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**“I always did hate watering-places”:  
Tourism and Carnival in Agatha Christie’s and Dorothy L. Sayers’s Seaside Novels**  
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**Abstract.** This article examines the interwar watering-place in Agatha Christie’s *Peril at End House* (1932) and Dorothy L. Sayers’s *Have His Carcase* (1932), drawing on theories of tourism and the social history of coastal resorts to demonstrate how these authors subvert the recuperative leisure and pleasure of the seaside by revealing sites for hedonism, performance, and carnival.

The Golden Age seaside novels of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers inhabit the interwar heyday of coastal resorts and tourism. The outburst of hedonism after World War I saw “the rise of recognizably modern resort activities” such as arcades, swimming pools and pavilions, as well as enthusiasm for sunbathing and sea swimming (Morgan and Pritchard 33). The seaside holiday was effectively branded and marketed by resort towns and a growing railway network, which contributed to defining the South Coast seaside holiday. In the 1930s, the Great Western Railway (GWR) promoted healthful outdoor activity such as camping and rambling in Devon to counter competition from foreign resorts (Morgan and Pritchard 121); slogans such as “Bournemouth: For Health and Pleasure” in a poster depicting a stylized fashionable woman in a backless evening dress gazing over pavilion, pier, and rugged coastline suggested “an elegant and restrained Bournemouth which promises leisure allied to refinement” (Harrington 30). These contexts of mobility, modern leisure culture, and social tone inform Christie’s Hercule Poirot novel *Peril at End House* (1932), which opens with a patriotic

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endorsement of domestic holidaying from Captain Hastings: “No seaside town in the south of England is, I think, as attractive as St Loo. It is well named the Queen of Watering Places and reminds one forcibly of the Riviera. The Cornish coast is to my mind every bit as fascinating as that of the south of France” (1). In contrast, at the end of Dorothy L. Sayers’s *Have His Carcase* (1932), Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane are repulsed by the transactional romances and exploitation behind the “health and pleasure” of a South Coast resort: “It’s all frightening and disgusting. We’ll go home” are Harriet’s final words. Peter responds: “Right-ho! We’ll go home. We’ll dine in Piccadilly. Damn it ... I always did hate watering-places!” (476). “Watering-place” refers to a fashionable resort traditionally known for sea-bathing or mineral water drinking; both Christie and Sayers emphasize the traditional healthful connotations of the seashore, ironically juxtaposed with narratives of moral and physical corruption and murder.

Drawing on the social history of the British seaside and theories of tourism, this article examines the grim reality that Christie and Sayers reveal beneath the holiday space and practices, and the stylized image of the “heterotopic tourist utopia” (Thompson 388) promised by railway advertising. In *Peril at End House*, set in the seaside town of “St. Loo,” Magdala “Nick” Buckley murders her cousin—also named Magdala Buckley—so she can claim an inheritance from her cousin’s fiancé and thereby keep her ancestral home End House. Charles Osborne reads St. Loo as the Devon seaside town of Torquay, suggesting that the novel’s Majestic Hotel is Torquay’s Imperial Hotel (95), but it is equally likely that St. Loo is Looe on the east Cornish coast. Both Torquay and the Cornish coast are connected to the French Riviera in interwar and contemporary advertising, and share a similar social tone. In *Have His Carcase*, Harriet is on a solitary walking holiday and stumbles across a bleeding corpse in a lonely cove. This turns out to be professional dancer Paul Alexis who was involved with Mrs. Weldon, a guest at the

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Resplendent Hotel in “Wilvercombe.” Wilvercombe shares some architectural and topographical similarity with Bournemouth, such as an orchestra in Wilvercombe’s Winter Gardens (151); Bournemouth’s Municipal Orchestra began to give concerts in the Winter Gardens in 1893 (Soane 147). Sayers holidayed in Bournemouth—a letter sent from there in 1922 opens, “I’m enjoying myself greatly as usual” (*Letters* 189). Two years later, she gave birth to an illegitimate child in Tuckton, a Bournemouth suburb (*Letters* 206). Sayers’s choice of location was perhaps informed by her awareness of the secrecy and anonymity afforded by the off-season seaside resort.

Narratives of crime and decay in *Have His Carcase* and *Peril at End House*, then, are shaped by the specific dark undercurrents of the seaside holiday—anonymity enabled by distance from everyday life and expectations, the opportunity for hedonistic liberation and transgression, and the unstable liminality of the coastal topography. As sociologist Rob Shields writes, “Its shifting nature between high and low tide, and as a consequence the absence of private property, contribute to the unterritorialised status of the beach unincorporated into the system of controlled, civilised spaces” (84). A key theme in both novels is the license afforded by this distance from the everyday and civilization; as Fred Inglis remarks, “Vacation is a time when one may try out on oneself the selves one might have been” (135). Brittain Bright describes the detective as a “stable, knowable entity” (98); the detective’s task, then, is to assert control over this psychologically, socially and topographically unstable site, and fix it within knowability, even though, as Bright remarks, “Christie’s work, particularly during the 1930s and 40s, asserts the alienating, modernist quality of the holiday and acknowledges the inherent unknowability of others” (108). At the conclusion of *Peril at End House*, Poirot has fully resolved all the problems of crime, place, and identity in the novel: “‘Now I know everything,’ he said happily” (239). By

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contrast, in Sayers's novel, it is precisely Harriet's and Peter's dawning understanding of the full extent of the crime—the murder of a middle-aged woman's 20-year-old boyfriend by her son Henry Weldon and his accomplices, as well as its likely repetition because of the continuing structures of desire and exploitation at the resort—that triggers their revulsion toward watering-places, as well as challenging the neat resolution often ascribed to the Golden Age novel. Mrs. Weldon ends the novel dancing with the next young gigolo.

This article examines Christie's and Sayers's subversion of the "tourist utopia" idealized in GWR advertising, with reference to topography, transgression, and criminal culture. Christie grew up in Torquay; her novels demonstrate familiarity with railway and travel advertising, and the marketing of the tourist experience. Sayers worked in an advertising agency for several years; indeed, in *Murder Must Advertise* (1932), Peter invents an advertising campaign in which collecting cigarette cards offers travel experiences. Mapping the performance of identities and desire in the seaside resort, this article argues that these are site-specific and enabled by the carnivalesque nature of the seaside novel. Although Christie's and Sayers's novels are situated in historically middle-class resorts on the southwest coast of England, the conclusion here is that the anxieties of splintering social cohesion represented through decadence, transgression, and tensions between visitors and locals in these novels challenge perceptions of the "enclosed" nature of the Golden Age murder narrative detached from its contemporary environment and insulated from grittier texts like Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938). The simultaneously feverish and chilling opening of *Brighton Rock* invokes the dark side of holiday spirit invoked by Christie and Sayers: "Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him. With his inky fingers and his bitten nails, his manner cynical and nervous, anybody could tell he didn't belong—belong to the early summer sun, the cool Whitsun wind off the sea,

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the holiday crowd” (3). Greene’s novel centers on the working classes and organized crime among local gangsters, but it essentially performs the same subversion of the seaside holiday as Christie and Sayers. The promenade and the pier in Brighton—key features of English seaside architecture—become scenes of stalking and murder, whereas the titular confectionary becomes a murder weapon.

In narratological criticism, the investigation of place in Golden Age detective fiction often has been superseded by the puzzle; for instance, Glenn Most and William Stowe remark that “[n]iceties of setting and characterization add charm, it is true, but the real power of the genre derives from its manipulation of stories and of the ways they can be told” (xii). A common scholarly perception has been that Golden Age settings, particularly Christie’s, are a “bucolic dream of England,” which is “never more than nostalgia or illusion” (Grossvogel 45, 52). Yet, as Crang notes, “It would be difficult to imagine a modernity without tourism, since tourism contributes precisely to a sense of modernity. . . . Tourism works as an interplay of movement and fixity, absence and presence” (49). The constitutive mobilities of the seaside novel, then, challenge the static settings suggested by Grossvogel. In more recent criticism, the modernity of the Golden Age is acknowledged, but the study of gender roles, sexual orientation and identity, and criminal and victim bodies and behavior are situated in a sociohistorical rather than geographical framework. Alison Light observes Christie’s talent for murderous subversion of settings “apparently representing order and harmony” (92), noting that she “captures a middlebrow world of burgeoning tourism” from Nile cruises to Devon boarding-houses (90) as well as the “new leisure culture imagined lethally” (94). Light establishes Christie’s position between modernity and conservatism, rather than investigates the textures of Christie’s imagined geographies. Megan Hoffman’s work is emblematic of the shift toward examining the modernity

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rather than nostalgia of the Golden Age; she discusses Peter's relationship with Harriet in *Have His Carcase* as "an exploration of a modern companionate marriage" (98), and victim/villain Nick as an embodiment of "stylish, boyish, modern femininity" (170) in *Peril at End House*, foregrounding sociohistorical rather than geographic specificity.

Bright has thoroughly investigated and theorized place in Golden Age detective fiction, particularly in the work of Christie, Sayers, and Gladys Mitchell; the shaping of the present argument owes much not only to her emphasis on the distinction between setting and place, but also her discussion of typologies of place in Christie's fiction and her observation that Sayers's "character's reactions to places in which they find themselves, from pride to amusement to disgust, illuminate both character and place" (8). Bright employs theories of human geography to argue that "[t]he 'setting' of a novel only gives the reader a very basic 'where'; when that 'where' takes on resonance in the course of the narrative, it is no longer merely a setting" (16). This insight informs her identification of typologies of place in Christie's fiction: "the house, the village, London (or the city), and the holiday (or the exotic)" (53). Bright observes that not only is the holiday a "different performative space, in which the performance of the criminal is concealed by that of the tourist" (54) but also that, "[u]nlike the dangerous performances of the city, these roles are temporally limited by the duration of the holiday, but the falsity inherent in the holiday itself—it is a pretense, a temporary escape from the normal course of life and work—lends itself to the detective plot" (106). These points resonate with the temporary and transitory communities and disguises of both *Peril at End House* and *Have His Carcase*.

Like Light, then, Bright blurs foreign and domestic travel into the same category and suggests that "[t]he place of the holiday, then, might be best defined as *placelessness*. . . . The placelessness of the holiday abstracts it from existing mores and societal constructs, but it also

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creates a place that is justified by its lack of orientation to the participants' known world" (106).

But the "seaside novel" has a place of its own, a cultural and criminal terrain where the class structure and routine of the village and country-house mystery coexist uneasily with the anonymity and transience of the metropolis. A key feature of the seaside novel, then, is the specificity of the place: the social scene, its therapeutic or luxurious history, and the physical topography of the resort shape the narratives of crime and detection in particular ways. This social scene is crucial to the seaside novel, which explicitly engages with contemporary practices and anxieties of tourism and holidaying. This rubric would not include coastal novels such as John Bude's *The Cornish Coast Murder* (1935), which is littoral but shaped around an enclosed and rooted village community. Bude's *Death on the Riviera* (1952), however, set in an expatriate colony and tourist resort in France, is a seaside novel. The seaside novel also is in a distinct category within holiday novels set on different terrains or in transit. In Christie's *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936) and *Appointment with Death* (1938), which Bright classes as holiday novels along with *Peril at End House*, the murderers' motives and connection to their victims are buried deep in the past, echoing the motifs of archaeological excavation and historical sites. In Christie's seaside novels *Evil Under the Sun* (1940) *The Body in the Library* (1941), and *Peril at End House*, there is little to link the killers and their victims besides chance, propinquity, and avarice, reflecting the potential for accidental encounters and casual relationships afforded by resort culture—even cousins Nick and Maggie in *Peril at End House* share no deep affection or sense of familial bonds.

A further justification for assigning seaside novels their own category is that mobility does not negate place. Indeed, as sociologist John Urry argues, it is precisely mobilities that construct place:

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A particular physical environment does not itself produce a tourist place. ...

Indeed places only emerge as tourist places when they are appropriated, used, and made part of the memories, narratives, and images of people engaged in embodied social practices. Such places are inscribed in circles of anticipation, performance, and remembrance. Places entail multiple mobilities that are very limited and very wide ranging. (ix)

Hastings's anticipation of the holiday ahead shapes the Cornish Riviera town of "St. Loo" as a tourist place, and as Poirot points out, Hastings's phrasing plagiarizes the slogan on the menu in the railway restaurant car—this anticipation is amplified by advertising. Similarly, it is Harriet and Peter's escape from the resort of Wilvercombe to the safety of the metropolis that inscribes the decadence and corruption of the seaside resort. A key theme of the following discussion, then, is articulating the specific imagined geography of the seaside resort and how it is inscribed by performance.

#### "A PERFECT HOLIDAY": TOURIST UTOPIA

Hastings's advertising-induced rhapsody over the Cornish Riviera is rooted in a series of Great Western Railway advertising campaigns. Indeed, as railway scholar Matthew Thompson details, drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, the GWR to a great extent constructed and consolidated the association between the South West Coast of England and the Riviera; the Cornish Riviera Express was a train in 1904, when the first Cornish Riviera guide book and poster series was produced by GWR to emphasize the "heterotopic nature of their tourist utopia" (388). As Thompson describes, between the wars, when continental travel became cheaper, GWR amplified their advertising of the domestic holiday but also needed to "layer the significance" of the tourist destination being constructed to "provide something for every desire" (35): "If images of the West Country ... were all designed to appeal to the solitary romantic



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walker then the company would miss out on ticket sales to those wishing for a seaside family holiday” (35). Torquay also was visually and conceptually linked to the French Riviera in advertising, which emphasized its climate and palm trees; a 1928 guidebook stated, “The blue of the harbour—reflecting the starry sky, the lights of the parade, and the illuminated Pavilion—is intended to invoke continental summer evenings” (Morgan and Pritchard 115). These examples demonstrate how place is constructed by tourism, as per Urry’s point—indeed, even the architecture and street layout of Torquay echo Monaco (on a less grand scale). These examples also indicate the sort of “utopia” undone by crime in Christie’s and Sayers’s novels. But it also is striking how Hastings and Harriet, in their respective novels, exhibit behaviors marketed as desirable by GWR. Hastings desires a leisurely and social seaside holiday for himself and Poirot, whereas Harriet is “the solitary romantic walker.”

Hastings desires a companionable seaside holiday with Poirot in a temperate climate. He takes pleasure in the carefully cultivated and landscaped hotel grounds:

The gardens of the hotel lay below us freely interspersed with palm trees. The sea was of a deep and lovely blue, the sky clear and the sun shining with all the single-hearted fervour an August sun should (but in England so often does not) have. There was a vigorous humming of bees, a pleasant sound—and altogether nothing could have been more ideal. . . . If only these weather conditions continued, we should indeed have a perfect holiday. (2–3)

This is a scene from a picture postcard or, indeed, an advertising illustration; it exudes leisure and excludes active participation in the environment. The weather emphasizes the association with the Riviera; this mirroring of spatial imagination is a clue to later doublings and artificial constructions of identity in the text for the reader, particularly if the reader is familiar with the

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Riviera's reputation as, in W. Somerset Maugham's phrase, "a sunny place for shady people" (156). As Bright suggests, "The dual role of the place echoes the dual role of the character: both Nick's real character [villain] and her performed character [innocent victim] are informed by the place that surrounds and motivates them" (122). Bright means End House, which Nick is intensely invested in possessing despite its expensive upkeep, but this doubling of place and character extends to the seaside setting itself. The subversion of this idyllic scene occurs early on when a shot seems to have been taken at Nick in the hotel gardens; Hastings's obliviousness to the real meaning of his surroundings extends to not noticing her deceit (although Poirot also is fooled at this point). This is the opening salvo of the murder mystery—an expected generic development. What is unexpected, however, and serves to heighten the sense of dark undercurrent and instability in the holiday place is Poirot's comment that "[a]ll this morning, my friend, speedboats have been making trips in the bay. You complained at first—soon, you did not even notice. But, *ma foi*, you could fire a machine gun almost and not notice it when one of those boats is on the sea" (15). The emphasis in *Peril at End House* is on social rather than physical resort activity, and therefore there is little topographical detail, unlike in *Evil Under the Sun*, for instance, where the location of a cave is important to the crime and investigation. In *Have His Carcase*, the situation of the corpse and the mapping both the shore and the surrounding countryside are key to the detection process. In *Peril at End House*, meanwhile, Poirot's challenge is to penetrate social and performative disguises rather than search for footprints or dive for evidence. Hastings, however, remains fixated on his picture-postcard version of England to the end. He fails to notice, for instance, that "Commander Challenger of the English Navy," a "real pukka sahib" (15) and a man he takes to be a "transparent lover" (90) of Nick's, is in fact a drug dealer supplying cocaine hidden in wristwatches to several Bright Young Things at the resort.

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Whereas Hastings and Poirot are on holiday together, Harriet at the start of *Have His Carcase* is engaging actively with the countryside on a solitary walking tour. Harriet's hike along the coast invokes the railway: "Except for an occasional tradesman's van, or a dilapidated Morris, and the intermittent appearance of white smoke from a distant railway-engine, the landscape was as rural and solitary as it might have been two hundred years before" (2). Harriet's appearance "tanned to an agreeable biscuit-colour by sun and wind" (2) echoes publicity images of hikers "redolent of youth and vitality" (Thompson 315). In the early 1930s, the GWR promoted hiking and an "active landscape which is there to be moved through, explored, understood, and explained" (Thompson 329); this resonates with Harriet and Peter's methodology for investigating and explaining the crime. They drive and walk around the countryside, as well as measure the shore. In addition, Peter, in an inversion of the typical "bathing belle" tourist advertisement, dives for evidence as Harriet admires his physique.

Like *Peril at End House*, the novel opens peacefully on the shore. Harriet decides to picnic in a cove: "The tide was nearly out now, and the wet beach shimmered golden and silvery in the lazy noonlight" (2). As a detective story writer, she is interested in the terrain. She spots what seems to be seaweed on a rock some way out to sea, but, through a process of what Ian Watt terms "delayed decoding" (175), gradually realizes that it is a corpse:

It was a corpse. Not the sort of corpse there would be any doubt about, either. Mr Samuel Weare of Lyons Inn, whose "throat they cut from ear to ear", could not have been more indubitably a corpse. Indeed, if the head did not come off in Harriet's hands, it was only because the spine was intact, for the larynx and all the great vessels of the neck had been severed "to the hause-bone", and a frightful stream, bright red and glistening, was running over the surface of the rock and

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dripping into a little hollow below.

Harriet put the head down again and felt suddenly sick. (5–6)

This body not only challenges the perception of the “bloodless corpse” (Scaggs 43) of the Golden Age but also the reassurance in the advertising posters “that one was never *too* far from civilisation” (Thompson 388; emphasis original). Harriet’s response to her contact with the corpse here is abject; as Julia Kristeva writes, “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (qtd. in Plain 10). Gill Plain suggests that “[c]rime fiction’s vicarious confrontation of death thus simultaneously exposes and disguises the abject” (10); Harriet’s nausea here signifies the reaction of the human rather than the detective story writer to the breakdown in meaning and civilization suggested by this corpse, a body that is not only dead but inexplicably still bleeding. The tide is coming in, and there is the danger that the corpse will be swept out to sea, along with any evidence it carries. Harriet’s response—to document the corpse with her camera—can be read as the resurgence of the instincts of the writer, or a scientific and forensic response that signifies reason reasserting itself after her feeling of nausea. But this photography also is a typically touristic response. She copes with the abject by framing the corpse as a spectacle to be photographed, her contact with death and violence mediated through the lens.

W. H. Auden argues that detective novels should be set in a pre-lapsarian state of innocence before the murder: “[I]t should be the Great Good Place; for the more Eden-like it is, the greater the contradiction of murder” (408). *Peril at End House* and *Have His Carcase* reveal the impossibility of this idyll. Even before the central crime is discovered, St. Loo is inflected with unholy influence both spiritually—Nick has inherited her grandfather’s nickname of “Old

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Nick,” a euphemism for the devil—and materially. Commander George Challenger is a cocaine dealer; one of Nick’s oldest friends, Frederica Rice, is an addict. Poirot remarks, “Sometimes she is all on edge, strung up—sometimes she is lifeless—inert” (Christie, *Peril* 138). Drug-taking causes moral as well as psychological corruption, as Hastings responds, ““Drug-taking affects the moral sense, does it not?””, to which Poirot answers, “Inevitably” (138). The topography of the coast where Harriet finds Alexis’s body in *Have His Carcase* has Satanic resonances. The rock he is draped over is named the Devil’s Flat-Iron, and the bay is surrounded by rocks called the Grinders (37), suggesting superstition and shipwreck. Drugs also are a corruptive force in Wilvercombe; the professional dancer Antoine comments that “[I] see so many people who have clean blood and strong bodies spoiling themselves and distorting their brains with drugs and drink and foolishness, it makes me angry” (150). These crimes are peripheral to the central murders, but nevertheless they shape the environment in which the crime is invented and carried out—even in the Golden Age, there was no such thing as a Garden of Eden before the snake.

#### “KING DEATH HAS ASSES’ EARS”: DESIRE AND CARNIVAL

In *Have His Carcase*, the social machinations of the resort take on a grotesque aspect; the liberation and therapeutic value of the seaside become decadence on the dance floor of the Resplendent, as resort workers mingle with the clientele in a system of flirtation, seduction, and exploitation. Similarly, the sophisticated Bright Young Thing culture of St. Loo is corrupted by drugs and lacks integrity: “We lived an insincere life. She *used* to be fond of me”, as Frederica says of Nick (207; emphasis original). This exploitation and shallowness evoke the “rootless and impoverished layers of poverty and insecurity which the larger resorts generated, worlds in which relationships were impermanent and instrumental” (Walton 6). Light writes that “[s]ocial life is always a kind of impersonation in Christie’s novels; it is openly seen to be theatrical, a

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matter of convincing your audience by a clear repertoire of gestures and speech mannerisms” (96); this often is the case in Sayers’s novels as well. Indeed, Bright suggests that speech and manners are constitutive of place in Sayers’s novels: “Sayers’ use of conversations, which in effect “perform” a place, subordinates the physical place to the “world-as-experienced” (197). In the seaside novel, however, resort culture introduces an element of lability that undermines, or suspends, the consistent performance of the social self. Shields observes the (Bakhtinian) carnival atmosphere of the beach holiday:

Against the empiricism, cerebral rationality, emphasis on control and economy, carnival produces a momentary social space based on the politics of pleasure and physical senses. ... The foolish, undisciplined body is the most poignant symbol of the carnivalesque. (95)

At the seaside, Harriet and Peter dance as equals; their difference in social status (and, more important, Harriet’s consciousness of this difference) as well as their detection of Henry Weldon’s movements and character are briefly suspended in sensuality: “Wimsey had never danced with her, never held her in his arms. ... They made the circuit of the room in silence and harmony” (125). Henry’s mother loses herself in fantasies of a romance with Alexis, even as he loses himself in Ruritanian fantasies of inheriting the Russian Imperial throne. In *Peril at End House*, upper-class divorcée and cocaine addict Frederica finds romance with picture dealer Jim Lazarus, who is “a Jew, of course, but a frightfully decent one,” as Nick comments (34).

The “politics of pleasure” are grotesque as well as romantic in *Have His Carcase*. Walton links Shields’s articulation of the seaside holiday carnival to a breakdown in social order: “[T]he usual constraints on respectability and decorum in public behaviour might be pushed aside in the interests of holiday hedonism, and of carnivalesque escape from the petty restrictions of

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everyday life in displays of excess” (96). This hedonism is given an unhealthy, even sinister, cast in Sayers’s novel. The Resplendent is described as “one of those monster seaside palaces which look as though they had been designed by a German manufacturer of children’s cardboard toys” (27). The professional dancers are on display in the ballroom:

The man was tall and fair, with sleek hair plastered closely to his head, and a queer, unhealthy face with a wide, melancholy mouth. The girl, in an exaggerated gown of petunia satin with an enormous bustle and a train, exhibited a mask of Victorian coyness as she revolved languidly in her partner’s arms to the strains of the “Blue Danube.” (40)

The emphasis here is on excess and artificiality in both architecture and the costumes of the dancers. Nostalgia for Victorian seaside tourism and a more decorous version of femininity than that exhibited on the tennis courts by the “muscular young women of the day” (29) is evident. Masks and performed identity, then, are integral to resort society and not only employed by criminals such as Henry Weldon and Commander Challenger. Harriet remarks that the blonde “exercising S.A. [sex appeal] on a group of rather possessive-looking males, will turn into a predatory hag” (41); this display of hedonism without joy, the motions of intimacy without true companionship, is a cautionary example for Harriet, a dark double of her later harmonious dance with Peter. The “blonde” turns out to be Mrs. Weldon, anxiously awaiting Alexis and ignorant of the fact that he has been murdered by her son.

The “foolish body” of the seaside carnival also is invoked by Sayers’s use of epigraphs from Thomas Lovell Beddoes’s poem *Death’s Jest-Book* (1850) for most of the chapters in the novel. The epigraph to the final chapter reads:

Take thou this flower to strew upon his grave,

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A lily of the valley; it bears bells,  
For even the plants, it seems, must have their fool,  
So universal is the spirit of folly;  
And whisper, to the nettles of his grave,  
“King Death hath asses’ ears.” (355)

Here foolishness and ridiculousness triumph over the dignity that mourning rituals should have; the flower that “bears bells,” the floral fool, refers to the fool or jester of the carnival. Peter quotes Beddoes in summing up the crime: “‘Well,’ said Wimsey, ‘isn’t that a damned awful, bitter, bloody farce? . . . God! What a jape! King Death has asses’ ears with a vengeance” (360). The intellectual business of crime and detection, as well as the spiritual sense that death should be solemn and meaningful, are overturned by the carnival spirit of the seaside. The novel ends with Peter’s and Harriet’s decision to return to the metropolis—in a reversal of the usual understanding of the urban environment, London with all its dangers is more predictable and thereby more secure and homely than the seaside. Bright observes that “[t]he holiday novel, . . . typically ends with the characters setting off for their homes, often with changed outlooks and relationships: the holiday, rather than being a break between periods of sameness, becomes a transformative experience” (114). This applies to some extent here, but what is more significant in the context of carnival is the reversal of conventional feeling and the resulting challenge to the narratives of the seashore as a site of health and pleasure.

In *Peril at End House*, the flirtations and dances of the Bright Young Things are not only undermined by addiction, as previously discussed, but used by Nick to plot the murder of Magdala (nicknamed Maggie), her cousin. As in *Have His Carcase*, a familial murder is obscured by the performativity and carnival atmosphere of the seaside; as Bright remarks,



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Christie combines “the masquerade of the holiday and the city into the family-oriented house” (116). Nick’s plot hinges on pretending that her own life is under threat from shooting, car sabotage, and cocaine poisoning. On the night of the murder, Nick dresses Maggie in her shawl and shoots her during a firework display on the shore; Nick then claims to have been the intended victim all along. As Horsley points out, “These doubles correspond to her dual role within the novel (actual transgressor but pretended victim)” (49). But Nick’s doubling with Maggie has further implications within the carnival atmosphere of the seaside resort. The gay and sporty Nick is “a modern” (33), as Poirot comments. Her features are “elfin” (9); her eyes are “reckless” with “dark shadows” (9). Maggie, on the other hand, is pure and honest: “Her face was innocent of makeup [...]. She had frank blue eyes” (66). Nick persuades Maggie to wear her scarlet Chinese shawl; interestingly, the etymology of the word *Magdala* includes reference to both biblical harlot Mary Magdalene and a dye called “Magdala red” (*OED*). While Maggie is wrapped up in Nick’s scarlet shawl (a scarlet woman), Nick herself is in a plain black dress like Maggie—the “carnavalesque” masquerade, liberation, and removal from the ordinary world (Shields 73) allows Nick to briefly inhabit the role of a good woman. End House, then, is not only a gothic family home, as Horsley suggests (48), a locus for Nick’s emotional energy and a ramshackle building out-of-place in the well-manicured resort, but also a theater. As Poirot exclaims when Nick’s deceptions are revealed: “How well she played her part! Magnificently! Oh, yes, she staged a fine drama here” (205). Indeed, as Birns and Boe Birns observe, “Both [Nick and Poirot] operate on a perceived confusion between mask and reality, a confusion which they think they can solve, but which others cannot” (130).

In both novels, the “cerebral rationality” and control of the detective is undermined by the carnival of the seaside space. Whereas characters such as Mrs. Weldon and Frederica are

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made foolish by their desire and addiction, and betray their class while doing so, Harriet, Peter, Hastings, and Poirot are temporarily made foolish by disciplined criminals who exploit the “politics of pleasure” of the resort. This sense of carnival—the suspension and destabilization of ordinary life and hierarchy—is enhanced in both novels by uncanny and fantastic details that evoke the fairground carnival tradition. Murderer Henry Weldon performs daring feats on a horse and has a snake tattoo. Poirot creates a haunted house within End House, staging a séance for the novel’s dénouement, in which Nick, who has faked her own death, appears, playing the part of her own ghost: “She advanced slowly and noiselessly—with a kind of floating ethereal motion that certainly conveyed the impression of nothing human . . .” (191). Floating here suggests water and the lability of the shore. The doubling and performance of identity necessary to commit and resolve crime in both novels recalls the “hall of mirrors” of the fairground. The spectacles of the fairground and the circus would have been associated with entertainment for “the lower orders,” which authorities would have viewed as “a threat to social order” (Morgan and Pritchard 21). In the rarefied social atmosphere of the South West coast resorts, these carnivalesque breaches in moral code, decorum, and rationality serve to highlight the lability not only of the seaside community and the identities played out there but also challenge the notion of the detective story as static and wholly rational.

#### BESIDE THE SEASIDE TODAY

The precarious balance maintained on the beach among local populations, transient workers, and visitors of different classes and nationalities with different motives is fertile ground for stories of crime among Christie’s and Sayers’s contemporaries and successors, but Christie’s and Sayers’s seaside novels remain popular. Ironically, the stylized landscapes and beaches that interwar advertising promoted as healthful and pleasurable, creating narratives of place

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undermined by Christie and Sayers, are now nostalgically embedded in the paratexts of Christie's and Sayers's novels, and the genre of cozy crime. The TV adaptation of *Peril at End House* (1990) with David Suchet emphasizes the sailing and bathing of the seaside, as well as the Art Deco hotel milieu. Historical novels and their adaptations such as Kerry Greenwood's Phryne Fisher mysteries (novels 1989 to present, TV program 2012–15) also explicitly evoke the aesthetics as well as the social behaviours of the 1920s and 1930s seaside resorts. Contemporary programs such as *Death in Paradise* (2011–present) draw on the precarious social dynamics and dark underside of resort culture and tourism. The Christie industry is prominent in Torquay, appealing to literary tourists, again in an ironic appeal to nostalgia that Christie warned against in *At Bertram's Hotel* (1965). Tourism, then, shaped the places of Christie's novels but has, in turn, been shaped by them. Sayers's complicated connection to Bournemouth has become obscured, even as the town is disguised in the novel. *Have His Carcase* still serves as a map to the past, of sorts—the Bournemouth Winter Gardens were demolished in 1937 (Soane 241), but in Sayers's novel, they survive as a location for music, flirtation, and creation of an alibi for crime.

*Keywords:* Christie, Agatha; Golden Age; Sayers, Dorothy L.; seaside; tourism

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