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Abstract

The well-loved Nancy Drew from 1930 has continued to solve mysteries in 1974 and 2015, though the series can no longer claim to be unconventional. Even though Nancy was a revolutionary character in 1930, the thought of a mystery-solving female is not as controversial anymore. This essay argues that the recently published Nancy Drew Diaries still advocate patriarchal ideologies seen in the 1974 version of The Scarlet Slipper Mystery, specifically ideas about gender roles, conformability and homosexuality. In order to investigate if 2015 The Magician’s Secret and 1947 The Scarlet Slipper Mystery portrayed similar patriarchal ideas—deconstructive, feminist, and queer theories have been used. They revealed that both books contain patriarchal views and depict them in similar ways, even though the newer book is more implicit in its portrayal. This suggests that even as the vaster society believes itself to move forward, patriarchal ideologies continue to affect our portrayal of men and women in the media, though in a more implicit way than before.
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1. Introduction

The long-running *Nancy Drew* series was groundbreaking when it was first published in the 1930s. At the time, it was unusual for a female character to take the active role of detective and not be undermined as unintelligent or emotional. In fact, due to the success, new *Nancy Drew* series continue to be released, one of which is the *Nancy Drew Diaries* series, which was first published in 2013. Since the original series was loved and inspired many women with its challenging views on female equality, one could assume that as western society has become more critical of patriarchal ideologies, the newer *Nancy Drew* series would portray an even more liberated Nancy. Even though the original series was praised by many for challenging patriarchal ideas, it was also critiqued by people who did not approve of the more masculine role given to Nancy. As the long-running series was revised and updated, Nancy was often adapted to suit the changing times. She was becoming a more traditionally feminine woman, along with her sidekicks Bess and George. By comparing and analyzing the revised version of *The Scarlet Slipper* from 1974 and *The Magician’s Secret* published in 2015, this essay seeks to reveal that there has been no further resistance to patriarchal views in the *Nancy Drew* series since the 1970s. Even though *The Magician’s Secret* attempts to distance itself from patriarchal ideas portrayed in the 1974 revision, it ultimately fails. In some cases, its attempts result in an even more patriarchal text.

In order to better compare how and which patriarchal ideas are portrayed in the books, it was necessary to find two books that both contained the most common characters: Nancy, Bess and George, and Nancy’s boyfriend Ned and her father, Carson Drew, since depending on the story, both Carson and Ned can be absent at times. Since all the supporting characters are present in both books, this essay is able to show how each character’s personality and physical attributes have changed and how Nancy’s relationship with each supporting character has changed. *The*
Scarlet Slipper Mystery and The Magician’s Secret also have similar stories and setting, making the comparisons easier. In both cases, Nancy is solving a mystery in her hometown River Heights, the mystery revolves around stolen diamonds, and the suspects are outsiders.

2. Background

Edward Stratemeyer is the Nancy Drew series’ creator, but it was far from his first popular series. Stratemeyer published Victor Horton’s Idea when he was twenty-six years old in 1888. This first publication became very successful and was made into a series of novels. Stratemeyer then continued to produce other series to the extent that he no longer could write all the books by himself, even though he “dictated up to 7,500 words in an eight hour day” (Ferriss 5). To keep producing book series, Stratemeyer employed writers who would create books based on frameworks that he had prepared. This means that Stratemeyer created Nancy Drew but never actually wrote any of the books. The writers received a salary for every book they finished, and they only had a time-period of one month to do so. In their contract, they had to decline any right to claim the work and never to reveal the authors behind the pseudonym Carolyn Keene, the author of Nancy Drew.

Nevertheless, it is now known that Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson was one of the paid writers behind the original books of the Nancy Drew series; she wrote the first one in 1929. Only five of the total thirty books were written by an alternative author (Fisher). Benson did not like how other children’s books were written and wanted this series to be different and fresh. She drew much on “her own beliefs that girls could do anything boys could do” (Ferriss 5, 6). Benson’s portrayal of Nancy as capable was a significant reason as to why the series gained popularity. Sadly, the creator behind it all, Stratemeyer, did not live to see this girl detective become a meaningful part of many children’s lives, since he died shortly after the series’ release in 1930 (Fisher; Ferriss 1).
After his death, Stratemeyer’s oldest daughter Harriet Stratemeyer became more involved in the Stratemeyer Syndicate. She became very fond of the *Nancy Drew* series and participated in writing some of the volumes. It was she who made the decision to rewrite the series in order to make it more modern (Fisher; Ferriss 6, 7). However, “it was also her revising that tamed Nancy into a more traditional female character who depended on her boyfriend for help and was not nearly as risk-taking” (Ferriss 6, 7). In 1959, Harriet Stratemeyer decided to eliminate any parts concerning race or other cultures, since their portrayal in the books had become inappropriate; the adjustments continued until 1976 (Chew 135). Controversially, the revision removed most, if not all, of the characters of colour that had been in the series. When Harriet Stratemeyer died in 1982, the series continued due to the publishing company Simon & Schuster buying the Stratemeyer Syndicate (Fisher).

*Nancy Drew Diaries* is the most recent series that has been published by Simon & Schuster. This new series is similar to *The Girl Detective*, published in 2004, which included a more modern Nancy. *The Girl Detective* was later cancelled in 2012, and in 2013 the *Nancy Drew Diaries* was published (Fisher). Jennifer White writes on her blog that “the Nancy Drew Diaries series is the most inconsistent of all Nancy Drew incarnations” (White). In this post from 2020, she is mainly discussing *Nancy Drew Diaries: The Vanishing Statue*. According to her, this book is not as thrilling and mysterious as the earlier ones. Instead, the mystery to White seems to be whether or not George is lesbian and if there is an African American character present in the story. According to her, the confusion about the characters sexuality and ethnicity is due to the vagueness of the text (White). It seems as though the author is incapable or unwilling to describe the looks of characters and their sexuality. Though, as will be discussed, the vagueness might be a conscious choice in order to avoid criticism. White also states that the books do not fit together, saying, “We will have to see what happens. If past history is any indication, then the next book
will feature George as a girly girl who is crazy about boys. That’s how inconsistent this series is” (White).

2.1. The Scarlet Slipper Mystery & The Magician’s Secret

In *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, the revised version from 1974 in which Nancy and the cousins have aged up from sixteen to eighteen, Nancy, Bess and George are helping two siblings, referred to as the Fontaines. Their parents were part of a resistance movement in their homecountry Centrovia and fled to France. They brought jewels with them in order to later send the money they had gained from selling the stones to their organisation. After their parents' death, the siblings Henri and Helen Fontaine receive a threatening note which tells them to leave France. They seek refuge in River Heights, and Nancy gets involved after the siblings once again receive a similar note. Nancy's attempt to hide the Fontaines from their stalkers causes one home invasion, three kidnappings, and an attempt to burn Nancy, Bess, George and the Fontaines alive in a house. This is primarily the work of the two main villains, a man and a woman, referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Judson. They, too, are from the fictional country from which the Fontaines initially fled. It is revealed that they had stolen jewels and put the blame on the Fontaines. In order to make the Fontaines seem guilty, the Judsons’ wanted them to flee the country to make it look like they were running away (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper”)

Compared to *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery, The Magician’s Secret*, published in 2015, seems relatively tame. In this book, a magician named Drake Lonestar performs at River Heights. With him he has his friend Hugo, who doubles as Lonestar’s security guard. Simultaneously, Nancy’s father, Carson Drew, is working on a law case together with her boyfriend, Ned. At the show, Lonestar makes a building disappear, which contains critical evidence to Carson’s case. The evidence is a box which could contain stolen diamonds, though before anyone can open the box and seal the case, the box goes missing. Shortly after the show, it
is discovered that the evidence has been stolen from the building. Since the robbery happened during the show Lonestar is, therefore, now a suspect as well. Nancy, Bess and George work together to find out how the evidence was stolen and if Carson’s client is guilty of stealing the stones which could be inside the vanishing box. They gather information about Lonestar by talking to his friend Hugo, who provides them with lies since, in the end, both suspects are victims of Hugo’s plan to frame Lonestar for stealing diamonds. He believed that by getting rid of his competition, he would gain everything Lonestar has (Keene, “Magician’s Secret”).

3. Literature Review

Much of the previous research discusses the Nancy Drew books written in the 1930s and the edited versions from 1959-1979. The spinoff series The Nancy Drew Files from 1986 is also included in the discussions in some of the research. With Nancy Drew's history in mind, many have chosen to write about changes in behaviour and looks and how changing social norms are reflected in the books. Still, the topics can vary from tomboys to race to feminism.

In “It’s Stupid Being a Girl” The Tomboy Character in Selected Children’s Fiction, Cynthia Mei-Li Chew not only studies the tomboys’ evolution but how gender has been portrayed in children’s fiction through time. She analyses how the characteristics of Nancy’s friends Bess and George have changed in the Nancy Drew series. Chew explains that the two cousins are binary opposites throughout all the books and their revised editions. George represents masculinity, and Bess represents femininity. However, as the books have been revised, George has become watered down. In the versions from 1959-1976, she is no longer the feisty girl with messy dark hair who resists using her feminine name, Georgina. Chew explains that the text needs to have some social acceptability; otherwise, people stop reading. During the revisions, female characters labelled as tomboys were problematic since they were seen as queer.
In the article “It’s Elementary”: What Nancy Drew Reveals About Gender Construction”, Johnson Song examines gender portrayal in children’s literature. The author discusses how a child’s perception of gender can change when reading literature that defies stereotypical roles given to men and women, claiming that a character like Nancy is essential since she shows that women can do men’s work with the same result. Song also discusses how difficult it can be to oppose norms. Song writes about how women in patriarchal societies who try to take a male role often get criticised and have to lower their dominant role in order to fit in. Song states that since Nancy is a fierce female detective, “she must be reimagined to ease the tensions surrounding her character” (Song 10).

Katie Still’s master’s thesis The Mystery of The Body: Embodiment In the Nancy Drew Mystery Series discusses how the Nancy Drew series both reinforced and threatened ideologies at the time it was first published in the 1930s. Even though Nancy Drew is intelligent and positions herself in a masculine role, her femininity is supported by her conventional attractiveness and position between masculine George and feminine Bess. Still explains in her thesis that the books signal to the reader whether or not a character is “bad” or “good” by giving them stereotypical physical attributes. The villains are often vicious-looking, ugly or poor, while the good characters are beautiful white Americans; this reinforces the ideology that white people are superior to poor or non-white people.

As described above, most of the research deals with how the Nancy Drew books have changed to promote, or fit into the changing ideas of what is to be considered acceptable gendered behavior, which this essay will touch on as well. However, they mainly discuss the original books published in 1930 and the revised books from 1959-1976. This leaves room for further analyses of the revised Nancy Drew Mystery Series in comparison to the new 2013 Nancy Drew Diaries. Because of the time gap between the revised book from 1974 and the 2013 series, it is worth exploring if there have been any changes considering the portrayal of patriarchal ideologies.
4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Gender Roles and Feminist Theories

In order to explain how the books support patriarchal ideas, such as traditional gender roles, one must also understand the concept of gender. Feminist theories largely distinguish between biological sex and socially-constructed gender (Tyson 86; Dobie 105). In other words, sex is male or female, while gender is what society considers feminine and masculine. Usually, it is believed that the female sex is feminine while the male sex is masculine (Tyson 86). In a patriarchal society, it is crucial to portray the male as dominant. Therefore, anything that is considered a weakness must become associated with femininity; this is where the traditional gender roles come into play. Traditionally, femininity in these societies is connected with being emotional, in need of help, timid and modest. On the other hand, men are viewed as intelligent,
strong, decisive and capable of providing for their family. These traditional gender roles have led people into believing that men are weak if they show emotion and that women are not supposed to be intelligent (Tyson 85).

Both sexes can also be criticized if they do not conform to the roles given. Feminist critics have determined that in a patriarchal society, women can either be “good” or “bad”, depending on whether the woman conforms to her gender role or not (Tyson 89-91). This is patriarchal in its own way since it suggests that women are either entirely good or entirely evil. Women are placed in these two categories depending on what the patriarchal society claims a “good woman” should behave and look like. If a woman is not beautiful or is perceived as “bitchy,” she automatically becomes a monster. Tyson further explains how these ideas are promoted in fairy tales since, in most cases, the princess/good girl is beautiful, innocent and young while the villain/bad girl is old, evil and ugly. The good girl in these fairytales is often in need of a man to rescue her, which also plays into the idea that women are submissive to men (Tyson 89). With this critical background, this essay will not only be able to show which traits are favoured in the Nancy Drew series, but also that the two books follow the traditional good girl/bad girl concept.

Critics have also explored the idea of a gendered narrator and what might be considered a feminine or masculine narrator, which will come into play when discussing the change of narrative in the Nancy Drew books. Gymnich writes that “Traditionally, authorial voices tended to be marked as ‘masculine’ ” (709). The authorial voice is essentially the same as an omniscient narrator; they both give a broader perspective and are considered truthful. It is also said that the “weaker” personal perspective could “be seen as a particularly apt instrument for highlighting the impact the cultural context may have on the life of an individual” (Gymnich 710).
4.2. Queer Criticism

If one part of feminist criticism is to oppose the idea that women should be subordinate to men, one part of lesbian criticism is exposing and working against heterosexism. “Heterosexism is the set of values and structures that assumes heterosexuality to be the only natural form of sexual and emotional expression” (Zimmerman 452). Because the patriarchal society wants women to be dependent on males, they do not want to promote homosexuality, especially not lesbian women. However, it is hard to define what is to be considered lesbian. Some critics suggest that a lesbian is a woman who has had some form of woman-identified experience, “I mean the term lesbian continuum to include a range - through each woman's life and throughout history- of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital experience with another woman” (qtd. in Zimmerman 456). Other critics suggest a narrower definition stating that “‘Lesbian’ describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other” (qtd. in Zimmerman 457).

In order to interpret a text as queer, there are some things critics look for. One thing is if there is any homosocial bonding included in the text. Homosocial bonding is when people of the same sex interact in activities to create a friendly bond. Even though this is not necessarily sexual, “the depiction of homosocial bonding foregrounds the profound importance of same-sex emotional ties in the development of human identity and community, which is a human potential often devalued, marginalized, or trivialized by the homophobic anxiety of heterosexist culture” (Tyson 339, 334). They could also look at if male or female characters are given any typically masculine or feminine traits. If a man is considered gay, the patriarchal society, which is in favour of heterosexuality, will provide him with stereotypical female features (Tyson 88).
However, lesbian women do not necessarily gain masculine traits since masculinity is still considered a privilege. Instead, lesbian women are portrayed as monsters or as undesirable (Zimmerman 453-464; Schippers 463-465). Using the different interpretations of what defines a lesbian, this essay will attempt to deconstruct George’s sexuality in the books.

4.3. Deconstruction

Deconstruction argues against the structuralist idea that there is a definite connection between a word (signifier), written or spoken, and what that word signifies. According to deconstruction, this connection could never be this simple since “what enables words to refer to what they refer to is their difference from other words, not a direct link to their so-called referents” (Güney & Güney 222). From a poststructuralist perspective, a signifier never reaches the signified; instead, it triggers other signifiers (Dobie 159). This means that words and language are flexible and can change based on what we associate with that word. For example, the word “gay” used to signify that someone was happy or carefree; however, in the 21st century, the word has taken on another meaning.

Since language, according to deconstruction, is unreliable and has no definite meaning, neither does text. Words and language do not connect with the real world, and therefore text cannot be a realistic portrayal of reality. According to Rolfe “[t]here is no method to deconstruction because texts literally deconstructs themselves in their impossible attempt to employ language as a transcendental signifier” (274). Not only is it impossible to claim that a text has one specific meaning, since language is unreliable and unstable, but also because people interpret texts differently. If a text can have many different interpretations, it cannot have one fixed truth (Güney & Güney 222). Since there is no clear definition of what a lesbian is, one
could argue that there is no one interpretation of George’s sexuality. This means she might be a lesbian, but at the same time, she might not.

By stating that there is no definite meaning, deconstruction denies the Western world’s view that “human beings want to believe that there is a centering principle in which all belief and actions are grounded and that certain metaphysical ideas are to be favored over others” (Dobie 160). Because deconstruction tries to show that binary oppositions and ideologies are not stable, it works well with other theories such as feminist criticism and queer criticism. By showing that binary oppositions can overlap, deconstruction can threaten the idea that men or heterosexuality should be privileged (Dobie 160-161).

5. Analysis

5.1. Gendered Narrative

By discussing the change of narrative in the two books analyzed, this essay will show how opposites could still promote the same ideas. *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery* is told by a third-person limited omniscient narrator, while *The Magician's Secret* is told from Nancy’s first-person perspective. This change might have been an attempt at making Nancy more relatable, especially since a discussion among female *Nancy Drew* readers revealed that many of them thought she was too perfect. One woman said, “I wanted to be someone who could do the things Nancy did. I think it would be irritating to be with someone who was so upright, almost like Horatio Alger” (González 239). However, Nancy becoming more relatable due to the first-person perspective also means she loses her credibility. The first-person narrative is unreliable because “the reader can never expect to see characters and events as they actually are but only as they appear to be” (Diasamidze 162). For example, the reader has to trust what Nancy says as the truth during the
scene when she goes to investigate the stage and says, “I knew it probably wasn’t the smartest move, but I was dying to know what was back there. And Bess and George must have felt the same, because they followed me” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 12). However, only moments before Bess and George follow, they both shake their head at her. George even warns Nancy that her actions could get them kicked out before the show starts (12). Here there is no certainty that George and Bess disapprove of Nancy’s decisions in this scene, but there is nothing other than Nancy’s statement indicating that they support it either.

There is also the statement that a first-person narrative could be considered “less formidable for women than authorial voice, since (...) a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person’s right to interpret her experience” (qtd. in Gymnich 710). This could imply that Nancy, as a woman character, is better suited to this personal voice instead of the authoritative third-person narration. The dependence on the reader’s interpretation also damages Nancy’s image as an undoubtedly intelligent detective, especially when the context does not always align with Nancy’s statements. Because of this, Nancy, as a homodiegetic narrator, is pushed into a weaker and more suitable role, according to the patriarchal ideas, which she was not limited to in 1974.

However, this choice could also open opportunities for Nancy, as a woman, to tell her own story as she experiences it, as Woolston writes, “Women cannot rely on men to give them a platform on which to speak (...) women should fight against the impending silence by writing and sharing their experiences of the world” (180). Though Nancy does not seem to share much of what she feels, on one occasion, she states that “Ned gave a small laugh and smiled. ‘Nancy Drew, Girl Detective.’ I blushed but didn’t back down” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 8). Here, the cause of Nancy’s reaction is uncertain. She could take it as a joke, though she could also feel
embarrassed by her boyfriend undermining her as a girl detective. If Nancy had used her voice, she could have explained how it feels to be teased for her skills. Still, the reader gains no insight at all. One could, however, speculate that Nancy does take offence to Ned’s statement, since in another scene with George, Nancy seems to take George’s statement as a joke “‘Uh-oh. Is this another case for Detective Drew? The Case of the Disappearing Courthouse?’ George asked with a giggle. ‘Exactly.’ I laughed and headed out the door” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 9). One could say that Nancy is more relatable and emotional, at least when it comes to Ned, but it seems as though the change of narration style has brought more negatives than positives. The reader gets the same amount of, if not less, information about Nancy’s inner thoughts due to the new narration style. She loses her reliability, and since some believe that the female voice is better suited to the weaker voice, one could view this change as a step in the wrong direction.

In The Scarlet Slipper Mystery, the omniscient perspective uses its authority to make Nancy seem in control and intelligent. This helps to show the reader that Nancy deserves the respect she gains from the other characters. In a scene where Nancy visits her father at the lawyer’s club, the narrator states that “At the lawyer’s club, Nancy found herself the center of attention. Her father’s friends enjoyed exchanging sallies with the young detective and trying to stump her on knotty problems” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 46). Here the narrator implies that other lawyers, presumably male ones, admire Nancy’s intelligence and fail to give her a problem she cannot solve. The directness and confidence portrayed by the narrator may suggest that it is masculine since those traits are connected with the male voice (Lanser 348).

Nevertheless, even though the narrator could be considered masculine, the storyteller promotes the idea of a nonconforming female character. On the other hand, the narrator also
portrays patriarchal ideas through character description, as will be discussed later. In a way, the narrator is similar to Nancy since it reinforces and contradicts patriarchal ideas simultaneously. Therefore, the narrator might be polyphonic, to strengthen this idea one should read Lanser’s explanation for the double voice, “For the condition of being woman in a male-dominant society may well necessitate the double voice, whether as conscious subterfuge or as tragic dispossession of the self” (Lanser 349). This means that the narrator may be coded as female, but must balance the feminist idea of a strong independent woman by using a masculine voice, and reinforcing other patriarchal ideas, showing that either way, the patriarchal norm governs how much the text can oppose its ideas.

5.1.2 Conforming to Gender Roles: Protagonists and Antagonists

When discussing protagonists and antagonists, one could claim that the more recent books, such as *The Magician’s Secret*, are not as traditional for the descriptions of different characters. Whereas in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, some descriptions, as mentioned above, strengthen the view of traditional gender roles. For example, the word *hysterical* is used in two places in the story. The first time it is used to describe a woman, and the second time a group of four women and one non-American man (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 55, 120). The word *hysterical* is often used to describe women; however, “it is a patriarchal assumption, rather than a fact, that more women than men suffer from hysteria. But because it has been defined as a female problem, hysterical behavior in men won’t be diagnosed as such” (Tyson 86). Since the word is used to describe a non-American man, it is also used to emasculate the character. As mentioned above, feminine traits are often associated with non-idealistic men to weaken them (Tyson 88). In *The
*Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, the non-American characters are described as emotional as well, which codes Americanness as fundamentally masculine in contrast to” foreign” effeminacy. Still also mentions that “In the Nancy Drew stories, immigrants or individuals of foreign descent are portrayed as dangerous, suspicious, untrustworthy, uneducated, and criminal” (27). Based on this, one could assume that there is a distinction between male and female characters and Americans and non-Americans.

*The Scarlet Slipper Mystery* also “reflect[s] a technique used in some filmmaking, where the heroes and heroines are always attractive and the villain is identifiable by his or her ugliness or deformity” (Still 27). Often, the heroes, Nancy, Bess, George, and most of the other minor characters, are all described as physically attractive and young. However, these descriptions are nowhere to be found when the story’s antagonists are introduced. If one applies Tyson’s description of princesses/villains, these antagonists should not be allowed beauty or possess some type of talent (Tyson 89). When Nancy first meets the villainous woman in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, she is described as “a coarse-looking person, wearing too much makeup and a strong, pungent perfume. She was dressed in a flowered red-and-green dress, and a red hat was perched on her disheveled reddish curls” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 32, 33).

The extensive use of makeup and perfume might suggest that the woman tries to present herself as more beautiful and feminine than she is, similarly to how men compensate for their lack of masculinity by increasing “the signs of their manhood in some other area” (Tyson 88). She is, nevertheless, failing at femininity since nothing in that scene makes the reader think that the woman is “a good girl”. She does not meet the modesty requirement and words such as ‘abrupt’ and ‘tartly’ are used to explain how the woman speaks. Because the woman is violent and aggressive, she is, according to the patriarchal standard, only to be portrayed as a monster.
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(Tyson 89). Since The Scarlet Slipper seems to follow this patriarchal standard, the reader will know early on in the book who the villains are based on how the book describes their looks. While also promoting the idea that one can judge a person's personality based on how they look. The gap between female protagonists and antagonists is best shown by how the book describes the women’s dancing skills. Nancy has not been dancing for a while, but she is begged to participate in a dance performance, “Please,” she begged, “take the part. You danced so beautifully the other day we must have you in the show” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 59). On the other hand, the villain is said to be a “miserable dancer”, even though she thinks of herself as a great one (69). Because Nancy is the protagonist it seems as though she is capable of doing anything and possesses many talents. On the other hand, the antagonist has to be purely monstrous and is therefore depicted as both talentless while also having too much of an ego to see her lack of talent.

These differences apply to the male characters as well. Traditional gender roles connect masculinity with being strong, intelligent and being able to provide for the family (Tyson 85, 87). One of the male characters that fits right into this role is Nancy’s father, Carson Drew. He is a successful and well-known lawyer, which implies that he has no problem providing for his family. In Carson’s introduction, the narrator says, “He was a tall, handsome man. Nancy loved his pleasant disposition, the twinkle in his eyes, and his keen mind” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 18). He is also portrayed as a strong powerful man and the villains find him intimidating. This becomes especially clear in one scene: the villains lure Carson away from his home in order to search through the Drews’ house. Because the house is locked, they ring the doorbell. When Hannah opens the door, they attack and threaten her to get information about the Fontaines
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(Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 50). Since they could have walked away as soon as they realised someone was home, their attack implies that they wanted either Hannah or Nancy to still be at home to gain information. This suggests that the home intruders only saw Carson as a potential threat.

As mentioned above, Tyson explains that if a man fails to prove himself as a masculine man, he might turn aggressive in order to establish his dominant role (88). Since Carson’s masculinity is already confirmed, the male villains might have to express theirs by instead being aggressive. However, even though the male villains are portrayed as more aggressive, they are often described in an emasculating way. Since the “good” males are described as tall, handsome, young or good-looking, one could assume that these traits are considered masculine. Therefore, male villains are given attributes such as slender, of medium height and gaunt in an attempt to emasculate them (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 24, 25, 99). These words do not paint the picture of a strong, powerful man. Instead, the villains seem to be weak and unattractive. To shape suspicion in the reader, they are also described as sinister-looking (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 25). This book clearly portrays and supports the patriarchal ideas of which attributes and behaviour one should favour. Characters’ attractiveness, intelligence and talents also depend on if they follow the patriarchal standard or not.

In the Magician’s Secret, the distinction between villains and “good characters” is not as prominent. The book seems to attempt to describe the characters as neutrally as possible. On one occasion, Nancy describes a boy as cute (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 64), though she never describes others as handsome, pretty, beautiful or attractive, Bess and George included. The reader only knows that Bess is blonde and takes care of how she looks, while George has dark hair and uses a tote bag. The book also reveals that Bess is popular with boys, which could have
been used to oppose the belief that only slim girls are attractive. However, Bess is no longer described as the “slightly plump” girl she was in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*.

It seems as though the book intentionally avoids describing female bodies, especially since it still describes the male characters as “muscular” and “very physically fit” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 12, 13). By looking at the history of the *Nancy Drew* series, it is understood that, when faced with criticism, the books have eliminated rather than improved anything that could be considered controversial, such as the portrayal of racial stereotypes and Bess’ plumpness (Chew 139, 155). Therefore it might be an intentional decision to avoid the stigmatised topic of female bodies and sexuality. However, on one occasion, the book describes Candy, the manager at a jewellery store, as “… tall and so thin and pale that she looked almost ghostly. Her bleached-blond hair was nearly white, and her forehead was taut and wrinkle free” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 44).

Though she is not portrayed as a villain, the book portrays Candy as the well-known stereotype: the dumb blonde. She is given many traits connected to traditional beauty standards, such as being blonde, thin, having light skin, and presumably using botox to get rid of any wrinkles on the skin. It might seem as though Nancy is critiquing these standards by stating that she “looked almost ghostly”, which can be interpreted as something negative or unattractive. Nancy then seems to assume the woman to be unintelligent or untrustworthy, even though Nancy does not want to come across as judgemental, “‘Are you sure?’ I asked lightly, not wanting to imply that I didn’t trust her memory” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 45). What stands out is the “asked lightly”. This change in tone seems only to be used by Nancy when speaking to blonde women such as Candy and Bess. At another time, Nancy talks to Bess with a gentle tone (Keene
“Magician’s Secret” 74). This suggests that Nancy view them as fragile women with whom one needs to speak in a non-serious or caring tone in order to not offend them. Still also mentions Nancy’s habit of using a gentle voice when discussing Nancy’s treatment towards non-Americans in the books from 1930, claiming that she views them as children or incapable (Still 35).

Candy also seems to take personal offence to Nancy’s question since she feels the need to explain that she is very good at her job (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 45). Candy’s defensive answer might be due to being used to people questioning her work capability. Whereas the book from 1974 explicitly connects physical beauty with trust and good-heartedness, *The Magician’s Secret* has attempted to ignore the idea altogether. Interestingly, since the book avoids describing male and female bodies as anything but slim or muscular, it makes it seem as though being chubby or unfit is something to be ashamed of, or that this type of body does not exist in this world. Though, this avoidance is all in vain since, if one takes a closer look at *The Magician’s Secret*, there are still some connections between a “non-attractive” look and the villain.

Hugo, the villain in *The Magician's Secret*, is still portrayed in an unflattering and threatening light. He is described as "… a security guard with thinning, gray-speckled brown hair and very big arm muscles" (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 12). Nancy later labels this guy as *beefy* and *burly*, which also implies an unattractive muscularity; though it is also reasonable that a bodyguard has a larger body in order to seem more intimidating. Hugo is also said to be moving and sounding threatening (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 25, 68). He is also portrayed as having a dominant personality, which can be seen in the scene where Mr. Walton and Carson Drew argue.
They began to argue. Hugo stepped between them. An impressive thing about Hugo was the quiet way he asserted himself. He didn't have to say much—or in this situation anything at all—to show that he was in control. (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 22)

Instead of making Hugo extremely threatening and vicious-looking, this book portrays him as hyper-masculine. As mentioned before, men want to portray themselves as more masculine if they are lacking in some other area. Thus, Hugo’s threatening and hyper-masculine looks and demeanour could be a facade covering his failures. When discussing gender roles, Tyson mentions that "men are not permitted to fail at anything they try because failure in any domain implies failure in one's manhood" (87). This suggests that Hugo's dominance over Carson and Mr. Walton is a result of his failures. Hugo is a man who has failed in many things. He is not successful at work, he lost the woman he loved to another man and ultimately failed to frame his friend. One could say he is a masculine imposter, and since the book cannot stray away from its patriarchal ideas and does not want to promote an unsuccessful man, he has to be exposed by Nancy and her friends.

The negative association to the burly body type can also be revealed by looking at Mr. Walton. Even though he is a minor character, The Magician’s Secret does not forget to make his appearance match his unpleasant demeanor. He is described as a short, hot-tempered and burly man and is not trusted by Nancy's father. Mr. Walton accuses Lonestar and Carson's client of being thieves (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 21). However, since a "good" character dislikes him, and his opinion is incorrect, the book has to show physical signs of him not being a good guy. Thus, this book has once again succeeded in promoting patriarchal ideas by connecting a specific body type to a specific behaviour or as a sign of inadequate masculinity.
5.2. Confirming Binary Structures: Bess & George

Since the creation of the *Nancy Drew series*, Bess and George have been “characterised and distinguished primarily by their contrast and opposition to one another, representing the masculine (George) and the feminine (Bess) binary” (Chew 134). This has led to some discussion about George’s sexuality. Queer critics claim that a woman can be identified as a lesbian if she has any woman-identified experience (Zimmerman 256), which one could suggest George has. According to Tyson, a woman can be defined as a lesbian, or a *woman-identified woman*, by “directing the bulk of one’s attention and emotional energy to other women and having other women as one’s primary source of emotional sustenance and psychological support” (Tyson 324). In both books, George exhibits a lack of interest towards men, rarely socializes with the male characters and expresses disgust whenever Bess is on the topic about love or men, as can be seen here, “‘Yuck,’ George gagged. ‘He wasn’t asking you on a date, you know’” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 64). Instead, George seems to prefer hanging out with Nancy and Bess and participating in homosocial activities with them: mystery-solving, dining, shopping, or watching magic shows together. This suggests that she prefers the company of women and relates to them on an emotional and physical level more than she does with men.

However, as mentioned in the theory section, there are many different interpretations of what a lesbian is (Zimmerman 256), and none of them can be the ultimate truth (Güney & Güney 222). Tyson further claims that "Our sexuality may be different at different times over the course of our lives or even at different times over the course of a week because sexuality is a dynamic range of desire” (335). According to this, there is no such thing as a definite heterosexual or a definite homosexual. Sexuality is fluent. This means that George’s sexuality is ambiguous, especially since her sexuality is never stated in either book. From one point of view, George
could be a lesbian. However, her reaction while on the topic of men does not prove that George is indifferent towards all men. Especially when she does not seem to interact with other women either, besides her cousin and Nancy. In a scene from *The Magician’s Secret*, one could interpret George as leaning more towards being heterosexual. The female trio asks for help from a man working at a hotel. George appears uninterested as usual, as opposed to Bess. However, George later finds out that he studies astrophysics, and she seems to take more interest since they have common interests, she even laughs with him at one point (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 69).

Because of George’s fluid sexuality, other hierarchies in the book can be disrupted. As previously stated, patriarchal society does not want to promote lesbianism. The very idea of having a woman be entirely independent of men goes against the patriarchal ideology. According to Schippers, “The symbolic construction of girls’ sexual agency and ability and willingness to use physical violence as undesirable and deserving of sanction and social expulsion turns their potential challenge to male dominance into something contained and less threatening” (95). This does not happen to George since she is not explicitly or definitely a lesbian, and therefore she is not a threat to the patriarchal ideology. Though there is, of course, the reasoning that this is another way of implicitly showing George’s sexuality towards women or an attempt at making her undesirable. However, even though both feminist and queer critics state that gay men are given feminine traits in order to distance them from dominant heterosexual masculinity (Tyson 88), this does not work the other way around. Schippers further states that “Because femininity is always and already inferior and undesirable when compared to masculinity, it can sustain features of stigmatization and contamination. In contrast, masculinity must always remain superior; it must never be conflated with something undesirable” (96).
This statement is interesting since Schipper only writes that masculinity cannot be connected to someone undesirable. From what we know, George is not undesirable, and since “the possession of erotic desire for the feminine object is constructed as masculine and being the object of masculine desire is feminine (Schippers 90), one could assume that George, as a presumably heterosexual woman, is desirable to men. Thus, she may be allowed to possess masculine traits. However, if one chooses to interpret George as a lesbian, she would have to be presented as undesirable, which she is not, thus deconstructing the statement that masculinity cannot be associated with anything undesirable. This interpretation would further deconstruct the patriarchal idea of binary oppositions and their place on the hierarchy.

Since the book wants the reader to interpret George as heterosexual, her masculine traits would be ranked higher on the hierarchy; masculinity is considered superior to femininity. This hierarchy and preference for the masculine can be seen by comparing Bess and George. George is never explicitly emotional in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, even though she expresses some feelings such as worry and frustration. On the other hand, Bess is very emotional and is often seen fretting over dangerous situations instead of taking action. When the group is trapped in a burning house, Nancy explains that they need to make a rope out of blankets to get to the ground safely. The text then reads, “As she and George dashed to a bed” (…) ‘Help! Help!’ Bess screamed” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 119). This is only one example of the many times George has stepped in to help Nancy, while Bess has turned to screaming, hesitating or giving the responsibility to George. Bess’s inferiority to George as a feminine woman is also depicted in how Bess is physically weaker than her cousin. After chasing their kidnapper, “Nancy and George felt as fresh as ever, but poor Bess was panting and insisted upon resting a few minutes” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 19).
This representation of Bess and George as binary opposites has not been changed in *The Magician’s Secret*. Instead, the gap between the two cousins is even more prominent. Even though they both contribute necessary knowledge and skills, which Nancy takes advantage of when solving the mystery, George’s detective work is the only one that is praised. Nancy even states, “She’d found our most important clue so far” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 48), even though it was Bess’s information that enabled George to find it (42). In another scene, Nancy goes to visit George late at night in hopes that George might help her understand the case. After some discussion, Nancy says that “George had done her homework” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 30), implying that she was impressed by the amount of information George was able to give her. In this scene, Bess is also present. However, she is never approached and is mostly there to complain about them bothering her sleep (29-31). This again shows Nancy’s preference for George, especially since Bess does not receive such praise.

If George could not be interpreted as queer, this hierarchy would follow the patriarchal norm. This is especially clear since George, as representative of the masculine, seems to undermine the feminine Bess at times. In many scenes, George expresses annoyance towards Bess’s interest in boys, as seen above, and her feminine hobbies. On some occasions, it also seems as though she questions Bess’s intelligence. In the scene mentioned above, where Nancy visits George, the masculine cousin is audibly annoyed by Bess’s complaints, “‘Oh, good grief,’ George moaned” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 29-30). She also makes an emphasis on *princess* when saying “Had to be quiet, though… don’t want to disturb the *princess*” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 29), which suggests that princess in this context is something negative. The two cousins also have an argument when Bess mentions her superstitions about the number thirteen, “George stared at Bess as if she was nuts. ‘What are you talking about?’ Bess shrugged. ‘Just saying.’
‘Ridiculous,’ George countered. ‘Superstition is contrary to science’” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 64-65). However, since George can be interpreted as queer, the books place a homosexual girl above an explicitly feminine heterosexual woman. This goes against the patriarchal view that heterosexuality should be the privileged sexuality; yet, it still reinforces the idea that masculinity is superior to femininity.

George can be interpreted as queer because, as mentioned above, “... texts literally deconstruct themselves in their impossible attempt to employ language as a transcendental signifier” (Rolfe 274). By assuming that there could only be one interpretation of the text, the books have unknowingly created an interpretation of the text where George defies her patriarchal and traditional role as either a feminine girl or a stigmatized lesbian; therefore, they are also opposing heterosexism. However, since it seems as though it is not the book’s intention to portray George as queer, based on the fact that it is never stated that she is anything other than heterosexual, this essay still claims that the books are incapable of opposing these patriarchal norms. If the books want the reader to interpret George as straight, neither of them contain any variety in sexuality, which could endorse heterosexism. As stated by Welsh, “Very few people only encounter straight, white, cisgender, able-bodied people every day, and books that only show that world increasingly feel anachronistic at best, or exclusionary at worst” (The Guardian).

5.3. The Female Dependence on Men: Nancy Drew

In the earlier books from the 1930s, Nancy had to be balanced between Bess’s femininity and George’s masculinity in order to be acceptable to readers. Her stability between the cousins made her such a revolutionary character, and it made her able to step over boundaries that other female detectives could not. Of course, there have been other female detectives in literature, but
none as successful as Nancy Drew. Some of these detectives often played into the stereotypical woman, who was limited by having to go to school and defeated by boys (Song 9).

However, Nancy is not entirely independent. She is clearly defined as Carson Drew’s daughter throughout the book from 1974. On four occasions, Mr. Drew is mentioned in conversation in order to make someone trust Nancy’s abilities and reputation. Even though Nancy has a lot of power and agency in the book since she is the main character, her father is the one person above her in terms of status. To keep Nancy ostensibly balanced between femininity and masculinity, the writers might have found it necessary for the book to have a male character who has even more power than Nancy, in order to “reinforce the reader’s acceptance of the wealthy heterosexual white male as authority figure” (Still 45). As mentioned above, Carson is described as an attractive male capable of protecting and providing for his family. One might even suggest that Carson is the definition of masculinity since “Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive” (Tyson 85). Some of these traits correlate with Nancy as well. However, she is also responsible for the housework when their housekeeper is unable to work. This shows that Nancy, unlike Carson, has to take care of “womanly work” such as cooking and cleaning, which automatically makes her more feminine. There is also the fact that Carson is Nancy’s father, which makes her subordinate to him since there is a parent/child power structure.

Even though the father/daughter relationship is a reason why Nancy is not as powerful as her father, it is not a significant one. In one scene in *The Scarlet Slipper*, Nancy suggests that the Fontaines could stay in the Drews’ home. However, the housekeeper does not think it is a safe idea, and Carson agrees with her. Still, Nancy wins them over with some persuading (Keene,
“Scarlet Slipper” 21). In this case, Nancy is asking something that might put all of them at risk. As she is not the homeowner or an authority figure, Nancy has to depend on Carson to say yes to her idea. Additionally, the book’s creator has made Carson a lawyer, which once again puts Nancy one step beneath him since she is only an amateur detective. Many times in The Scarlet Slipper Mystery, Nancy asks her father to use his position as a lawyer to help her with the cases. This would suggest that Nancy is not always reliant on him as a father but as a man who is more capable than she is because of his professional experience. However, her reliance on Carson is never portrayed as an inconvenience. In many cases, Carson offers to help Nancy without her asking. In a way, he has to be willing to share information since Nancy is dependent on him, and his refusal would limit her ability to move forward in the mysteries, “this relationship both reveals her submission to him but also her teamwork and ability to him” (Brooke 33).

Even though, by the time of The Scarlet Slipper Mystery, Nancy has solved 32 mysteries in less than a year, since she has not aged, she is not often acknowledged or believed by others if she does not mention her father. In this book, she is not asked by the Fontaines to help them; instead, she offers her help. On the other hand, Carson’s reputation has people knocking on his door to ask for his help or consultation. On one occasion, a man storms into the Drews’ home explaining that he needs Carson’s trust and help with a law case, saying, “I’ve come to your father,” (...) “with a law case that may also need a little detective work” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 44). Earlier in the story, a woman also came by to seek Carson’s help. She was unsure if Nancy could help her but tells her story and asks Nancy for advice. Nancy, on the other hand, cannot answer for Carson and instead offers to help her in another way “‘Mrs. Boyd, I think my father will have to decide that (...) But, in the meantime, suppose I take the statue down to the store and talk to Mr. Howard?’” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 19). In both these scenes, Nancy is
secondary to Carson, not because she is a child or an amateur, but because “[h]is social status and political power add to Nancy’s role as the ideal girl, while reinforcing white heterosexual male power as the norm” (Still 50).

In *The Magician’s Secret*, Nancy and her father still seem to have a good relationship, though he is not as involved or as helpful as in the book from 1974. Since Nancy’s reliance on her father in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery* strengthened the idea that women are not as capable as males; this new dynamic between the two family members could push Nancy into a position with more agency, but it does not. While Carson is a working but caring father in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, the new 2015 version of him seems to only care for Nancy when he needs her. In one scene, her father comes up to her, “‘Tell her everything,’ my father told Ned. ‘Every detail.’ He looked at me. ‘We need your big brain on this one’” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 36). At the time of this scene, the reader is almost halfway through the book, and Carson has been nowhere to be seen since the beginning of the story. Still, he possesses more information about the case and Nancy, who has been looking for clues the whole time, has to be allowed to get that information. This creates the same dynamic as in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, but now the father is more absent. He is not as involved in the mystery and he does not spend any quality time with his daughter as he does in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*. Later in the same scene, he tells her, “Now put that mass of gray matter to use and figure out what is going on, okay?” (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 36). This dialogue seems almost demanding. Her father is not asking Nancy if she could help him, as she had to ask him in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*. Instead, he is ordering her. This again shows Carson as a powerful and masculine figure while Nancy becomes the weaker counterpart even though she is not as reliant on her father as she used to be.
Instead, Nancy in *The Magician’s Secret* has become more attached to her boyfriend, Ned. In the first part of the book, Nancy complains that Ned is working too much. She wants him to go to the magic show with her, which he has forgotten. When Nancy arrives at the show, she is searching for Ned in order to be able to enjoy the show. She even acknowledges it herself, stating, “I knew I was acting obsessive, but I really hoped he would come” (Keene, “Magician’s Secret” 10). The first scene with them seems to show the stereotypical situation in which the man is working too much and is not making enough time for his partner. Even though Nancy explains that she understands, she complains that he has already cancelled on her two times (Keene “Magician’s Secret” 6). This portrays Nancy as needy and emotional, instantly making her more stereotypically feminine than she was in 1974. From a feminist perspective, the 2015 version of Nancy affirms the idea that women are dependent on a stronger, more masculine gender (Tyson 87, 88, 97).

In *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, Ned is the one who continually asks Nancy out or talks about their future. It seems that Ned does not get much time alone with Nancy, since he states, “It isn’t often that I get a chance to ride along the Muskoka River with you in the moonlight. Guess I can thank my lucky stars tonight” (Keene, “Scarlet Slipper” 52). Nancy never seems to respond or express her love for Ned in the same way. In another scene, Ned pretends that they are married to create an alias. Nancy’s response to this seems to be confusion, frustration or embarrassment since she demands an answer to why he stated that they were married.

‘Anyone who heard you would think we’re husband and wife. Especially a man like Renee.’ Ned laughed heartily. ‘Well, someday I hope it’ll be true. And for your
information I hope he’ll think we’re married now. If he’s a spy or a kidnapper, as I suspect, he’d better not find out your name is Drew!’ Nancy agreed and said she did not trust Renee either. (Keene “Scarlet Slipper” 103)

Here, Nancy does not comment or reflect on the statement Ned made about their future, suggesting that she might not be interested in a life together with Ned in the same way he is. In *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, Nancy claims the right to be an independent woman who is not defined as man’s *other*. This liberated portrayal of Nancy seems more modern than the emotional version from 2015. Nancy’s emotional connection to Ned might have been added to make Nancy easier to connect with, even though it ruins the more liberated woman from 1974. However, neither *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery* nor *The Magician’s Secret* succeeds in portraying Nancy as independent of specifically masculine support; she is either dependent on her father, Ned, or both. When she does seem to be more independent of her father, their relationship suffers.

6. Conclusion

Even though there is more than a forty-year gap between the rewritten *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery* from 1974 and the modern *The Magician’s Secret* from 2015, the later book still portrays the same patriarchal ideologies as the previous one. In some cases, it has tried to avoid supporting patriarchal ideas. However, *The Magician’s Secret* has either failed to oppose rather than reinforce patriarchal ideas or tried to avoid one idea while strengthening another. As has been shown, *The Scarlet Slipper* explicitly relies on traditional, stereotypical performances of gender. It also confirms the idea that if a person does not conform, he or she can only take the role of an unattractive, villainous character.
Even though times have changed, *The Magician’s Secret* continues to reinforce this idea, though implicitly. By censoring the descriptive language, the book still infuses patriarchal ideas. It has not tried to look at the portrayal of appearances from another angle, making it seem as though the book still believes the connection between appearance and behaviour exists. The lack of reimagination also seems true when discussing George. Her sexuality has long been questioned even though neither of the books seems to want to portray her as queer. The unwillingness to even consider the possibility that she could be interpreted as anything but heterosexual is also what deconstructs the book’s belief that there could only be one truth. However, since there are many definitions of what a lesbian is, this portrayal is easily deconstructed, reinforcing the heterosexist belief that heterosexuality is the only sexuality that can be acknowledged.

There is also evidence that Nancy stereotypes the blonde feminine Bess and Candy since she treats them more gently, like children. Though it could be argued that reading the book from Nancy’s own perspective is an improvement, she continues to endorse patriarchal ideals. Having said that, it could be, as with the omniscient perspective in *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery*, that the female voice has to hide beneath the patriarchal values in order to be heard. However, since it has been more than four decades between the books, one would think that *The Magician’s Secret* would be able to give Nancy a voice independent from the traditional patriarchal views.

The strong opinions portrayed in *The Scarlet Slipper* also try to give Nancy the power she needs in order to be respected as a female detective by the reader, as opposed to *The Magician’s Secret*’s weaker narration. It is also clear that the books are limited by the patriarchal need to reinforce masculinity as higher on the hierarchy. Male characters like Carson Drew and Ned
exist to make Nancy reliant on them, whether romantically or to solve a case. As can be seen, beliefs have not changed as much as we would like to believe they have.


Ferriss, Jeannie. "A Sleuth Of Our Own: A Historical View Of Nancy Drew, Girl


Welsh, Katie. "A Queer, Diverse Nancy Drew: Is This How To Keep Children's Classics

