

Criminal Waters: Lakeside Piracy & Phantom Ships in *The Clue of the Broken Locket*

Accessibility to lakefront cottages due to car ownership and highway networks allowed the postwar middle class(es) to escape from urban homes to enjoy “simplicity, naturalness, and informality” in rural environs (Löfgren 138). *The Clue of the Broken Locket* (1965) inverts the connotations of serene vacationing when Nancy Drew, George Fayne, and Bess Marvin travel to “a summer cottage on Misty Lake” (2), to unravel a new mystery. Although earlier Nancy Drew books, like *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* (1930, 1961), associate water with lower-class criminality and symbolically charged storms, as I argue in this paper, *The Clue of the Broken Locket* constructs Misty Lake as a vexed site of modernity and nostalgia that metaphorically parallels the novel’s piratical overtones.

I begin by contextualizing the plot revisions to the 1965 edition of *Clue of the Broken Locket* that lend Misty Lake its postwar sociocultural resonance(s). The 1934 version of the book is a domestic mystery focusing on twin orphans’ unknown parentage and suspicious adoption. While a river plays a pseudo-biblical role in simultaneously separating the babies from their mother and sustaining the children, no vacationing, no lakes, and no implications of piracy appear.

Next I analyze the tensions between modernity and nostalgia in the 1965 edition, embodied in the criminal activities Nancy, George, and Bess uncover. Their journey to Misty Lake is catalyzed by the appearance of a phantom ship, initially a symbol of ghostly nostalgia, but later revealed as a film projection and thus a signifier of modernity. As missing inheritances, uncanny doubles, orphaned children, and record piracy manifest on the borders of Misty Lake, the water itself becomes a shifting symbol of danger, violence, and social class struggles.

I conclude by considering the significance of record piracy in relation to Misty Lake as a vacation site and as a body of water, as well as the ways that both crime and lake connect to other aquatic-based criminal activities in the Nancy Drew books, including *The Haunted Showboat* (1957) and *The Invisible Intruder* (1969).