. The study is broken down into chapters by emotion, including surprise, anger, happiness, fear, disgust and sadness. Ekman notes that

"emotions are shown primarily in the face, not in the body. The body instead shows how people are *coping* with emotion. There is no specific body movement pattern that always signals anger or fear, but there are facial patterns specific to each emotion" (7). By providing photographs of models exhibiting facial expressions common to specified emotions, accompanied by written descriptions of emotion signifiers, the study acts as a key for deciphering the expressions found on the cover art of the Nancy Drew Mystery Series.

Another source that attempts to break down emotions into recognizable facial and body gestures is Betty J. and Franz H. Bäuml's A Dictionary of Gestures. The dictionary contains "non-codified, non-arbitrary, culturally transmitted (semiotic) gestures" (vii). The dictionary is organized into two parts: the first lists significant body parts (hands, face, arm, chest etc.) alone or in combination, with a variety of emotions that can be expressed using these parts (anger, fear, sadness) and then the way that this body part can be used to express this emotion (ex. Defiance: arms crossed over chest p.3). The second part of the dictionary is an index grouped by emotion that then leads you to which body parts can be used to express an emotion.

Michael Argyle's Bodily Communication correlates closely with Ekman's work. He cites the face as being the most important area for non-verbal signaling, and he adds that personality characteristics can be derived from examination of facial features and expressions (211-12). He writes,

> The reason that impressions of personality are formed from the face is probably that the face is the area which is attended to most; hence people are recognized most readily from their face, and their facial behaviour stands for their personality. This can be controlled to a certain extent, so that what is seen is partly the result of self-presentation. (212)

He cites research done by Osgood in 1966 that asked judges to look at photographs of posed expressions and then to identify forty different facial expressions. Cluster analysis broke these expressions into seven different groups of expression: happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, anger, disgust or contempt, and interest (214).

In <u>Body Speech</u>, Samy Molcho writes that "every person acts as a stimulus or a reflex on his surroundings through his posture and behaviour. Others react to it positively or indifferently. But whatever the case, there is a retroaction, a feedback" (16). Molcho, who works as a mime and also a consultant to businesses like IBM and Swissair, uses pictures and descriptions of postures, facial expressions and movements that point to a person's inner nature. He also identifies specific facial expressions and gestures that map to emotions.

The literature review has provided the background on the changes that Nancy's character has undergone, primarily in the text of the stories. Nancy's character was created as an independent, wily, forceful woman who was an active seeker of mystery. Ironically, as time has passed, and women have gained more rights and freedom from traditional female roles, Nancy's character has become more confined, passive and dependent. The tools for visual analysis that have been discussed in the Literature Review will be applied to the Analysis chapter of this paper in order to show that the same changes that are evident in Nancy's character textually have also occurred in visual representations of Nancy Drew in the series' cover art.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The methodology in this paper will explore the research problem on two levels.

The research questions are:

> In what ways have the representations of Nancy Drew evolved from the 1930's to
> the present in the cover art of the Nancy Drew Mystery Series, specifically in
> regard to changes in facial expression, body language and placement within the
> cover scene, and what do these modifications reveal about alterations in her
> characterization?

The discussion will be based on qualitative analysis derived from two different

ways of evaluating pictorial representation. The two main methods of approach are 1)

analysis of body posture and facial expression in order to describe the emotions that

Nancy experiences in the cover art of the series, and 2) analysis of the composition of the

pictures, including the placement of Nancy within the scene represented as well as the

use of external elements (light and dark, gothic settings) in order to increase feelings of

fear or suspense. A combination of these two approaches will provide a means of

examining the representation of Nancy's character and the way in which these elements

influence the way that she is characterized.

Analysis of Body Posture and Facial Expression

Analysis of Nancy's facial expressions will be based largely on the work done by

Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen in their Unmasking the Face: A Guide to

Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues. In addition, the Dictionary of Gestures will be

referred to when attempting to describe the significance of body gestures. The goal will

be to use these gestures to gauge transitory emotions, such as fear or surprise, and from

these emotions, to deduct what the artists were trying to express about Nancy's character.

A cover will be chosen that is considered representative of one Nancy Drew

characterization. By looking at the facial expression and body language of Nancy on that

cover, then relating it to other covers that share similar characterizations, the paper will

establish trends that allow for the naming of specific phases in the character of Nancy

Drew. From these phases it will be possible to track the evolution of Nancy Drew's

character.

Limitations

One of the problems inherent to analyzing body posture is that there is

subjectivity that is a result of communication between two people, or in this case, of a

person looking at an object, as to what that object communicates to the person who views

it. As John Spiegel and Pavel Machotka explain in <u>Messages of the Body</u>, the formula

for the phenomena of body communication can be stated as S $\rightarrow$ E $\rightarrow$ I, where *S*

represents the inner state of the person who is communicating, *E* is the behavior that

expresses the inner state, and *I* is the impression that this expressive behavior makes on

the observer (4). In this model there are two ways in which information can be

miscommunicated: from S $\rightarrow$ E, the person who is communicating may not show their

emotions in a codified way, and from E $\rightarrow$ I, the observer may misinterpret the behavior

as expressive of a different emotion. This said, there are still many broad trends that can

be assumed when analyzing body language and facial expression.

Analysis of the composition of the pictures

In analyzing the composition of the pictures this paper will discuss the way in which varying the placement of Nancy's character in the picture alters the perception of her character and the feeling that the reader has toward the moment that the picture is representing. For example, is Nancy in the center of the composition or off to one side? Do we look over her shoulder and see what she is seeing, or does she face us? Is she directly involved with the drama in the scene or does she stand back and observe? By analyzing such aspects of the composition, a pattern may evolve that may correlate to the nonverbal communication aspects that will also be examined.

The model for analyzing the composition of the pictures was Molly Bang's Picture This: Perception and Composition (Little, Brown and Co. 1991). In her book she explains the relationship between picture structure and emotion. By reducing figures to geometric shapes she analyzes how changing the shape and position of the composition affects the viewer's attitude towards it. It is a perceptive, almost intuitive approach to examining illustration that is very meaningful and effective.

Sample frame:

The strategy for choosing covers for inclusion in the study involved selection by years. In order to get an accurate representation of each decade, when possible one cover was chosen from a year in three year increments, beginning with The Secret of the Old Clock from 1930 and ending with The Case of the Captured Queen, published in 1999. Due to the rarity of extant dust jackets from the 1930's and 1940's, it was not always possible to maintain this three-year incremental method. In this case, covers were chosen

by their availability, with the goal of having a representative sample of three to four

covers from each of these decades.

Limitations:

Publishers of the series have chosen to print only the original copyright date on

the title verso of the books. Because of this, it is very difficult to discern the actual

printing of the copy in hand. David Farah's <u>Farah's Price Guide to Nancy Drew Books</u>

<u>and Collectibles</u> (Farah's Books, 1990) provides a means of dating editions based on such

differentiation as end papers and spine covers. He does not, however, provide

photographs of the covers. This makes it difficult to tell whether significant changes

were made to the cover art from printing to printing. Certainly with the earlier editions

this is made easier by the fact that Rudy Nappi created entirely different covers for the

revised editions of those titles published prior to 1962 (Plunkett-Powell 49). In the case

of these editions, Farah's criterion were checked, and editions were compared to covers

published in Plunkett-Powell's book, as well as to the facsimile reproductions of numbers

1-10, published by Applewood Press, in order to ensure that the covers being examined

were the covers originally shown at the time of publication.

In the case of those stories published from 1962 until 1979, whose artwork was

done by Rudy Nappi, there is less means of ensuring that the cover looks exactly as it did

when published. The reprinted editions for these titles appear to retain their original

artwork, although the display of the title, Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, changes from

printing to printing. Whether or not minor changes were made to the artwork itself,

however, is not information that was available at the time that this study was done.

Plunkett-Powell comments that "Nappi was with the Drews for so long he eventually had

to update his own covers" (47). Unfortunately, no other information about which covers

he updated or how significant the changes were is provided. By examining available

copies in surrounding libraries, there is information enough to suggest that the covers that

are being printed for these titles today are the same as those that were done at the time of

publishing. However, although all attempts were made to ensure that the cover art was

accurate, this cannot be guaranteed.
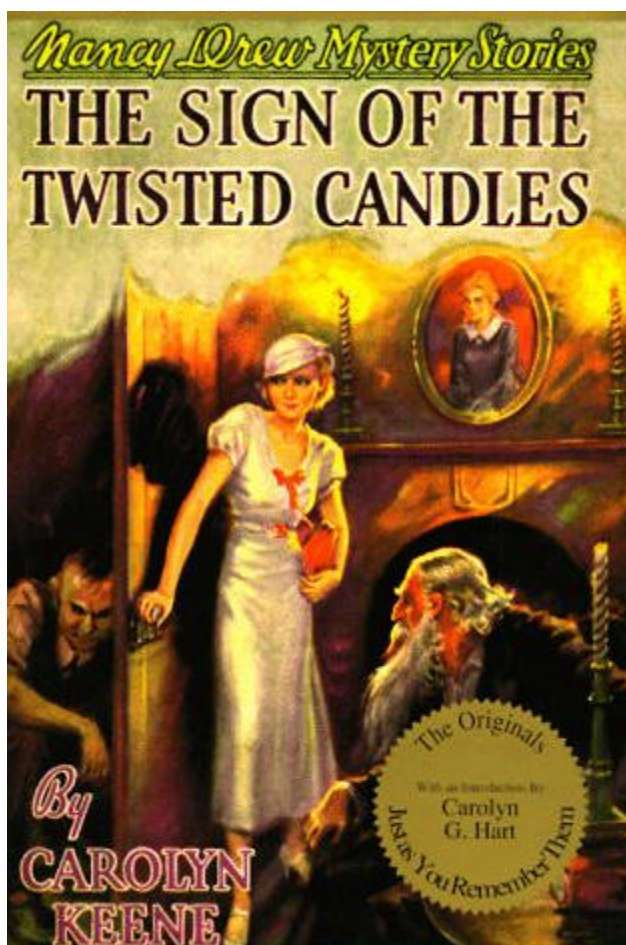
Nancy Drew Covers Used In Study

Year	Number	Title	Artist	Publisher
1930	1	The Secret of the Old Clock	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1933	9	The Sign of the Twisted Candles	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1935	12	The Message in the Hollow Oak	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1936	13	The Mystery of the Ivory Charm	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1942	19	The Quest of the Missing Map	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1946	23	The Mystery of the Tolling Bell	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1947	24	The Clue in the Old Album	Russell Tandy	Grosset & Dunlap
1951	28	The Clue of the Black Keys	Bill Gillies	Grosset & Dunlap
1954	32	The Scarlet Slipper Mystery	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1957	35	The Haunted Showboat	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1960	37	The Clue in the Old Stagecoach	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1963	40	The Moonstone Castle Mystery	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1966	43	The Mystery of the 99 Steps	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1968	45	The Spider Sapphire Mystery	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1971	48	The Crooked Banister	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1974	51	The Mystery of the Glowing Eye	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1977	54	The Strange Message in the Parchment	Rudy Nappi	Grosset & Dunlap
1980	58	The Flying Saucer Mystery	Ruth Sanderson	Simon & Schuster
1982	65	Mystery of the Winged Lion	Paul Frame	Simon & Schuster
1985	76	The Eskimo's Secret	Aleta Jenks	Simon & Schuster
1988	81	The Mardi Gras Mystery	Bob Berran	Simon & Schuster
1991	99	The Secret at Seven Rocks	Aleta Jenks	Simon & Schuster
1994	120	The Case of the Floating Crime	Aleta Jenks	Simon & Schuster
1997	141	The Wild Cat Crime	Aleta Jenks	Simon & Schuster
1999	147	The Case of the Captured Queen	Bill Schmidt	Simon & Schuster

Chapter 4

Analysis

Phase one—Instigator Nancy

The first characterization of Nancy Drew can be seen in the cover of <u>The Sign of the Twisted Candles</u> (shown below). Nancy is in the center, which Bang notes is the point of greatest attraction in a composition (84). She is what the eye focuses on first, and one is immediately drawn to her facial expression. She is alert, surveying the room as she enters. She wears a look of arrogance, classified by Bäuml and Bäuml as "raising the head, which is drawn slightly to the rear, lips closed, and stiff posture" (27). She narrows her eyes, raises her eyebrow, and her face is tense, with a look of cunning (Bäuml and Bäuml 53). The next thing that one notices is her body language, which suggests

<u>The Sign of the Twisted Candles</u>. 1996: Applewood Books, fascimile reproduction of 1932 ed. Russell Tandy, Illustrator.

direction. She stands with her legs apart, one foot forward, a gesture that Molcho characterizes as masculine (76). The use of light and shadow create an ominous atmosphere. The eerie yellow light of the candles casts a heavy shadow on the door as she enters. The crouching man behind the door seems ready to spring. Nancy's confident look, however, does not allow for nervousness on the part of the viewer. She gives the impression that she will be able to handle what awaits her.

This cover is characteristic of the first phase of the characterization of Nancy Drew, referred to here as Instigator Nancy. In each of these covers she is shown to be an active participant in the drama that is unfolding. Usually, she is shown sleuthing in situations that are dangerous to her person, although she shows no fear. Rather, she is represented as a strong, assertive, independent woman. The cover portrays a tense moment—the moment right before Nancy is confronted by the man lurking behind the door. It is a scene of potential physical danger to Nancy.

In this cover Nancy is shown directly facing the viewer. She is set back into the picture. The viewer stands from the perspective of the opposite side of the room and can see the danger that Nancy is in before Nancy does. In this way the viewer is not allowed to participate with Nancy in the mystery, but is rather forced to watch Nancy from a distance.

Other covers from this period have similar characteristics. The facial expression and body language that Nancy evinces in The Sign of the Twisted Candles can also be seen in The Mystery of the Ivory Charm and The Message in the Hollow Oak (below).
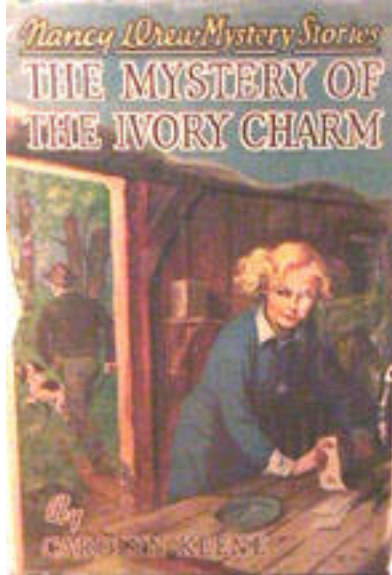
The Mystery of the Ivory Charm,
1936. Russell Tandy, Illustrator.
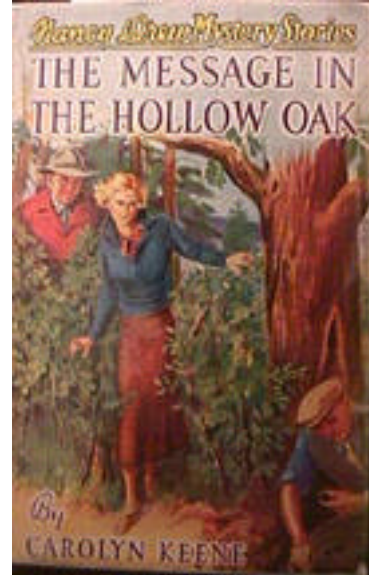
The Message in the Hollow Oak,
1935. Russell Tandy, Illustrator.

In each of these two examples Nancy is shown to be the center of attention. She is actively involved in the mystery. In The Mystery of the Ivory Charm she is shown looking over her shoulder secretively as she glances at some letters. In The Message in the Hollow Oak she steps out of the brush in a pose very similar to that of The Sign of the Twisted Candles, moving forward, one foot out, body erect in a sign of confidence (Bäuml and Bäuml 20). Her form seems alive with energy as she pushes through the

Detail from Message in the
Hollow Oak, 1935.

woods and into the clearing. Once again, Nancy is surrounded by ominous-looking men. However, Nancy never appears to be shocked, trepidatious or scared. A detail of Nancy's face from The Message in the HollowOak (left) shows her to be the picture of assurance, "head raised, brows lowered, firm glance"

(Bäuml and Bäuml 118). It is easy to envision this Nancy to be the one who "flashed into the garage with a skill born of long practice." (Jones 708). She is alert to clues with her hawk-like stare. She is certain to foil the plans of these wrongdoers.

Finally, this first phase of Nancy Drew can be seen in the cover for The Quest of the Missing Map. Her posture here is similar to that of The Mystery of the Ivory Charm. She bends over the map secretively as she looks behind her to see if she is being observed. She is shown at a moment of frenetic energy and tension, as she attempts to do some sleuthing without getting caught. The diagonal lines of the shadows intensify the dynamism and tension of the scene (Bang 62).


Detail from The Quest of the Missing Map, 1942. Russell Tandy, Illustrator.

Compositionally, these covers share the placement of Nancy in the center of the page, the point of greatest attraction (Bang 84). In each of them, Nancy is shown in a moment of danger. In The Mystery of the Ivory Charm it is that she will be caught snooping through the letters. Nancy is likewise in danger of discovery in The Quest of the Missing Map. In The Sign of the Twisted Candles, the man behind the door is poised; ready to spring. And in The Message in the Hollow Oak, as Nancy watches one man, another lurks behind her. The viewer is privy to information that Nancy does not have yet, but is soon to find out. Because of this, the viewer is distanced from Nancy's character. Interestingly, in all of these covers Nancy is in the center of danger compositionally, but Nancy's expression and posture suggest to the viewer that there is nothing to fear.

Phase Two—Observer Nancy

Nancy's second phase can be seen in the cover for <u>The Clue in the Old Album</u> (below).
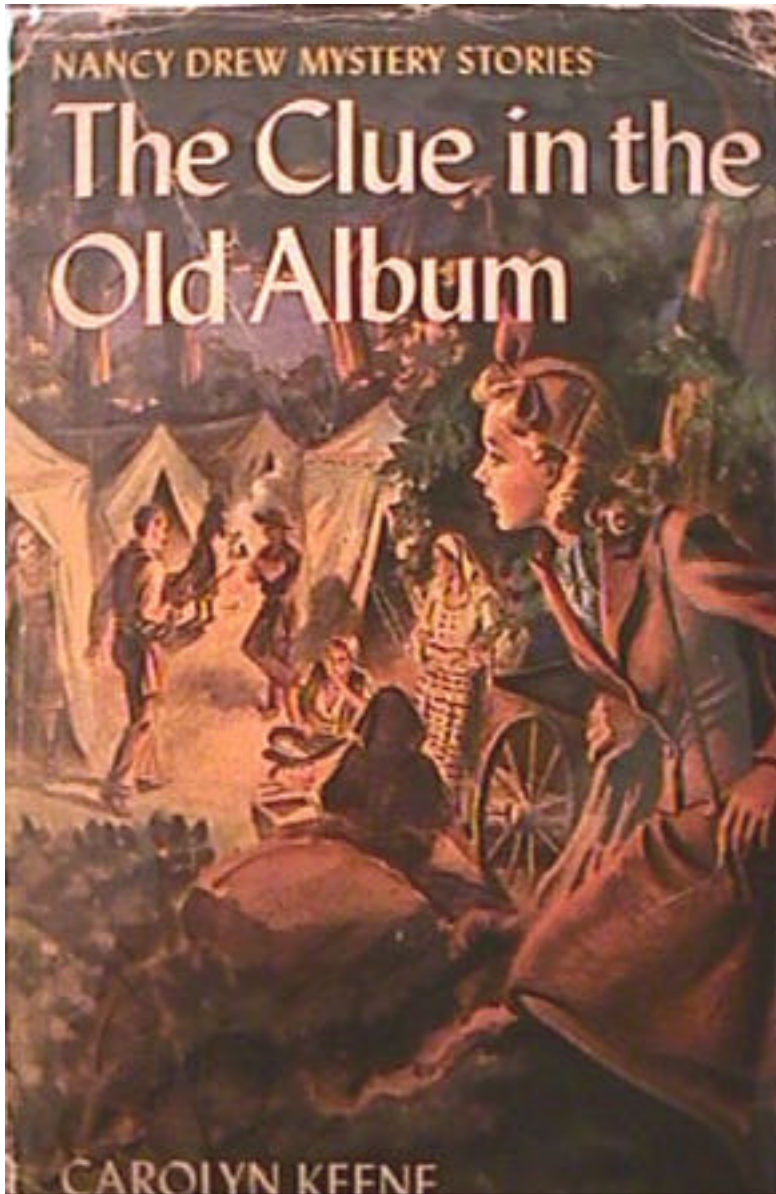
<u>The Clue in the Old Album</u>, 1947. Russell Tandy, Illustrator.

This phase is being referred to as Observer Nancy because she is no longer a direct participant in the action. Here Nancy stands not in the center of the composition, but off to one side. Rather than stepping boldly into the heart of the action, Nancy now hides herself from view behind a tree. She has moved farther back in space, closer now to the viewer. She is unobtrusive, unseen by those who could be a threat to her. While this removal should decrease the tension that the viewer feels, Nancy's facial expression and body language increases the tension. Nancy wears a look of surprise as described by Ekman, her eyebrows curved and high, her eyes wide open,

her jaw dropped (Ekman 38-39). She looks younger and less assured than the previous

Nancy. Rather than stepping forward, she holds her body back, shrinking from view.

Compositionally, by representing Nancy turned to the side, the artist gives the

impression that the viewer is looking over Nancy's shoulder. Nancy appears closer to the

edge of the picture, and so closer to the viewer. This causes the viewer to identify with

her (Bang 24). Hence, the viewer's participation in the scene is increased. It is as if the

viewer now stands directly behind Nancy, seeing what she is seeing. This involvement

increases the suspense that the viewer feels about the illustration because she has no more

information than Nancy as to what danger may be lurking around the corner.

Detail from The Haunted Showboat, 1957. Rudy Nappi, Illustrator.

Another cover which follows this pattern is The Haunted Showboat. Nancy is again shown from the side, her eyebrows raised, her eyes wide in surprise. In this cover she also raises her hand to her mouth, another sign of surprise (Bäuml and Bäuml, 82). Nancy, George and Bess hide behind a tree, just as Nancy did in The Clue in the Old Album. In this cover the viewer looks over George's shoulder. As before, the effect is to make the viewer feel as if she shares the experience with Nancy and the cousins.

The suspense of the scene is further increased by the Gothic setting; a cloudy moonlit

night, a ghost ship, and dark, hanging vines.

One more cover that fits the Observer Nancy characterization is The Clue in the

Old Stagecoach (below). Again Nancy is placed to one side of the picture. Bess and George frame the composition, but the focus is not on Nancy and her friends, but rather on watching the mysterious stagecoach that passes behind them. Nancy bears the familiar gestures of surprise: the wide eyes, the raised eyebrows, the dropped jaw. This time Nancy seems to be jumping back in astonishment, and her arm is out before her, fingers spread in an expression of uncertainty and

Detail from The Clue in the Old Stagecoach,1960. Rudy Nappi, Illustrator.

amazement (Bäuml and Bäuml 50). The scene takes place in the daylight, unlike the previous two, but the feeling of dynamism and tension is carried by the expression of the girls, as well as by the eeriness of the haunted stagecoach, which travels down the road with no driver.

All of these covers characterize Phase Two of Nancy Drew, Nancy as Observer. Though she expresses surprise, she is not afraid. She appears to be a bit taken aback by what she sees, but she looks as if she is still in control of the situation. The placement of Nancy in these covers is always toward one side, close to the viewer. She never faces the viewer, but rather turns toward the mysterious scene. This has two effects: one is to remove some of the attention from Nancy and to refocus it on the mystery itself. The first thing that the eye is drawn to is not Nancy, but the gypsies around the fire, or the ghost showboat or the haunted stagecoach. The second is to increase the viewer's tension and participation by making her feel as if she is standing behind Nancy. It also removes

Nancy from the role of active participant as she was in phase one, as she stands not in the thick of the action, but rather with the viewer, looking on.

Phase Three—Pensive Nancy

The third phase in the Nancy's characterization is Pensive Nancy, an example of which can be see in the cover for <u>The Strange Message in the Parchment</u>. This phase marks a departure from the previous covers in that there is not one moment from the narrative that is being represented. This causes Nancy to be a step further removed from the action of the story. In <u>The Strange Message in the Parchment</u> Nancy is not shown in the midst of danger or even watching a mystery unfold from a distance. Instead, Nancy is shown thinking about the clues and trying to make sense of them. Only her head and upper body are shown, and the face is turned toward the viewer. In this cover her

<u>The Strange Message in the Parchment,</u> 1977. Rudy Nappi, Illustrator.

eyes are cast down in thought (Bäuml and Bäuml, 16). There is no feeling of suspense to this cover at all. The viewer may be intrigued by what she sees, but the sense of immediacy and danger have been removed. The picture inspires contemplation. Nancy's torso floats in space. There is no indication of foreground or background. It is a collage of characters and clues from the story. The viewer now seems to stand at once in front of her and inside her head, seeing the pieces of the mystery that Nancy is thinking about as she tries to solve the case.

Other examples of Pensive Nancy include The Spider Sapphire Mystery and The Crooked Banister (see below).
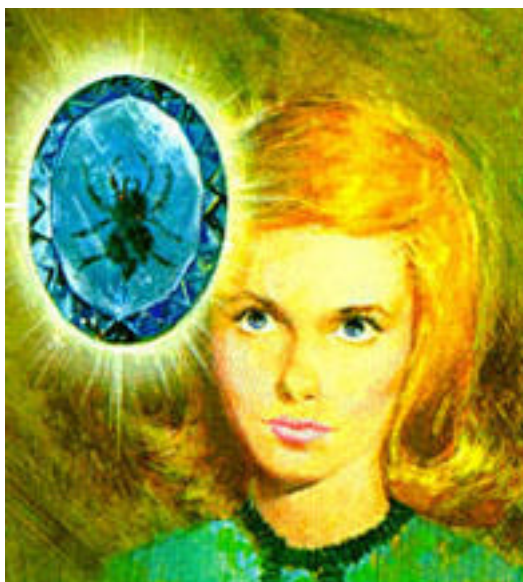
Detail from The Spider Sapphire Mystery, 1968. Rudy Nappi, Illustrator.

Detail from The Crooked Banister, 1971. Rudy Nappi, Illustrator.

In each of these examples, Nancy's head and shoulders float on the space, and pieces of the mystery revolve around her. She is not located in any definable space. She gazes at a large sapphire that floats impossibly in front of her head. Although the stairs wrap around her in The Crooked Banister, the hot pink background and the lack of a torso show that she is not actually at the foot of the stairs, but rather thinking about them.

Nancy is shown in the process of raising her hand to her mouth, but rather than surprise, this motion now suggestions puzzlement. In each of these pictures, Nancy's face wears the blank expression of one lost in thought. She tilts her head slightly to the side, an expression of pensiveness (Bäuml and Bäuml 16).

In the covers showing Pensive Nancy, the emphasis is not on danger but on Nancy's thought process and on the mysteriousness of the clues. The covers show what the book is about not by representing a specific moment, but by showing various objects or people that Nancy will encounter.

Even though we are seemingly inside Nancy's head, by showing Nancy in a frontal pose, she is distanced from the viewer. We do not share in the suspense of the moment as we did in Observer Nancy. The emphasis is now on Nancy's face. This shift in focus suggests a new emphasis not on how Nancy acts, but on what Nancy looks like. In previous covers Nancy was shown in less detail, being farther removed, or smaller. It showed her reacting to a specific moment. It showed her confidence or surprise when faced with the unexpected. In these covers we can see that Nancy is wearing pink lipstick, or that her eyes are blue. Another example of this can be seen in the detail of The Mystery of the Glowing Eye, shown on the right. This time Nancy's lips are parted in a look that resembles surprise, except that her eyebrows are not raised. It seems closer to a look of rapt attention or concentration (Molcho 124). In comparison to previous Nancy's, Pensive Nancy appears more passive. She appears kittenish and

Detail from The Mystery of the Glowing Eye, 1974. Rudy Nappi, Illustrator.

sometimes confused, not the go-getter that is seen in the covers from the 1930's and 40's. Nancy's ability to take action has been replaced by a Nancy frozen in thought.

Phase Four—Pursuer Nancy

In the 1980's there is a return to the more literal representation of the mystery. Once again the cover represents a moment from the story, rather than a pastiche of images relating to the book in general. There is also a return to Nancy in action. This new Nancy is characterized as Pursuer Nancy, and can be seen in the cover for The Mardi Gras Mystery.

In this cover Nancy is shown in New Orleans during Mardi Gras. Nancy is shown from the front, so that the reader does not share in the mystery but watches it from a distance. Unlike earlier pictures Nancy is surrounded by a large crowd of people. The scene is chaotic and intriguing, rather than Gothic and creepy. She chases after a mysterious woman who carries a stolen painting under her arm. Nancy is shown in a position of alert action. She also expresses
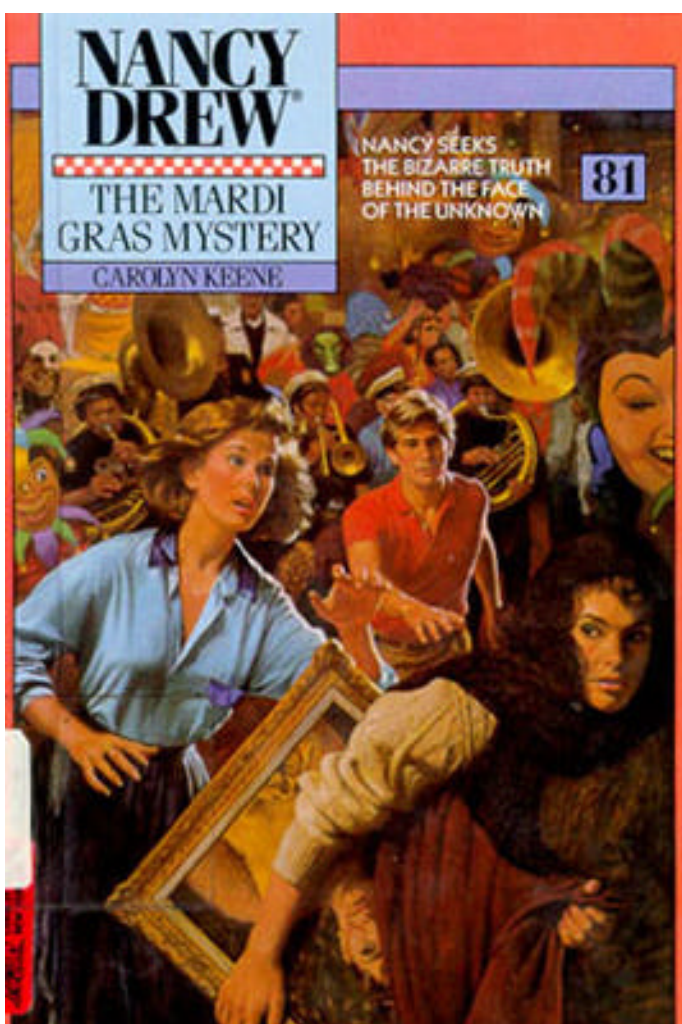
The Mardi Gras Mystery, 1988. Bob Berran, Illustrator.

surprise, her eyebrows lifted, her mouth dropped open, her eyes large (Ekman 37). Her

hair is blown back from her face as she runs after the woman.

Much more action-oriented than either Pensive Nancy or Observer Nancy, this is

a different kind of action than was seen in covers representing Instigator Nancy. It is

oriented toward the chase rather than the seeking of clues. Her body leans forward, her

hands reach out trying to grasp the fleeing person. Also unlike Instigator Nancy, this

Nancy looks less cunning, less-self assured. She is athletic and assertive, but her

uncontrolled facial expression does not guarantee for the reader that she will catch the

figure that she is chasing.

Pursuer Nancy can also be seen in the The Eskimo's Secret (below). As in the

The Mardi Gras Mystery, Nancy is shown in a moment of

pursuit. Although her face is turned to the side, her body

faces toward us, creating space between the viewer and

Nancy. She leaps out of the boat, in an athletic stance,

scanning the landscape for potential danger. Her face is

alert, her body poised for action yet cautious (Bäuml and

Bäuml 55).

Detail from The Eskimo's Secret,
1985. Aleta Jenks, Illustrator.

Pursuer Nancy is characterized by athleticism and

an alert expression. Although she has once again taken

control of the situation, actively pursuing mysteries, she has lost the arrogance and self-

assurance that she possessed in the covers portraying Instigator Nancy. Pursuer Nancy is

alert to personal danger, while focusing her energies on the chase.

Phase Five—Nancy in Peril

The final phase in the evolution of the characterization of Nancy Drew can be seen in the cover for The Case of the Floating Crime (below). The cover shows Nancy being thrown off a boat into the darkness, still clutching a flashlight in her hand. Her face holds an expression which Ekman describes as a blend of fear and surprise. Her eyes are wide and her eyebrows are lifted, a gesture of surprise, but her lips are stretched back signaling fear (50, 60). Her limbs flail helplessly as she plunges toward the water.

A dynamism is created by her hair, which flies from her face, the splashing of the water that

The Case of the Floating Crime, 1994. Aleta Jenks, Illustrator.

rises to meet her, and the diagonal lines of her body as she falls. Suspense is created by the dangerous situation in which Nancy finds herself. This is Nancy in Peril. She has lost all control over the situation. Instead of pursuing the villains, the villains are

pursuing her, and taking advantage of a moment to attempt to get rid of her. Nancy in

Peril is characterized by the look of fear and surprise, of being caught off guard. Looking

at a picture from the Instigator Nancy phase the viewer could not imagine Nancy getting

into a situation like the one represented above. Even the caption for the picture (a

convention begun by Simon and Schuster in the late 1980's) suggests that Nancy is out of

control, reading, "Nancy Investigates a Ship of Mystery—And Takes a Plunge Into

Danger!"

Other examples of Nancy in Peril can be seen in The Wild Cat Crime and The

Case of the Captured Queen (below).

Detail from The Wild Cat Crime, 1997. Aleta Jenks, Illustrator.

Detail from The Case of the Captured Queen, 1999. Bill Schmidt., Illustrator.

In The Wild Cat Crime, Nancy draws her brows together and pulls her lips back

in fear (Ekman 50). She lunges forward, her body creating a dynamic diagonal line

which we have seen before to increase the tension of the picture (Bang 62). As she

throws herself forward, her muscles tight, she glances over her shoulder, checking for

danger. Nancy is not chasing now, but being chased. Similar to The Case of the Floating

Crime, the caption at the bottom increases Nancy's position of helplessness by announcing, "Nancy Faces a Dangerous Threat When Danger Is Uncaged!"

In the detail from The Case of the Captured Queen, Nancy is shown in a very similar pose. She lunges forward, looking over her shoulder as she checks for danger, her eyes wide, her mouth open and hands out in fear (Bäuml and Bäuml 139). There is a breathlessness to Nancy in these pictures that suggests helplessness.

Nancy in Peril is characterized by frenetic energy on Nancy's part; whether she is falling, limbs flailing, an alarmed look on her face, or whether she is running, hair flying, body bent, face breathless. Nancy does not have any control over the events that are happening in these covers. She is shown to be a victim, being hunted and attacked by unseen foes.

Summary of Visual Analysis

The five phases of Nancy Drew's characterization have now been examined in detail. Analysis of the cover art reveals startling changes to Nancy's character that reflect a step backward rather than forward. Instigator Nancy, which can be seen in the covers from 1930 until 1942, is bold, self-confident and in control. She is shown in the heart of the action, sleuthing while backs are turned, bursting through doors or stepping forcefully through shrubbery. Her expression and body language show her to be wily, powerful and unsinkable.

From the mid-1940's until the late 1960's, Observer Nancy steps in. The confidence of Instigator Nancy is replaced by a look of controlled surprise. During this phase, the viewer is allowed to share in the sleuthing along with Nancy, seemingly looking over her shoulder to the often supernatural events on which Nancy's stare is

riveted. The settings of these covers is increasingly Gothic, with dark, moonlight, eerie

lighting and strange occurrences. Unlike the Instigator Nancy who bursts confidently

into danger, Observer Nancy becomes more cautious, choosing to remain farther back,

hiding behind objects to shield herself from view.

From the late 1960's until 1970 Pensive Nancy becomes the standard

representation on the covers. Completely removed from action, Nancy's head floats on

an abstract background, surrounded by floating keys to the mystery that she is solving.

The viewer is riveted on Nancy's face, which is the center of the compositions and so the

center of attention. An increasing importance seems to be placed on how Nancy looks.

The emphasis is not on Nancy solving mysteries, but on her thinking about them.

The fourth stage of the Nancy Drew series can be seen in the cover art of the

1980's. A return to Nancy as an aggressive seeker of mystery can be seen. Though she

never regains the bold look of Instigator Nancy, she does possess an athleticism and drive

that suggests that she has regained something of her forcefulness. This, however, is

tempered by an alert, often cautious look that suggests that although she is the pursuer,

she is not completely sure of herself.

The final incarnation of Nancy Drew, which can be seen from the mid-1990's to

the present is a huge step backward from the pursuer Nancy of the 1980's. There is a

complete shift in power, from Nancy as aggressor to Nancy as hapless victim. In the

Nancy in Peril covers, Nancy has lost any control over her environment. She is often

shown fleeing from danger, or, as in The Case of the Floating Crime, actually portrayed

in a moment of extreme danger, instants before she hits the water. It is a strange and

unfortunate progression. What does this latest incarnation of Nancy's character represent

to young girls who are just starting to read the series? Can Nancy be a positive role model for girls in the 1990's if she is continually shown in situations over which she has no control, if she appears weak and vulnerable? It will certainly be interesting to see how her character evolves as Nancy Drew enters the new millennium.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In the literature review, many scholars commented on Nancy's assertiveness and independence. These writers were referring to the first incarnation of Nancy Drew, the vision of Nancy Drew that was created by Mildred Wirt Benson in the 1930's and 1940's. This Nancy Drew, referred to by one scholar as "omnicompetent" (Johnson 20) is cited as being a strong role model for young girls, a character that helped her readers push the boundaries of women's roles and expectations. The original Nancy Drew, decades ahead of her time, was an inspiration to millions of young girls. This Nancy Drew is reflected in the cover art of those covers fitting the description of Instigator Nancy. Her fearless expression, her cold stare, and her intrepid sleuthing are all indicative of the Nancy Drew that is portrayed in the text of the time.

With the revisions to the text of the Nancy Drew stories beginning in the late 1950's, there is a visual rewriting of Nancy Drew that appears equally less independent, less assertive and less confident. In the Observer phase of the Nancy Drew covers, she appears taken aback and surprised. Just as her role changes in the text, this role is reflected in the artwork. The Nancy Drew shown on the covers of the 1950's and 1960's appears to be the Nancy who "moves over to let [the official] drive her car" (Vivelo 77), who may need rescuing by Ned Nickerson or her father. She seems younger and more vulnerable, less in control.

The criticisms of the texts revolve around Nancy's passive roles in the stories, what Vivelo refers to as "the glamourous life of a teenage detective, a lucky person to whom exciting things happen"(11). These textual rewritings are again accompanied by the visual rewriting of Nancy's character, which can be especially seen in the cover art from the 1990's, in which Nancy is continually represented in positions of danger, wearing expressions of fear. She doesn't seem to be seeking anything out in these covers, but rather finding them happening to her. In addition, a disturbing trend shows Nancy indeed "evolving toward a Barbie doll detective (Vivelo 76). The covers for The Wild Cat Crime and The Case of the Captured Queen show an unrealistically beautiful girl, with long legs, sexy clothing and flowing blonde hair. Indeed, even her stiff arm movements seem to suggest the poses of a Barbie doll. While Reid-Walsh and Mitchell take a positive view of these changes in their article, "Romancing Nancy: Feminist Interrogations of Successive Versions of Nancy Drew," I feel that the changes that have been made to Nancy's character, both textually and visually, can hardly be seen to reflect positive views of womanhood to a new generation of readers.

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