SOLVING THE CRIME OF MODERNITY: NANCY DREW IN 1930

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Edward Stratemeyer's Nancy Drew, with her titian blonde hair and sporty roadster, is often seen by critics as the apotheosis of modernity—she is quick-thinking, partial to new gadgets, ever on the move. In fact, modernity was perceived as a particular threat to adolescents in the 1930s, increasing pressures on an already vulnerable phase of life. I suggest in this essay that Stratemeyer's "breeder" set of Nancy Drew novels—the first three books in the series, published in 1930—presents the adolescent heroine caught between two worlds. Nancy Drew polices the borders of a middle class threatened by various aspects of modernity—new economic instabilities, the erosion of "older" orders and the replacement of certain kinds of labor (even fiction-writing) by new modes of mechanical reproduction. While she comes to represent a new kind of young adult hero, she achieves this in the shadow of some of modernity's most challenging issues.

The image of an idealized adolescent sleuth may have seemed ironic at first, given longstanding associations in the public imagination between adolescence and deviance. After all, connections between juveniles and crime had deep roots in American discourses of delinquency. In the middle of the nineteenth century, 15-year-old Jesse Pomeroy, the "Boy Fiend" from Chelsea, provoked a national debate over capital punishment, helping to focus attention on "youth" as a separate category in the public imagination while associating that new category with depravity (Savage 7-13). By the early twentieth century, concerns over delinquency were expanding into the middle classes. Adolescence—newly theorized as a distinct phase of life—was believed to provoke strange urges and compromising mood swings. Accounts

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of "flappers" and "pagan pleasure" rose to cult status with the publication of Walter Fabian's bestselling 1923 novel, *Flaming Youth*. Fabian sought young readers who were "restless, seductive, greedy, discontented, craving sensation, unrestrained, a little morbid, more than a little selfish, intelligent, uneducated, sybaritic, following blind instincts and perverse fancies" (qtd in Savage 203-04), The success of his call bolstered fears that the "modern" adolescent was dissipated and dangerous—hardly a candidate for fighting crime.

The years between ages fourteen and twenty-four came to be understood as a separate phase of life only gradually in the early years of the twentieth century. Psychologist and educator Stanley Hall is often credited with the invention of adolescence, as his massive two-volume study (1904) was the first to provide exhaustive data and commentary on what he called an "unprecedentedly critical decade of life" (467). Hall believed adolescence comprised a unique phase of human development. He argued passionately both for recognizing adolescence and for outlining its requisite disciplines, insisting that "youth can be wonderfully docile if approached aright" (19). To a great extent, Hall pathologized adolescence, defining it as a period of crisis and debilitation requiring careful supervision and management. Affiliating his work with social Darwinism, Hall used "genetic" psychology to argue that the adolescent—while not literally a barbarian—was only partly ascended up the scale to civilized adulthood (380). Hall's adolescent was always in or about to be in crisis, swinging between extremes of energy and lethargy, storm and stress. Hall saw adolescence as a dangerous passage, threatened by moral laxity, dissipation, sexual license, experimentation and lawlessness. Consequently, he believed it was critical to maintain discipline over every arena of adolescent life, from hygiene to exercise to academics to the proper (and supervised) "excitement" or stimulation of energies (465-67). If the "almost convulsive struggles" (572) of adolescence were to be harnessed, adolescents needed close supervision at every turn.

Hall's research on adolescents in the first decades of the twentieth century coincided with complex socioeconomic changes leading to the gradual recognition of teenagers as a distinct demographic group. Perhaps the biggest factor in shaping American adolescence was the institution of high school, strengthened by corresponding extensions to compulsory education in the early twentieth century. Stephen Mintz notes that between 1880 and 1900 the number of public high schools in America increased 750 percent (197). By 1920, thirty-seven percent of fourteen-to-seventeen-year-olds enrolled in secondary school, strengthening adolescent peer culture and creating new focus on teenage discipline and regulation (Savage 209). By the Depression, the age for compulsory attendance was raised again (this time to sixteen), partly to take adolescents out of the workplace and decrease competition for scarce jobs. High schools organized and categorized adolescents both by age and aptitude. In the 1930s, as attendance increased markedly in American high schools,

schools established "tracks appropriate to students' abilities and career goals," as well as administered IQ tests to help each student "determine her or his course of study" (Mintz 198). American high schools helped to institutionalize adolescence, and at the same time segregated adolescents both from younger children and from adults. If the child had evolved in earlier periods as the "other" of the adult, the new adolescent emerged both as the "other" of the adult (mature, reasonable) and of the child (innocent, untainted).

Attention to adolescents as a new demographic increased focus on guidelines for behavior and morality. Entertainment for young people came to be seen as an important tool for enforcing middle-class values. Along with the emergence of the scouting movement and radio programs in the 1910s, the first "juvenile[s] of distinction" (Savage 172) emerged in this period, novels for young readers such as Irving Hancock's *The High School Freshman* and Booth Tarkington's *Seventeen*. Unlike the Horatio Alger novels of the '80s and '90s, these new "juveniles of distinction" featured middle-class protagonists confronting modern innovations and adventures. However lighthearted their plots, these novels displayed morals and manners fit for middle-class emulation. Literature for young readers, always didactic in nature, shared with emerging sporting and educational programs the belief that adolescence provided new opportunities, but also presented new hazards. Adolescents needed to learn to monitor and control themselves, and literature could help to show them how. After all, as Hall's research posited, adolescence was a dangerous passage, and the sense that young people could go terribly wrong persisted in the public imagination.

Modern life was believed to exacerbate these vulnerabilities, and the 1924 murder committed by University of Chicago students Leopold and Loeb offered the public a particularly grim reminder of this anxiety. Leopold and Loeb had staged what they considered the perfect crime: the kidnapping, ransom, and murder of the son of a wealthy Kenwood businessman. Leopold and Loeb were affluent, precocious, and young—still in their late teens when they were arrested for the boy's murder. As the Chicago Sunday Tribune acknowledged, it was difficult to square the "diabolical spirit" of the crime with the "wealth and prominence of the families involved," not to mention with the boys' youth (Savage 213). The murder trial, which drew enormous publicity, repeatedly emphasized both the boys' youth and their affluence. "Modernity," according to some commentators, was really to blame. "Let no parent flatter himself that the Leopold-Loeb case has no lesson for him," one commentator exhorted. "[This] is more than the story of a murder. It is the story of modern youth, of modern parents, of modern economic and social conditions, and modern education" (Mintz 214). Clarence Darrow of Scopes trial fame took on Leopold and Loeb's defense. Darrow claimed that "both these boys were in the most trying period in the life of a child" (qtd. in Savage 215). Darrow argued that "the age of fifteen to the age of twenty or twenty-one" was newly difficult in the modern

era, as young people were cut off from older patterns of attachment, "left to work the period out for themselves," (qtd. in Savage 215-16). As Nancy Lesko writes, ". . . the adolescent came to occupy a highly visible and recognizable place, as a being who was defined as 'becoming,' as nascent, unfinished, in peril—in today's terms, 'at risk'" (49).

Concerns about new pressures on modern youth found their way into contemporary juvenile fiction in various ways. As Stanley Hall was solidifying his theories of adolescence as a period of storm and strife, an entrepeneur named Edward Stratemeyer was working to develop a new model of literary production in order to provide young readers with a constant stream of inexpensive adventure novels. Stratemeyer, whose own boyhood heroes had included the fictional Horatio Alger and real-life Henry Ford, made a fortune as a young man in the emergent field of juvenile fiction (see Benjamin and O'Rourke). In 1904, when Hall was publishing his landmark study on adolescence, Stratemeyer was in the process of building a mass-market syndicate that went on to produce thousands of books for young readers before his death in 1930. Unlike the dime novels of the 1880s and '90s, Stratemeyer's new formula fiction starred young people taking part in adventures firmly anchored in middle-class America. He himself wrote over eight hundred juvenile titles, catering to a burgeoning adolescent appetite for fiction: "as oil had its Rockefeller, literature had its Stratemeyer" ("For Indeed" 2).

Stratemeyer came to be seen as "the inventor of the business," according to a 1934 article from *Fortune* magazine. The syndicate brought out a new form in the 1910s and '20s—the fifty-cent novel, a work of formulaic fiction, written from Stratemeyer's outlines to prescribed lengths and produced with hard covers in full color, distinguishing themselves from the cheaply made, paper-covered "dime novels" that had dominated mass-market fiction since the 1880s. Within this format, Stratemeyer offered readers a new kind of hero: the independent, "plucky" adolescent in "whose shoes the reader may easily imagine himself" ("For Indeed" 2). Stratemeyer's characters seemed like models of sublimation: The protagonists of his most successful series—including the Hardy Boys and the Nancy Drew mysteries— embodied as if by prescription Hall's eight "optimal" (17) adolescent traits: health and hygiene, superabundant energy, a willingness to be taxed or "stretched," sympathy, love of nature, sublimation, activity, and loyalty or fidelity, both to self and community (Hall 17, 451-67). Above all, the young heroes in Stratemeyer's books were shown prevailing over evil, setting right the disordered world around them. The preferred age for his protagonists was sixteen, two years older than their (initial) target readers. Frank and Joe of the Hardy Boys were conceived as "two brothers of high school age who would solve such mysteries as came their way"; Nancy Drew—originally to be named "Stella Strong"—was planned as a "girl detective" of sixteen years, following a string of adventures "written in some consecutive

order," in which "startling exposures," "perplexities," and "perilous trails" would lead to "triumph" (Rehak 108, 112).

Nobody—perhaps not even Stratemeyer—expected the Nancy Drew series to succeed as well as it did. As *Fortune* remarked, the books were "the greatest phenomenon among all the fifty-centers" ("For Indeed" 2). Sales of the Nancy Drew books eclipsed even the contemporary bestselling boys' series, *Bomba*. The Nancy Drews continued to sell briskly during the Depression—they cost less than the "juveniles of distinction," yet with their "real" cloth covers, were seen to offer consumers good value ("For Indeed" 1). They offered an escape from the harsh realities of the Depression, a collective fantasy of middle-class empowerment, as both the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew feature idealized adolescent protagonists with phenomenal yet recognizable skills; they were competent problem-solvers able to set a disordered world right again.

To a great extent, these books marginalized adults, leaving the starring roles to adolescents. While the police conveniently show up to take criminals away after Nancy has found them, adult law enforcers are portrayed in these books as bumbling or delayed, and in their absence Nancy obligingly outperforms them. The marginalization of the police, as D. A. Miller has observed in his well-known study of nineteenth-century fiction, serves to strengthen the role of the "amateur supplement," diffusing and expanding the need for surveillance. Further, the absence of the police establishes a diffuse "ideology of delinquency" (Miller 4) as an unchanging structure. Delinquency is as fixed in the world of Nancy Drew as virtue; bad characters can be captured and punished in these books, and good characters rescued from danger, but bad people never reform. Criminals do not change in Nancy Drew's world but instead are *revealed*. In this sense, the juvenile detective series presumes, as Miller argues elsewhere, that crime is an enclosed world from which it is all but impossible to escape, one that constantly threatens the "middle-class world of private life" (5-6).

Nancy Drew is Miller's "amateur supplement" writ large: she constantly polices the terrain of River Heights, finding clues where others see nothing, locating suspicious persons with her uncanny (and unerring) "intuition," identifying criminals through such superficial symptoms as bad posture, unusual accents, or poor vocabulary. Using her inherent (and inherited) sense of right and wrong, Nancy defends a middle class that increasingly defines itself against intruders—foreigners, "Negroes," thugs, robbers, the poor. In this sense, as Bobbi Ann Mason notes, Nancy's mysteries are not "whodunits" so much as adventures set on a "bedrock of domesticity" (60). Injustice here is corrected; crimes of character or judgment resolved; goods restored to the good. Mason notes the repetitive structure of the mysteries:

> The plots of Nancy Drew mysteries are like sonnets—endless variations on an inflexible form. A plot may contain any or all of these elements: the pursuit of

> at least two separate mysteries which turn out to be astonishingly intertwined; a warning to get off the case; a trip to a quaint or exotic place (with tourist bureau description supplied); the befriending of an innocent victim…who faces ruin if the mystery isn't solved; a romantic story about a tradition or secret in a prominent family; the appearance of twins or doubles….(57)

Mason points out that the settings of the mysteries are similarly repetitive. River Heights is at once mythic and localized, filled with lakeside cottages, summer camps, department stores, roadways and avenues, bungalows, and endless houses, each setting working within the "feminine, domestic, aristocratic, slightly Gothic" remnants of a "traditional…idealized world" (Mason 57).

Nancy Drew's task is to police the dangerous line separating the worlds of respectability and evil. Lesko has argued that adolescents often take up "border zones between the imagined end points of adult and child, male and female, sexual and asexual, rational and emotional, civilized and savage, and productive and unproductive" (50), and Nancy Drew exemplifies this kind of border work. Her detective skills establish Nancy as the perpetual exception. Hers is the point of view where all answers consolidate; often she works alone, culling information that only she can access. Motherless, well-to-do, she is apparently finished with formal schooling and free of the restrictions imposed by a regular job. She has full access to adult privilege with none of the encumbrances of adult life—no bills to pay, no boss, no restrictions on her freedom. She runs the Drew household, but has Hannah Gruen, her devoted housekeeper, to handle the actual labor such supervision entails. She is always already adult, without personal conflict or development; she is her father's partner, her community's private eye. By the time she has begun to work with her "chums" Bess and George in the fifth book of the series and has met her boyfriend Ned, Nancy is already established as a paragon of self-discipline, free of bodily needs, mood swings, lapses of judgment, or emotional outbursts—a secret agent of the adult world. There is no "bildung" in Nancy Drew, no internal conflict, no ethical hesitation or uncertainty. Nevertheless, troubles abound in these books, despite Nancy's sagacity; in essence, these troubles *create* her, as she defines herself in relation to their solution. Storm and stress are externalized in the world of Nancy Drew, emblematized by River Heights's violent weather systems that come apparently out of nowhere, sudden and dreadful, causing glassy lakes to rage, producing vivid, "forking" lightning, downing trees, and limiting visibility. Nancy speeds away from each gust or gale undeterred; readers expect, exception and exceptional, that she will always survive unscathed.

At times, Nancy's role as sleuth actually seems to ally her with the bad guys, at least in terms of methodology: like the criminals she hunts down, Nancy "boldly" enters other peoples' houses when nobody is home (Keene, *Old Clock* 123), hides in closets, spies, picks locks with hairpins (*Old Clock*

135), breaks open closed doors, takes other peoples' property (*Old Clock* 165-6), carries a revolver (*Hidden Staircase*), crawls through unlocked windows (*Hidden Staircase* 129), crouches in dark cellars (*Hidden Staircase* 134), sneaks through underground passages or climbs trellises to slip into houses through open windows (*Bungalow Mystery*). Despite being an "excellent" driver in all weather and road conditions, Nancy is not above driving "swiftly" or leading a chase to catch a criminal. But her stealth and transgression always serve to bolster her status as law-enforcer, reassuring her growing audiences that deviance comes *not* from the middle classes, but from its margins,

Good Money and Bad: *The Secret of the Old Clock*, 1930

The Secret of the Old Clock, delivered in outline form to writer Mildred Wirt Benson twelve days before the stock market crash in 1929, situates middle-class ruin between two kinds of peril—the threat of too much, and the threat of too little. Here, modernity is associated with economic ruin. The mystery suggests that good money, like character, identity, and middle-class sensibility, ought "rightly" to belong to good people, but modern machinations have disrupted proper lines of inheritance, and Nancy has to fight to get the money back to its rightful owners. A wealthy man has died; his second (corrected) will has gone missing, and until Nancy is able to find it, his inheritance will remain in the wrong hands. In its recovery, Nancy proves herself a local hero, able to recover (and reassign) wealth to suffering middle-class families.

"Too much" in *The Secret of the Old Clock* is represented by a family of *nouveau riche* strivers named Topham who made their money gambling on the stock exchange (3). Here, as in many of the early Nancy Drews, the Stock Exchange is depicted as part of a shadowy world of gamblers and upstarts, markedly different from River Heights's upstanding community bank. The Tophams have been making gains on the money they claim to have inherited from Crowley, all derived from his original (uncorrected) will. Despised by "nearly everyone in River Heights" as "snobbish and arrogant" (3), the Tophams are full of false airs, revealed through their gauche personal style; their large house "seem[s] to look down rather aloofly upon the surrounding homes" in its over-landscaped yard crowded with "sundials, benches, bird houses, and statues." "Such lack of taste!" (95), Nancy pronounces. Inside, all is cluttered and inauthentic; none of the Tophams' belongings are inherited, "dainty," or lovely. They lack the refined qualities of order and arrangement seen as part of a vanishing older order: instead of tasteful arrangement, "expensive oriental rugs clashed with window draperies of a different hue. The walls were heavy with paintings which were entirely out of place in such a small room, and period furniture had been added indiscriminately" (96). These consumer excesses are matched by rudeness and disrespect for established hierarchies. The Tophams treat River Heights's "oldest families" with contempt, believing "their [own] word is law" (17).

Countering the Tophams' display of too much is the mystery's corresponding threat of too little. Two kinds of poor people appear in *The Secret of the Old Clock*. The "deserving poor," fallen on hard times, make up the mystery's collective victims. Nancy is moved by the sight of hardship—at least when it is accompanied by good manners and diction, clean clothing, and a strong work ethic. The deserving poor in this instance turn out to be members of the middle-class, innocently swindled out Crowley's inheritance by the greedy Tophams. Membership in River Height's middle-class is evident through personal appearance and behavior. The Horner sisters, Nancy's contemporaries, speak "pleasantly," have "cultured voice[s] and manner[s]" (21), and wear clothing that "while not expensive, [is] neat and well made" (31). Nancy can see at once that the Horners are not like "other" poor people; Allie Horner, for instance, does not appear to Nancy "to be the daughter of a farmer who would live on this poor land" (31); despite her "isolated life," Allie appears "genteel" and hospitable. She and her sister Grace keep a home that is spare but nevertheless "warm and comfortable…[and though] there [is] little in the room. . .dainty white curtains covered the windows [showing that]…they [have] tried hard to make their home attractive" (37). As she finds Allie and Grace "charming" and "deserving," Nancy is determined to "see justice done" (56) on their behalf.

In contrast, the mystery provides the backdrop of the permanently "poor folk" who live along the Muskoka River. These destitute people can expect no profit from Crowley's inheritance, nor does anyone in River Heights seem to care about them once the missing will is found. The real poor in these early mysteries—like the "colored people," Jews, immigrants, or servants the books treats so disparagingly—are expected to know their place and stay within it. The poor inhabit a dangerous borderland that must be vigilantly policed, a borderland as great a threat to the middle-class as the unscrupulous stock-market. Nancy's task is in part to maintain the border that protects River Heights from such threats to prosperity.

Criminals in Nancy Drew mysteries are often described as "pushy, grabby, crude, rough, illiterate" people who "want to snatch at the upper echelons of the good life" (Mason 68). They are usually "dark-hued and poor," with "piercing dark eyes," foreign accents, or hooked noses. In *The Mystery At Lilac Inn* (1931), Nancy's pursuit of an imposter-housekeeper leads her to Dockville, "the slum district" outside River Heights, where she is appalled to discover "row upon row of tenement houses, all alike and of a dingy and uninviting appearance. Swarms of dirty children were playing in the streets, making it necessary for Nancy to watch her driving closely" (93). The inhabitants of Dockville—many of them foreigners—are seen here as mere obstacles; but when they penetrate the world of River Heights, they are seen as dirty, grasping, and amoral, constantly threatening to steal antiques, jewels, money, or identity from a threatened (older) world.

In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, the real poor remain in the background, but they are subtly elided with the "unscrupulous robbers" who ransack the "summer homes of wealthy persons" and resell their valuables. The thieves who threaten Nancy in this first mystery are described as savages: "heavy-set," "rough-looking," with "cold and cruel faces" (127). They "growl" at each other, speak "savagely," and when they catch Nancy spying on them from a closet, lock her up, leaving her to starve. These thieves are the underworld correllary for the conniving, nouveau-riche Tophams. The two classes of robbers converge in the climax of the mystery, when Nancy escapes from the locked closet in the Topham's lakefront cabin.

Jeff Tucker, the Tophams' "colored" caretaker, has unwittingly abetted the bad guys by leaving his watch to get drunk, allowing the Tophams' summer cottage to stand unguarded. Nancy is outraged by Tucker's "breach of loyalty" to them, even though she is already convinced that the Tophams themselves have stolen (and hidden) Crowley's revised will. In the midst of saving herself, chasing down the robbers, and finding the second will, Nancy takes time out to lecture Jeff Tucker for his "disloyalty," admonishing him for having proven "unfaithful to [his] trust" (143). Nancy here seems as interested in reproaching Jeff Tucker as she is in locating the missing will. The two acts are connected in the work of restoring middle-class order to a world threatened from two apparently different directions—above and below.

Jeff Tucker is the first in a series of disturbing caricatures of racial and ethnic "others" in the original Nancy Drews, edited out in the 1959 revisions (see Marcus 105 and Rehak 243). With his dialect English and "alcoholic glint" in his eye, Tucker is depicted as deserving humiliation, if not worse: "I reckon you's right, Miss. Ole Jeff done gone and made a fool of himself. I realize dat whatever I gets, I's got it a-comin'" (143). Tucker's self-reproach here reveals a guiding principle of the series at large: people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. At the mystery's close, the Tophams get upbraided, and the kind-hearted middle-class relatives get Crowley's money. Goodness and goods are established as self-justifying. The real poor—along with Blacks, Jews, and foreigners—get nothing at all, but Nancy firmly reminds her readers that the world of middle-class propriety needs to keep them at bay. Taking Crowley's money from the upstart Tophams, Nancy has "rightly" restored it to the "deserving" middle-class families who will put it to best use.

What does Nancy take as reward for her efforts? She refuses money, reinforcing her status as the exception in a mystery in which money touches (and connects) every other character. But she *does* accept (as trophy and memento) the old clock that had kept Crowley's revised will hidden all this time. The clock—symbol for time's passage—is, interestingly enough, an "old" one, part of the eroding order Nancy Drew establishes as hers to defend. Already in this first mystery, the clock stands as a memento of a time left unguarded, open on all sides to new kinds of plunder: from the striving, grasping nouveau riche on

the one hand, and the barbarian underclass on the other. Both are depicted as scheming to repossess the rightful property of the middle classes, but Nancy Drew—as if adolescence were an antidote to modernity, rather than vulernable to it—is newly poised to protect them.

The Hidden Staircase and the House(s) of History

The "secret" clock in the first Nancy Drew mystery signals the ways in which time in the series becomes symbol and symptom of the books' divided relationship to modernity. Edward Stratemeyer told his publishers in 1929 that Nancy Drew was conceived as an up-to-date heroine, and in part, the series seems to advertise modernity, showcasing newspapers, telephones, airplane trips, and automobiles. Nancy's own modernity is best captured by the skill with which she maneuvers her indefatigable "roadster," and the open network of roadways in River Heights seems as important a setting to the mysteries as any of its gothic houses, dark closets, hidden stairways, or tunnels. Road and traffic conditions signal to Nancy's observant eye just how "up-to-date" a given area is: country roads are "poorly paved," muddy, or made of gravel; in town, boulevards give way to "congested streets" with "heavy traffic." Whatever the road conditions, Nancy is never averse to a "fifteen mile jaunt" or a drive "through the hills" forty miles away. Nancy's constant motion on these crisscrossing roadways works in lieu of temporal progress; while in the first few books there is some attempt at chronology ("last summer," "a few months back"), the syndicate quickly gave this up, eventually setting all of the books in a single ongoing, never-ending summer. Motion replaces temporal change; time does not move, but Nancy does. In the first three mysteries published in 1930, Nancy's actions are almost always described as swift: her convertible speeds, Nancy dashes. In *The Bungalow Mystery*, she chases down the false Jacob Aborn, her speedometer creeping "higher and higher until the car wavered on the road" (171). But even as she "does some of her fastest traveling," Nancy keeps a cool head. Her pace is part of the series' propulsion forward.

Countering Nancy's "forward motion," there is deep nostalgia in these early books for an older order now fallen into disrepair. The past is often materialized through a central structure—an inn, mansion, or dwelling that has fallen on hard times or is being threatened by an ill-wisher. These crumbling houses are living relics, representations of earlier (idealized) periods in American history. As Mason notes, the mysteries are filled with references to a vague, aristocratic past—"quaint reminders of a traditional, Victorian, idealized world" (59). Nancy's task is to restore what has been lost: "romantic ruin evokes nostalgia for a past order" (Mason 58). But such restoration is not always possible.

In the second mystery in the series, *The Hidden Staircase,* Nancy encounters not one ruined house but two: a pair of ancient mansions, strikingly

similar in appearance, originally owned by two brothers who broke from each other when they took different sides in the Civil War. The houses were originally connected by a hidden staircase and an underground tunnel, but after the brothers' estrangement, the passageway between the buildings was closed up and the connection between them sealed off. Subsequently, the houses have come to different ends. The Turnbull mansion has never changed hands, maintaining its elegance despite a gradual decline in wealth. Conversely, the "bad" neighboring mansion has gone through multiple owners, lost its grandeur, and is currently inhabited by a scheming underworld miser named Nathan Gombet.

While Topham in the first mystery fed off the stock market, Gombet's greed is nourished by real estate speculation. With his poor vocabulary and malnourished appearance, Gombet is portrayed as a living parasite, making money by sucking the life out of others. "Like an animal about to pounce upon its prey" (8), Gombet has "clawlike hands," "growls," and looks at Nancy like "a wild animal" (29). Along with his "accomplice," a "Negress" he treats like a slave (she calls him "Master"), Gombet has been using the hidden staircase and tunnel between the mansions to "haunt" the Turnbulls, stealing heirlooms, casting shadows on the walls, and making eerie noises at night. His scheme is to terrorize the Turnbulls into selling their mansion to him at a great loss, then reselling it at a profit. Nancy is enlisted by the elderly Turnbull sisters, Floretta and Rosemary, to help find the "ghost" who has been taking their valuables and terrifying them with nightly visits.

The Turnbull mansion harkens back to an earlier time. It resembles "a ruined castle" (42) but "could boast little of its old glory," as it had "fallen into decay" (42). Nancy admires the mansion even as she feels uncomfortable in it: it is filled with lovely, inherited objects—a silver urn, a diamond bar-pin, finely made old silk dresses. From the "massive, gold-framed" ancestral portraits in the mansion, Nancy learns that once "the Turnbulls had been the leading family in Cliffwood," and though they are currently running out of money, they are still welcomed "among the best society." The sisters' "great-great grandfather…fought in the Revolution" (44), and "the city wants [their] house for a historical museum" (98). But this world no longer feels relevant, even as Nancy admires it. The Turnbull sisters are old and frail; they do not live in River Heights but in Cliffwood, some distance away, and their moment—like the lifestyle represented by their mansion—is already past. In its age and grandeur, the house feels fossilized. Nancy notes there is something "creepy" about it—"it's a perfect habitat for a ghost" (42). She finds "the very air about the old place oppressive" (42). Nothing about the Turnbull mansion is *modern*. Nancy is struck by the fact there is neither telephone nor newspapers there:

> The evenings at The Mansion were all alike. Dinner was served at seven o'clock in the big, gloomy dining room, and after that the three adjourned

> to the drawing room. There was no radio and no evening paper. With the deepening of the shadows, the conversation became stilted and difficult. By nine o'clock everyone was glad of the opportunity to retire. (93)

The setting strands them all in a time that is curiously pre-modern. "I feel like a ghost myself" (128), Nancy jokes when she sets off to break into Gombet's neighboring mansion, armed both with a flashlight and her father's revolver (128). In order to solve the mystery, Nancy has to rid the mansion of its (imaginary) specters. Even after she succeeds, exposing Gombet and freeing the Turnbull sisters from his terror, the old mansion remains shrouded in the past at the mystery's end. This may contribute to Nancy's faint "melancholy" at the book's conclusion. The uneasy relationship between the two great houses—both in shadow—suggests, I think, an unresolved relationship in the series between past and present. Modernity, with its paved roadways, its news, its fast pace, its agility and accomplishments, "produces" Nancy, with all her ingenuity. But it also produces the Tophams and the Gombets of the world, whereas the gracious, twilit world of the Turnbulls is being turned by modernity into a living museum. Like the two mansions that sit in close proximity, connected yet not in correspondence, the past seems (paradoxically) haunted in these mysteries by the present, which plunders its artifacts and renders irrelevant its beauty.

Early in this second mystery, Nancy goes to look at the "new railroad bridge" that has cut across Gombet's land. "A gigantic arc of iron and steel that stretched across the Muskoka River," the bridge—like the tunnel that conjoins the two mansions—seems to connect the old world and the new. But the image of the "train approaching from the west" over this bridge has none of the idealization that accompanies descriptions of Nancy's roadster:

> As she was considering the remarkable engineering feat which the bridge represented, a shrill locomotive whistle caused her to wheel about. The block signal was down and she knew a train was approaching from the west….She moved hastily to a safe distance from the tracks. With a fascination which was tinged with horror, she watched a long, heavy eastbound flyer as it roared around the bend and like a mighty monster charged down upon the railroad bridge. (21)

Nancy convinces herself here that the "uneasy feeling" that has overtaken her, watching this "mighty monster" of the train, comes from the fear that Gombet might carry out his threat and blow up the bridge (19). But the unstoppable force of the locomotive suggests another kind of destruction as well—the intrusive speed of modernity, and the sense that before long, the "hidden staircase" to the past will be sealed closed.

Double Guardians in *The Bungalow Mystery*: Juvenile Fiction in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Serial fiction had been popular in America long before the emergence of Stratemeyer's syndicate, but in the first decades of the twentieth century, mass-market juvenile fiction underwent a significant change. Increasingly, its target audience became middle class; its audience was female now as well as male, and the procedures for producing serial fiction underwent rapid-scale modernization as the size of this audience increased. In the first decade of the century, 46 new book series were started for girls alone; another 94 series began in the next decade (Rehak 92-93). The protagonists of these new series, like cars rolling off the new assembly lines, conformed to new standards—most had "sunny dispositions," adventures with "chums," and ongoing "trials and triumphs" involving expected adventures (Rehak 93).

Stratemeyer was a central figure in the new industry of juvenile mass-market fiction, first as an author, and later as the founder and owner of his powerful syndicate. The success of his Rover Boy series—and a cluster of others he began, such as The Motor Boys, The Motor Girls, and The Bobbsey Twins—afforded him the capital and incentive to start his syndicate, which in turn enabled him to increase his rate of production. His syndicate was seen by some detractors, such as this acrid detractor from *Fortune* magazine, as a kind of factory:

> Smoothly, without interruption, the Stratemeyer plant turns out book upon book on a conveyer-belt system. Upon leaving the Stratemeyer brain, a fifty-center is crammed into a three page, typewritten outline in which the time elements, names of characters, and their destinies are logically arranged. Then comes the writer who is given the outline and anywhere from a week to a month to fill it out into a book. Upon completing his job he is promptly given from $50 to $250, releases all claims to ownership of the piece, and the manuscript is thrown once again into the Stratemeyer hopper where it receives a final polishing. At the end of the chute stands a representative of the publisher who, acting like a U.S. Government meat inspector in a packing plant, certifies the manuscript as factually fit for consumption….The whole process takes perhaps forty days, although on occasion books have sped from Stratemeyer's brain to the immortality of print in considerably less time. ("For Indeed" 4)

For his part, Stratemeyer was unapologetic in his desire to create a new author-function—as much a part of the machine age as the new motorcars and airplanes. Writing for the syndicate, as he saw it, was a team effort: efficient, market-driven, in constant motion. The syndicate did the "creating," and writers were seen as "filling in" rather than "making up." They were, Stratemeyer reminded them, only "authors in part":

> The work for our syndicate is done *sub rosa* by the majority of our authors and…it is well understood that they are only authors in part….All of our

> stories are written on our complete outlines and…we frequently make many alterations in the manuscripts received….I have no objection to an author saying he is "doing work for the Stratemeyer Syndicate," but to be fair he ought to add that he is working on our complete plots and outlines. (qtd. in Rehak 146)

Writers signed away all rights to series they helped to create in exchange for relatively small sums of money. Stratemeyer's "fiction factory" changed the relationship between the writer and his or her texts in important ways. For many, the question of authorship remained problematic. Who was "the author" of Nancy Drew?

In the 1930s and '40s, there were at least two "authors" of the mysteries—the syndicate, and Nancy Drew's principle ghostwriter, Mildred Wirt Benson, who wrote 27 of the first 30 books. Stratemeyer wrote the first few outlines; after his death, these were written by the syndicate, but Stratemeyer had commissioned the series with the idea that the books would be written by Mildred Wirt (who became Mildred Wirt Benson after marriage). Stratemeyer sold the idea of the series to Grosset and Dunlop planning for Wirt to be the author of the books:

> For this series I have in mind one of our younger writers, a woman who has just graduated from college and who has written one book already for my Syndicate and a number of stories for St Nicholas and other high-grade magazines….[S]he writes particularly well of college girls and their doings, both in college and out, and I feel that she could make a real success of this new line. (qtd. in Rehak 109).

From its inception, the series had a kind of dual-authorship. Plots and ownership stayed with the syndicate, with all the credit for the books going to "Carolyn Keene," a pen-name Stratemeyer built into the series from the outset. Carolyn Keene became a kind of alter-ego, complete with her own fictional autobiography, signature, and stationery (Rehak 164-65). Years later, following Benson's abrupt (and rather unceremonious) termination, other writers took over from her, and the books continued to come out, all under Carolyn Keene's now-famous name. But for Benson, who wrote so many of the early books, the role of "author in part" may have cast the longest shadow.

Residues of tension over this kind of double authorship show up repeatedly in the early books themselves. The Nancy Drew series did not dispense with the author-function but continually called it into question through figures of doubles and impersonators. There was the *sub rosa* writer, working hundreds of miles away from the Syndicate's office, her name concealed, her investment in the series invisible. Then there was "Carolyn Keene," visible, public, but a phantom—no more real than the shadows Gombet cast on the haunted mansion's wall. Which one was the ghost? Traces of this doubleness show

up over and over again in the mysteries. Ghostwriting appears in—one might even say haunts—the mysteries in their preoccupation with doubles, imposters, and false imitations. These doubles and ghosts work in contradistinction to the books' emphasis on Nancy's autonomy.

In these early books, Nancy does not yet work alongside her best friends and foils, Bess and George, who get introduced in the fifth book, *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* (1931); instead, her autonomy is continually emphasized; she is able in almost every instance to fend for herself, for her father has "raised her to be self-reliant" (*Bungalow Mystery* 13). This self-reliance is the hallmark of Nancy's character. Her skill set is impressive: she is an expert driver, able to put chains on her tires in the midst of a terrible storm, or to determine if her car has engine problems. She is a superb swimmer, can handle a revolver, has a keen sense of direction, knows how to position her wrists while they are being tied up with rope so she can later untie them; and most importantly, has keen instincts and an unwavering sense of what to do in any given situation. At the same time, she depends on a network of assistants that widen as the books grow in number: her father gives her advice, support, counsel, clues, and money; her elderly housekeeper Hannah Gruen provides much-needed sustenance as Nancy has a good appetite; friends provide "coincidental" clues or help, or, at the darkest hour, a convenient offer of assistance. There is, then, a split in these first books between an emphasis on individual heroics and the persistent idealization of teamwork and cooperation. The books, in essence, want to have it both ways: Nancy (like her authors) should be both "singular" and corporate, working for her own praise and working to restore order for others.

The Nancy Drew mysteries play constantly with the idea of the double and the idea of authenticity. Strikingly, in each instance of a double or pair, the first is false or problematic, whereas the second is authentic. Is it possible this pattern reinforced the underlying sense on the part of Benson that the "second," unacknowledged writer (she herself) was genuine, and the first—"Carolyn Keene"—an artifice? In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, the "second" will is the real one, reallocating Crowley's money to his deserving friends and relatives rather than to the greedy Tophams. Similarly, in *The Hidden Staircase*, the Turnbulls' mansion is the "better" version of Gombet's shadowy house. In both cases, what is "authentic" is invisible, missing, or haunted—in the same way that the figure of the ghostwriter, absent in every way from the text, is nevertheless authentic, the good double of the imposter that takes her rightful place.

This paradigm of the authentic and impostor is a central theme in the third mystery in the series, *The Bungalow Mystery*. In the opening scene of this book, Nancy and her friend Helen, caught in a sudden storm, nearly drown when their boat capsizes. They are fortuitously rescued by a girl about their own age, Laura Pendleton, who they learn has been recently orphaned and is

about to meet the man chosen by her mother to serve as her guardian. When Nancy meets Jacob Aborn, the man selected for this charge, she is put off at once by his uneducated accent and vocabulary, his bad table manners, and his "gruff" determination to "speculate" Laura's inheritance on the stock market. Nancy suspects that the refined and gracious Laura Pendleton will not much like her guardian, and of course she is right: before long, Laura has run away and seeks refuge with the Drews, leaving Nancy's sleuthing skills to determine the "true" identity of Jacob Aborn. Eventually she learns that Jacob Aborn is not Jacob Aborn at all, but instead an underground criminal named "Stumpy." The real Jacob Aborn is being held hostage in a second cottage near the lake, and when Nancy rescues him, she discovers that the two men "bear a surprising resemblance" to each other:

> Now that she gazed directly into the man's face, she wondered how she could have mistaken him for Jacob Aborn. To be sure, the two men were of the same build, although the prisoner appeared gaunt and thin as though he had not been fed properly during his captivity. Their features were similar also. But while Jacob Aborn's face was characterized by harsh lines, the prisoner had a gentle, kind expression. (126)

This scenario reiterates the familiar pattern of the "genuine" as the second in a pair of near-doubles. Even more striking is the sense in this mystery of divided guardianship. The false Jacob Aborn is as ruthless and uncaring as the genuine Jacob is nurturing and kind, and their conjoined presence throws into uneasy prominence the issue of identity. The long string of "doubles," impersonators, and identity-thieves in *Nancy Drew* is part of the series' general anxiety about reproducibility. In the case of Stratemeyer's syndicate, the writer finds not only the text but the writer herself the subject of mass-production. Which writer is the reproduction, "Carolyn Keene" or Mildred Wirt Benson? Where is the place of the genuine in a writing-machine that reproduces fiction as its own double?

Like the issue of threatened inheritance in *The Secret of the Old Clock* or the vanishing past order in *The Hidden Staircase*, the anxieties surrounding doubleness and legitimate identity are not vanquished in *The Bungalow Mystery* but instead are resolved by the end of the mystery through a series of compromises. The "good people" get the money they deserve. Modern resourcefulness defends the best remnants of the past, even if that past ends up showcased in a museum. The identity thief is captured and taken off to jail, and the "real" guardian is honored for his stewardship. In each instance, the malefactors are pushed back to the margins, and the middle-class reasserts its central claims on prosperity, property, and guardianship. And who has effected this restoration but the modern adolescent, sanitized of deviance, ready to put the adult world right? Nancy Drew, even as she refuses to take all the credit, is acclaimed at the end of every mystery as a hero. Deviance is safely pushed

away, making central the space for the century's new hero. In this way, the machinery of Stratemeyer's Nancy Drew series helped to produce a vision of the adolescent as modernity's most able enforcer.

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