

75 Years of Mystery Unfolds, Part I: Revising an Original

By Jennifer Fisher

Plucky Girl Sleuth or Finishing School Girl Sleuth? Blonde Girl Sleuth or Titian-haired Girl Sleuth? How do you like *your* Nancy Drew?

Nancy Drew: Revised Sleuth unfolded upon the scene in 1959 for “today’s readers.” For the next twenty years, the first 34 stories were rewritten, these revisions based upon the originals. Removing offensive stereotypes, modernizing, and shortening were the key goals of the revision process. On the chopping block, however, some scenes were subtly changed or not so subtly removed. Often new scenes were added. 8 of these originals received complete style makeovers, becoming all new stories. (2, 4, 5, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18)

Never one to become an old maid, by 1959 Nancy’s world had evolved over the course of the 36 volume series. She had aged from 16 to 18, ditched her roadster for a sporty convertible, and Hannah Gruen became like a member of the Drew family rather than just “the housekeeper.” Nancy herself had morphed from a rather blunt gumshoe to a rather demure-style heroine. Don’t get me wrong, Nancy Drew was still thrilled by an exciting mystery, she still ran off in search of adventure and she still continued to brave the most dastardly of villains. She was just not quite the same sleuth as she was when she came alive in 1930 in the first volume, *The Secret of the Old Clock*. It was up to Harriet Adams and The Stratemeyer Syndicate to revolutionize age-old Nancy to stand alongside the present day Nancy. In the process of revising Nancy, it was goodbye plucky flapper 1930 Nancy, hello debutante 1959 Nancy.

A clock and a lost will in common, the original text and the revised text of *Old Clock* vary substantially and subtly. Setting the scene in the opening chapter, a more brash opinionated 1930 Nancy is defiant about Josiah Crowley’s heirs, the snooty Tophams. 1959 Nancy, the dutiful daughter, is running an errand for her father, Carson Drew, when she saves little Judy and stumbles upon a mystery. Both text versions intertwine and go their separate ways until they come together as Nancy overhears the Topham girls discussing the will at a park. From that scene forward, both versions flow along the same beat, each with a different tempo—the original richly descriptive, the revision a more faster paced flow.

Major scene changes abound: little Judy is not in the original, there was no birthday party nor singing lessons, and certainly not the police dog and puppy caper! You may just be wondering what these new scenes and subplots were doing in the revision? Never fear, these and other text version puzzlers will soon be demystified.

Nancy Drew’s Guide to Revised and Unrevised Life:

The Taming of the Drew or “Wildcat” Nancy v. Cool Cat Nancy

1930 Nancy was more emotional and chided herself. She was a little less perfect and more real. In overlooking a clue, she thought “how stupid” whereas 1959 Nancy pondered cheerfully,

“why didn’t I think of that.” Caught in the Topham bungalow by a robber, regarding her presence, 1930 Nancy explained her predicament “lamely”. 1959 Nancy explained “cooly”. On a trip to Moon Lake, 1930 Nancy liked to keep secrets and clues to herself, preferring to surprise everyone in the end. She also used the camp launch at will. 1959 Nancy spills the beans on her planned adventure before leaving and made sure to get permission before she used the camp launch.

1930 Nancy, considered a tad more socially conscious and snooty, doesn’t pick up the Topham’s dress discards at the department store while 1959 Nancy rescues a discarded dress from the floor and ends up with a bargain. 1930 Nancy referred to the Topham girls as “vapid creatures” and said they do not deserve the Crowley fortune. By 1959, this rather un-Nancy like behavior was shouldered upon Hannah Gruen, who declared the Tophams to be undeserving. Regarding Richard Topham’s purchase of charity tickets, 1930 Nancy told Helen he did it to show off. 1959 finds Helen Corning the one to remark that Topham did it for social prestige. Showing her more sensitive side, 1959 Nancy put in a good word for the Topham’s caretaker after the robbery. More judgmental, 1930 Nancy is not as inclined to do so. 1930 Nancy surveyed the Topham’s home with distaste, and commented on the decor as having “such lack of taste” Nearly always the polite one, 1959 Nancy refrained from making such comments to herself.

In the end, 1930 Nancy was more gleeful at the impending Topham demise, “I’d give a lot to see how they take it. I think it would be a splendid idea to call a meeting of all the relatives and read the will aloud!” (*p. 193*) More gracefully, 1959 Nancy asked, “Dad, when you call a meeting of all the relatives and read the will aloud, please may I be there?” (*p. 162*) After the “coup de grace” was administered to the Tophams and Ada Topham accused Nancy of being behind everything, 1930 Nancy noted pleasantly with a smile, “Perhaps I had.” (*pg. 201*) 1959 Nancy appealed to Ada’s “sense of justice” and answered, “Any good I’ve done I’m happy about.” (*pg. 170*) After the will reading, 1930 Nancy, unable to help herself, thought it was funny to watch the Topham’s faces when they were cut off without a cent. 1959 Nancy would never say such a thing, this being edited out in the revision. 1930 Nancy is less modest and less embarrassed at being praised than 1959 Nancy. As the mystery concluded, the Horners hinted at a reward and 1930 Nancy openly asked for the Crowley clock. 1959 unsuspecting Nancy was given the clock.

Nancy’s relationship with her doting father, Carson, has always been one of respect and mutual admiration. However, 1930 Nancy often accused her father of teasing her when he dropped compliments her way. “You’re a regular detective, Nancy” he noted with mingled pride and “amusement” in the 1930 version. (*pg. 180*) After some sensitivity training, 1959 Carson, with mingled pride and “amazement” noted, “You’re a good detective, Nancy. You’ve picked up an excellent clue.” (*pg. 149*)

The Homogenizing of River Heights: A More Perfect Nancy Drew World Emerges.

Still a hotbed of criminal activity in 1959, River Heights is much more tame by the time of the revising process. In 1930, one got a more social view of the inhabitants and the country folk nearby who suffered from poverty such as the “poor as church mice” Horner sisters. By the 1959 revision, Nancy focused more on helping Allison Hoover (nee Allie Horner) be able to afford singing lessons for her beautiful voice. Though 1959 Nancy contended with the Turner sisters

and their predicament for providing for little Judy, the underlying current of poverty present in the 1930 text is much more subtle in the revision.

Dialect plays a role in characterizing the 1930 version. Typically distinct for ethnicity and race, dialect leaves no stone unturned, for Abigail Rowen in regarding her helpless condition, spoke distinctly, “There ain’t been a soul come near me.” (pg. 79) By 1959, however, having apparently been sent to finishing school, Abby Rowen chimed, “Not a soul has been here...” (pg. 73) The Topham’s Negro caretaker, Jeff Tucker, in the 1930 version was a drunkard and fell down on his job—stereotypical for that time period. Upon finding Nancy locked in the bungalow closet, Nancy had to scream in order to prove to Jeff that she was not one of the robbers. 1930 Jeff Tucker blustered, “Dat’s enough! Hold yo’ siren! I’ll let yo’ out. Dar ain’t a man in de world could make a racket like dat! Dis way out, lady!” (pg. 138) By 1959, Jeff Tucker became a country bumpkin “hornswoggled” by “those critters”, described as the tallest skinniest man outside the circus, surely not offending “country bumpkins” and tall skinny circus types. With some mild country bumpkin dialect throughout his role, in the same scene, he uttered, “All right, *all right*, ma’am. I believe you! No man could make that racket. This way out, lady!” (pg. 115)

Violence and the villains become more tame in the 1959 version. When confronted by the robber, Nancy tries to make a run for it. 1930 Nancy’s arm is grabbed and she’s forced against a wall, then flung inside the closet “roughly”. 1959 Nancy is treated a bit daintier with only her arm being grabbed before she was flung inside the closet. On the trail of the fleeing robbers, gunshots are fired in the 1930 version, a tire blown out, causing the robbers to run into a ditch. In the revision, criminals become more bumbling and with no gunfire necessary, they just swerved into ditches at will. The tone of the head robber in 1930 is more cruel regarding Nancy’s closet predicament, “Now you can starve for all I care!” (pg. 132) 1959 brings us a more sensitive robber who told Nancy, “Now you can spy all you want!” (pg. 110) He apparently assumed there would be plenty of mysteries to solve to keep Nancy company while in the closet. And being that the villains are of the robber-type, 1930 Nancy later spied them at the roadside inn “engaged in a drinking orgy” whereas by 1959, the robbers were found “eating voraciously” thus proving that a robbery snack of Snickers really doesn’t satisfy you!

Keystone Cops or Colleagues? Nancy Drew v. the Law

1930 Nancy drove at “breath-taking speed” whereas 1959 Nancy drove “as rapidly as the law permitted,” a likely change after all those “speeding tickets” raised her insurance premiums! After recovering the Crowley clock from the robbers, 1959 Nancy pondered whether she should reveal the clock to the officers and decided to fess up regardless of the consequences. 1930 Nancy has nary a thought about fessing up and kept the stolen property to herself. Both Nancys justified keeping the notebook, as it was unrelated to the robbery. 1930 marshals were rather slow to Nancy’s consternation and were reluctant to admit Nancy’s theories of the robbers’ whereabouts might be right. In 1959, the officers were quick to act and found Nancy’s theories reasonable. In the last chase after the robbers, 1930 Nancy brazenly told the marshals she would follow them. 1959 Nancy politely waited until the officers asked her to follow them.

Puzzling Revisions: Necessary Changes or Trivial Departures?

Aside from the taming of Nancy Drew, the homogenizing of River Heights and its victims and villains in an effort to modernize, shorten, and remove stereotypes, there are several changes that have some readers as “hornswoggled” as 1959 Jeff Tucker:

1930 Grace Horner was a dressmaker. 1959 Turner sisters were dressmakers. In the 1930 version there were 3 robbers compared to just 2 by 1959. 1930 Nancy shopped for a dress to go to a party, by 1959 it was for a country club dance. The 1959 version included a scene where Nancy contended with an angry police dog protecting her puppy, thrown in as a cliffhanger sequence. 1959 Nancy sought justice for Allison Hoover’s beautiful voice and helped her get singing lessons from Signor Mascagni, a world famous voice coach who happened to live in River Heights—what a coincidence! At Abigail Rowen’s, the clock struck 3 in 1930, 12 in 1959. 1930 Nancy had not seen Helen Corning in days. 1959 Helen Corning had not seen Nancy in days. The 1930 version took place late in the summer whereas the 1959 version took place in early summer. The Topham’s butler was condescending in 1930, by 1959 it was the maid. In asking for the time at the Topham’s, 1930 Nancy was told by Isabel that there was a clock in front of her. 1959 Nancy was told by about the clock by Ada. At the Topham’s bungalow, 1930 Nancy trapped herself in the bedroom, by 1959 it was the study. At the roadside inn, 1930 Nancy hid in a manger while 1959 Nancy hid in a grain bin. Crowley’s notebook was blue in 1930 and dark-blue in 1959. Nancy covered the clock with a blanket in 1930, a coat in 1959. Never a series to go without mentioning food, Nancy ate crisp “steaming” waffles in 1930--by 1959 they were just crisp “golden” waffles, as even Hannah Gruen was unable to avoid lawsuits stemming from food and beverages being served too hot!

Finally, To Tidy Things Up: The Name Game:

As is often the case, from original to revision, names modernize and even mysteriously change: Matilda Turner to Mary Turner, Judge Hartgrave to Judge Hart, Allie and Grace Horner to Allison and Grace Hoover, Abigail Rowen to Abby Rowen, Josiah Crowley’s alias Josiah Harkston to Josiah Johnston, The Black Horse to Black Horse Inn, and Masonville National Bank to Merchants Trust Company.