

WHENCE THE NAME OF NANCY DREW?

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In an essay on Charles Dickens' The Mystery of Edwin Drood, in the Journal of the American Name Society [1], I added an endnote to the effect that the name of the celebrated teenage crime unraveler, Nancy Drew, may derive from Dickensian sources: a conflation of the heroine's name, **Nancy**, from Oliver Twist along with **Drood** from the mystery novel bearing that surname. The new name can be thought of as representing a curtailed form of **Drood**, spelled slightly differently. The immense popularity of the last of Dickens' works, fragmentary only because the Inimitable died before it could be completed, lends itself to this verdict. Likewise Nancy, of the earlier novel, surely represents Dickens' most famous female creation (if we dismiss a few less relevant, and certainly much older, ones in David Copperfield). Oliver Twist can be taken as a sort of prime detective novel appealing especially to youth, because Fagin has to be brought to court. Further, Drood's first name, Edwin, has four-fifths of its letters in **Nancy Drew** [2].

Did the creator have all this consciously in mind? Perhaps not, but does it really matter here? Many influences are unconscious. A feminist reaction: does this mean that we shall next have to consider that the Hardy Boys series likewise bears somehow on a complementary Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy? Hardly so. Dickens was rather more popular to begin with, and the onomastic suggestions made herewith provide us with one last unravelment of the Dickensian mystery tale: it achieves its ending in Drood's being transformed into, of all things, its diminutive. This change-over may appear a bit ironic [3], but hardly for that reason displeasing to Nancy Drew readers (who might be called Droo-ids).

[1] "Drood Renominated", Names 40 (1992), pp 117-22.

[2] Compare this with the use of his friend Collins in Moonstone Castle.

[3] The name of Nancy Drew's creator, Carolyn Keene, is also pseudonymous, lending strength to the above argument. The effect then is, to some extent, ironic. Though the female-male combination of **Nancy** and **Drood** may at first appear odd, it is useful to be reminded that the mystery series had its origin in both male and female: e.g., Edward Stratemeyer and Harriet S. Adams. Stratemeyer formulated the name **Drew** as a counterpart to the names of his previous male characters (see Betsey Caprio, The Mystery of Nancy Drew [Source Books, 1992], p 18). Caprio prefers to see **Drew** in terms of the past tense of **draw**. Finally, the serial publication of Dickens' novels had, in turn, an effect on the Nancy Drew series.