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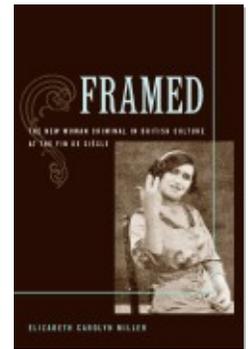
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THREE

THE LIMITS OF THE GAZE

Class, Gender, and Authority in Early British Cinema

Historians of film debate such basic questions as who invented cinema and what year it first appeared, but all now agree that the early film archive, once relegated to the embarrassing category of “primitive” filmmaking, is a rich trove for understanding modern developments in culture, narrative, and visuality.¹ In Britain, the Lumière brothers’ films first appeared on movie screens in 1896, while Thomas Edison’s “peepshow” films debuted a few years earlier, but what happened for the next fifteen or twenty years was, for a long time, of little interest to literary and cultural critics. This chapter considers early British crime films about female criminals, and its endeavor is partly archaeological, as critics have not yet established early British crime film’s relation to contemporaneous crime literature, nor the broader relations between literature and film of this era.² I will examine early crime film in relation to the cultural practices I have identified in detective series, and my chronological scope will include cinema from 1896 to 1913; these films reproduce crime fiction’s New Woman Criminal, but the unique form and context of early cinema also transform the cultural meaning of this figure. Because of early cinema’s cultural status as working-class entertainment, crime films address far more directly than crime fiction the class politics of female consumption. Moreover, while we have seen that female criminals were glamorous, rapacious consumers before the advent

of film, this characterization expands and evolves in motion pictures due to early cinema's promotion, as Paula Black has put it, of "femininity as a process of image selection" (33).

Before I turn to the films themselves, let me offer a few pertinent remarks on early cinema, rather than slipping seamlessly from a discussion of magazine fiction to a discussion of another medium altogether. Because filmmaking is an "industry" to a greater extent than fiction writing, many critics have assumed that it is more bound by capitalism's implicit and explicit forms of censorship, and for many years, film was hardly thought to be an "art" at all, since an enormous gap appeared to exist between the artist as Romantic individual and a crew that engages in both technical and creative labor. Film was not yet industrialized or integrated in its earliest years, however, but sat somewhere between artisanal and entrepreneurial, and one might argue that appreciation of film as an art form correlated with its adoption of bourgeois ideology.

While these early, volatile years of British film can thus offer surprisingly heterodox narratives, radical shifts in filmmaking did occur in the seventeen years that constitute the scope of my study. Tom Gunning has called films from 1896 to 1906 a "cinema of attractions," whose chief *raison d'être* was to create a spectacle, trick, or thrill rather than to compose a narrative. In contrast, he and other film historians often term 1906–13 a period of "narrative integration," which saw the solidification of the film industry, the "language" of continuity editing, and the conventions of filmic storytelling. In Britain as in other countries, economic and social pressures contributed to such formal and aesthetic developments. Britain's hodgepodge of pre-1913 filmmakers bears little resemblance to the vertically integrated studio system of Hollywood's golden age, much less the transnational, cross-marketing conglomerates that dominate the entertainment industry today, but when the British Board of Censorship was inaugurated in January 1913, it ushered the industry into a new age of relatively systematic, centralized film regulation. Though this censorship organ was not state-controlled, its introduction marks the advent of a more incorporated and less erratic age of film production.

For all these reasons, pre-1913 films invite the same terminological dilemmas one also faces in writing about crime fiction, magazines, and other "popular" or "mass" cultures. "Popular culture" suggests organic cultural forms that emerge spontaneously from authentic audience endorsement or desire; "mass culture," on the other hand, implies forms that have been imposed on audiences by a centralized capitalist culture industry with sophisticated means of manufacturing audience desire.

Early film lies somewhere between these formulations. Like detective fiction, film often regulates, normalizes, and performs other “mass cultural” disciplinary functions, but in its earliest years in Britain, it attracted an almost exclusively working-class audience, and often addressed class-specific pain and indignation. The same could not be said of early U.S. cinema, which according to Miriam Hansen had a “heterogenous” audience, “mostly the new urban middle class” (61). Audience composition is a contentious issue among scholars of early U.S. cinema, but not early British cinema. Films that cost a nickel in U.S. nickelodeons were only a penny in Britain, less than half as much in exchange rates of the day (Burrows, “Penny Pleasures” 71). Because it was “cheaper to see a film than to attend any other form of organized entertainment,” as Nicholas Hiley writes, the British cinema “appealed to those people who were too poor to join other paying audiences” (“Fifteen” 106). British film’s early marginality temporarily mounted a genuinely “popular” culture, which often celebrates antibourgeois and antiauthoritarian values.³ It was not a utopian or extracapitalist space: Britain’s film pioneers often made tidy profits (Barnes 2:8), and even rabidly antibourgeois films tend to endorse and naturalize a voracious urge to consume. Its audiences were clearly not stupefied into ideological submission, however, and its appeal elicited widespread fears about the rise of a working-class mass medium, not unlike earlier debates surrounding the penny press and the taxes on knowledge in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Besides having a different audience, early film was also far more international than contemporary fiction, and a film’s national origin had much less to do with its presence in the British public than was the case for magazine series or novels. French and U.S. film dominated the British market from early on: in 1909 and 1910, for example, only 15 percent of the films shown in Britain were British (Low 54).⁴ Film’s cosmopolitanism was part of its association with the “new,” but it also begs the question of why this chapter should focus exclusively on films made in Britain. British films did have unifying stylistic elements, such as an antiauthority sensibility, and British companies certainly employed the *idea* of a national style to market their films: a 1910 advertisement in the *Bioscope* reads, “BRITISH FILMS FOR BRITISH AUDIENCES. You are in business to make money—the easiest way to do so is to please your Audiences. They being English prefer ENGLISH PICTURES;” Hepworth Manufacturing Company touted in another advertisement, “ALL BRITISH PRODUCTIONS. PICTURES which your audience can APPRECIATE and UNDERSTAND.”⁵ Despite the simplistic nationalism underlying such claims, I

limit my analysis to British films because they are enmeshed in the intricacies of historical and cultural localism, including the narrative discourse of crime, gender, and female criminality that my other chapters examine. British crime films didn't begin from scratch in 1896, but grew out of generic practices already in place, such as in detective series and dynamite narrative.⁶

If early British film picks up on the preexisting figure of the New Woman Criminal, it also offers a vital reinvention of this narrative persona. I argue in this chapter that film's visual and spectacular form, as well as its unique audience and context, occasioned pivotal shifts in the New Woman Criminal's cultural role. In a visual medium so dependent upon characters' bodies, female criminals' physical glamour becomes increasingly significant in motion pictures. Early film thus illuminates a shift toward image-centered conceptions of femininity, incrementally apparent in the fictional genres that precede cinema. Film also adapts the New Woman Criminal to the sensibilities of a proletarian audience. British cinema's working-class public fostered an antiauthoritarian political sensibility that is largely absent from contemporaneous literature; thus filmic female criminals reveal the underlying class regulation at work in narratives of theft. A sharp contrast emerges, however, when we compare such New Woman Criminals to filmic representations of suffragettes. At the end of the chapter, I turn away from conventional crime films to consider films about militant suffragette violence, and here we see the limits of film's antiauthoritarianism. En masse feminist political action aroused far more filmic hostility than female criminals' individual violations of property law, which paradoxically served to *uphold* consumerist, individualist ideologies; thus early crime films both complement and complicate crime fiction's depictions of authority, gender, and criminality.

GLAMOUR AND THE GAZE: GENDER IN EMERGING FIELDS OF VISION

I want to begin by discussing how film's visual form intersected with a scopophilic turn in the narrative representation of female criminals. Authors of detective fiction as well as sensation fiction depict transgressive women as uniquely apt subjects for the erotic gaze, but this maneuver becomes even more significant when projected erotically on screen. Criminal women are overtly sexualized, for example, in the 1898 film

Duel to the Death.⁷ Produced by British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, *Duel to the Death* features two women fighting with daggers, and could function as a primer on why criminal women tend to be filmed erotically.⁸ As the film begins, the actresses strip down to their undergarments, so they wear only petticoats and bodices during the duel. Tropical flowers and palm fronds garnish the film's mise-en-scène, summoning conventional associations between the exotic and the erotic, and though the women's dress does not appear foreign, criminality marks them as alien, sexual, and titillating. They circle around one another and pounce. As they wrestle, the straps of their chemises slide down, revealing bare shoulders incrementally like a striptease. Eventually, one woman's breast is partially exposed to the camera. The seminude women stare intently into each other's eyes as they fight, and finally, one stabs and kills the other.

This film demonstrates how criminality can function to designate women as appropriate subjects of the erotic gaze. Constance Balides writes of early U.S. cinema: "pornographic and erotic films from this period justify the display of women by relying on the pretext of a theatrical performance or out of the ordinary situation" (20). Criminal behavior—definitionally eccentric to norms—is a perfect "out of the ordinary situation" to "justify" erotic display. Female criminal transgression legitimates the sexual voyeurism of the camera, while the revelation of the women's bodies transforms the duel into a sexually charged spectacle. It is not altogether clear, however, that *Duel to the Death* simulates the "male gaze" that feminist critics since Laura Mulvey have described, as its actresses enact both diagesis and spectacle. Examples of erotically depicted women are readily available in early British film, as in *Duel to the Death*, but typically do not follow a stable division between male action and female spectacle, such as Mulvey finds in classic Hollywood cinema. As Hansen writes in her analysis of U.S. silent film, "early cinema was no less patriarchal than its classical successor . . . [but] lacked the formal strategies to predetermine reception in the classical sense" (38). Recent critical work in film as well as literature has challenged an overly rigid conception of the "male gaze," as Deborah Parsons describes (4–6). I am less interested in engaging with this specific term than with identifying emerging, historically specific modes of representing sexuality, vision, and power at the turn of the century.

The formulation of modern visual/sexual sensibilities, I argue, was bound up with social shifts such as women entering the workforce and gaining more access to the public sphere, and with the rise of cinema and

other visual culture. The “to-be-looked-at-ness” of the female criminal body, to use Mulvey’s term, thus plays an important but uneven role in early film. I find the term *glamour* more useful than *spectacle*, in describing this to-be-looked-at-ness, because it captures the ambiguity of film’s emerging sexual tone in depicting female criminals. Peter Bailey has used the term *glamour* to describe a new sexual “middle ground” at the end of the nineteenth century: sexuality that was neither domesticated nor illicit, but existed in “everyday settings” like “the expanding apparatus of the service industries, and commercialised popular culture” (148). Glamour, in this sense, is an elusive desirability primarily visual in nature: “Glamour and its stimulus to the sexual pleasure in looking . . . gave a new emphasis to the visual element in the changing sexual economy” (167–68).

Bailey does not link glamour with Charles Baudelaire’s *passante*, but the two concepts might be profitably connected. Both glamour and the *passante* refer to a new kind of modern femininity defined by visibility, attraction, and remoteness. Parsons has discussed the *passante*’s “ability to evade being fixed by the male gaze,” claiming she is a “metaphor” for “modern, autonomous” women (64), parallel to my formulation of glamorous female criminals. Filmic women, elusive as flickering light, are perhaps the perfection of Baudelaire’s *passante*, for the rise of photography contributed to the development of this new model of femininity. Susan Sontag claims that with photography, “new conventions about what was beautiful took hold. What is beautiful becomes just what the eye can’t (or doesn’t) see: that fracturing, dislocating vision that only the camera supplies” (91). Glamour, in this sense, is a specifically *photographic* visual effect: it is always mediated and never perceived directly. This is why, in Bailey’s analysis, the barrier provided by the bar is what makes the barmaid glamorous.

The concepts of glamour and the *passante* provide useful models for discussing the female body in early film. Glamour, like the *passante*, is characterized by distance, achieved through “the traditional device of the stage; more recently by the shop window or the distance inherent in the mechanical representations of photography, film and television” (Bailey 152). While theater also relies on the distance between actor and audience to imbue the stage with meaning, film intensifies the sense of distanced desire by exacerbating the separation between the performer and spectator, and by creating an illusion of intimacy through close-ups, lighting, and other filmic effects. The uniquely mediated intimacy of film was the perfect forum for representing glamorous female offenders:

the distance between the spectator and the image on screen is heightened by criminality, positioning such women at an even further remove. Films such as *Duel to the Death* capitalize on the female criminal's "out-law" position to voyeuristically parade her sexuality; thus the glamorous female criminal was often much more sexualized in early film than in crime fiction.

The 1909 Cricks and Martin film *Salome Mad* comically satirizes the modern interconnectedness of cinematic glamour, transgressive women, and distanced desire.⁹ At the time of the film's release, Britain was in the grip of "Salomania," as Philip Hoare describes it, and Maud Allan's erotic dance performance *Vision of Salomé* was all the rage. Like a filmic female criminal, Allan's rendition of Salomé was transgressive yet alluring, criminal yet beautiful. *Salome Mad* exacerbates the distance between the filmic Salomé and her admirer to comic effect, and links this particular form of impossible desire to the visual illusion of cinema. The film depicts a man who falls in love with Salomé, or rather with her picture on a poster in a shop. He buys the poster, but loses it in the wind, and chases it across town. So enamored is he with Salomé's image that he pursues the poster up a ladder, through a bedroom window, into a movie theater, and under the sea. On the seafloor, the poster comes alive, and Salomé performs her erotic dance for the man's visual pleasure. In his ecstasy, he attempts to embrace and kiss her, but before he can grasp her, his rescuers fish him out of the ocean. Salomé's dance, it turns out, was merely the near-death illusion of a drowning man. In depicting a love affair between a man and a poster, the film comically mocks the absurd physical and emotional connections that can obtain between humans and visual commodities under modern capitalism.

Rudyard Kipling's "Mrs Bathurst" (1904) is a less comedic, more haunting take on this idea. In the short story, a British serviceman in South Africa becomes fixated on the image of his former love, Mrs Bathurst, after watching her in an actuality film at a traveling circus. He ends the story burned to a crisp in an electrical storm. Nicholas Daly reads the cryptic narrative as a parable of cinematic technology, and views Mrs. Bathurst as a version of the cinematic "it" girl, a personification of filmic glamour: "the cinema apparatus magnifies Mrs Bathurst's 'It' to the point that her on-screen representation does not simply attract Vickery—it obsesses him" (76). Interestingly, while Daly suggests that the cinematograph "seems to exert more power over [Vickery] than the woman herself" (76), Kipling's story refers three times to Mrs. Bathurst's "blindish" way of looking. On film, for example, "she looked out straight at us with

that blindish look” (287), as though she too is dazzled by the flickering light of cinema. Kipling thus presents the gaze as unidirectional and chimerical, yet treacherous to both viewer and subject.

In different ways, both *Salome Mad* and “Mrs Bathurst” indicate that glamour is a concept inextricable from Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism. Glamour, like commodity fetishism, is an intangible generator of indefinite desire; unlike commodity fetishism, however, glamour adheres to a person—more precisely, the image of a person—rather than an object or commodity. Mindful of Benjamin’s Marxian reading of the *passante* in *Charles Baudelaire*, we can view glamour, like the *passante*, as a phantasmagoric abstraction of consumer capitalism, part of the “consumerist” or “image-centered” models of body and visibility that I discuss in chapter 2. Consumerism’s new means of manipulating desire via vision and distance—as with large plate-glass windows and prominent department store displays—anticipated the spectatorship of filmic glamour.¹⁰

If glamour suggests a new visual-sexual order for the modern world, we have already seen how criminal science outlined a seemingly opposite modern relation between visibility and power. As I discuss in chapter 1, the decades preceding the 1896 emergence of cinema saw widespread innovation in the field of visual technology, and the disciplinary uses of vision were eagerly investigated as criminologists mined visual technology for means of identifying criminals and tightening social controls. Criminal theorists like Galton, Bertillon, Lombroso, and Ellis imagined the gaze in terms of knowledge rather than feeling; unlike consumerist appeals to vision, they considered the eye as powerful and controlling rather than vulnerable and desiring. Benjamin’s distinction between “trace” and “aura” helps explain this crucial difference between criminological and consumerist notions of visibility: “The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us” (*Arcades* 447). The criminological gaze, we might say, apprehends the visible as what Benjamin calls trace, whereas the consumerist gaze perceives aura or glamour.

Fictional detectives like Sherlock Holmes operate in tandem with new criminological theories of vision, and the Holmes series thematizes the prospect of near-perfect surveillance and authority in modern criminal science. Tom Gunning has located a similar predisposition toward the criminological gaze in early cinema.¹¹ He uses a 1904 U.S. film, *A*

Subject for the Rogues' Gallery, to exemplify cinema's indebtedness to visual theories of criminology. The film depicts a female criminal who resists police efforts to take her photographic "mug shot." Gunning argues that the film reveals the "ineffectiveness" of her resistance ("Tracing" 27), and thus the "process of criminal identification represents a new aspect of the disciplining of the body which typifies modernity" (20); but his analysis fails to account for the woman's manipulation of her appearance, which defies the criminological gaze of the police. A very attractive woman, she sits smilingly and complacently until the camera is trained on her face, at which point she grotesquely contorts her features and begins to bawl violently, to distort the photographer's image. The moment the camera is withdrawn, however, she shuts off her tears like a faucet and affectedly smoothes her hair. The sharp contrast between her vanity and beauty (captured by the off-screen camera) and her contorted, anguished mug shot (captured by the on-screen camera) indicates the failure of the criminological gaze: she has no singular appearance or particular bodily identity to be fixed, recorded, or caught.¹²

The crime films that I discuss in this chapter similarly interweave the criminological gaze of power and the consumerist gaze of desire and lack, but just as in crime fiction, filmic representations of female criminals do not simply map onto a visual binary between female transgressive spectacle and male authoritative gaze. The presence of female detectives and other woman "gazers" in early film strongly challenges such a division. The 1910 Cricks and Martin film *Bumpkin's Patent Spyopticon*, for example, imagines the augmentation of conventionally *feminine* authority by means of new technologies of vision. The film no longer exists, but was described at length in contemporary film magazines.¹³ A wife "leaves the house on a shopping expedition" and "passes an 'Amusement Arcade.'" She is "attracted by a poster advertising a 'Spyopticon'—a wonderful instrument which reveals the action of absent persons without their knowledge," and "pays her penny to peep into the instrument." In the device, "she witnesses her hubby entering a sitting-room with an attractive young lady" and "observes the couple . . . embracing shamelessly."¹⁴ The wife later gets revenge by enjoying a shameless embrace of her own. The film posits a relationship between the ongoing scientific "progress" of modernity, signified by the "patent spyopticon," and the feminization of the public sphere, signified by women's shopping, sexual equality, and enhanced visual surveillance. Here, women are part of modernity's incremental encroachment into

patriarchal autonomy; technologies of visual authority are not aligned with the expert male eye, but with egalitarianism and the feminization of public politics and public life.

Early British films about female detectives and female figures of visual authority pose a challenge to overly rigid conceptions of male visual power at the turn of the century, but many of these films presume the *undesirability* of women exercising the gaze of social control. The 1908 film *If Women Were Policemen* capitalizes on antisuffrage sentiment by satirically depicting “militant suffragettes” who “take over [the] police force” (Gifford no. 01805). The 1910 B & C (British and Colonial Kinematograph Company) film *When Women Join the Force* illustrates, according to a contemporary film periodical, “the state of affairs which would obtain if the police force accepted female recruits, and . . . the picture is not a very reassuring, though an extremely humorous, one.”¹⁵ The film’s policewomen flee burglars, dog thieves, and wife beaters, but arrest a small boy for stealing an apple. Britain had no policewomen until 1915, so such satires comically stoke anxiety about the possibility of women’s advancement into positions of visual and social authority.

Like contemporaneous fiction, many early British films exhibit a preoccupation with “new” and “modern” modes of femininity and with women who work in the public sphere. Some suggest that women’s emancipation will disrupt family relations, such as *The New Woman* (1905), in which a woman “makes [her] husband do housework while she goes to his office” (Gifford no. 01172). Others exploit the volatile new sexual realm opened up by women’s more general public employment. For example, a 1904 film called *Once Too Often* depicts an “exciting scene between thief and shop girl” (Gifford no. 00911), while *The Mill Girl*, a 1913 Hepworth film, features a “factory girl” named Lizzie whose foreman frames her for theft after she “indignantly repulses” his “attempts to make love to her.” At the end of the film, “the foreman is rushed off to the police station by an irate crowd of women,” “Lizzie is immediately released,” and “the foreman is arrested on the charge of conspiracy.”¹⁶ A few months before this, B & C released *A Factory Girl’s Honour*, which depicted a factory girl who is fired after refusing her manager’s sexual advances, but ultimately avenged when she saves the factory owner’s daughter from a fire.¹⁷ Building on the theatrical genre of the factory melodrama, these films sympathetically ponder working-class women’s new economic role on the heels of industrial and consumer revolutions.

The figure of the female typist—a paradigmatic New Woman, as

Christopher Keep has argued—also commonly appears in early British film. As factory girl melodramas do for industrial space, films about typists ponder the seismic sexual shifts occasioned by women's entry into the new frontier of the white-collar workplace. A 1904 film called *The Lady Typist*, for example, shows a boss kissing his typist as his wife enters the room; the film revisits the scenario of one of the earliest and most influential of surviving British films, *The Maid in the Garden* (1897), in which a wife catches her husband kissing the maid behind a clothesline. *The Lady Typist* also portrays a working woman as disrupter of bourgeois domesticity, but transplants this landmark scene from the home to the "middle ground" of the office, where women's new public roles present a threat to domestic stability.

On the other hand, *Foiled by a Girl*, a 1912 Clarendon film, depicts a lady typist as hero: after a theft in the office, she poses as an amateur detective and uncovers the perpetrator of the crime.¹⁸ The opening shot of the film again revisits the recurring gag from *The Lady Typist* and *The Maid in the Garden*: the typist Dora steals kisses with her officemate, Dick, but the two quickly "look busy" when another coworker enters the office.¹⁹ Billed as a "sensational drama," *Foiled by a Girl* features a standard plot progression—crime, detection, and arrest—but is unusual in that a woman functions as detective and rescuer. Dora manages to prove that her coworker, Blunt, has stolen money from the office safe and framed her sweetheart, Dick. To catch Blunt, she trails him while cross-dressed in her brother's clothes, and ultimately threatens him with a gun. The film ends with her rescue of Dick, who has been kidnapped, bound, and gagged. As in Arthur Conan Doyle's "Scandal in Bohemia," the plot turns on Blunt's failure to "see" Dora beneath her cross-dressing, and on his broader failure to appreciate the lowly female typist in the corner of the office. Like the female detectives of contemporaneous crime fiction, Dora exploits the fact that outside the periphery of the erotic or desiring gaze, women are often not seen at all, which can be a form of power in itself.²⁰

EVERYBODY AGAINST THE POLICEMAN: CRIME ON FILM

The similarity between *Foiled by a Girl* and "Scandal in Bohemia" is one of many intertextual links between late-Victorian crime fiction and early British crime film, for with the emergence of film as a new nar-

rative form the popularity of crime and detective plots flourished. According to Rachael Low, some early proponents of cinema in Britain believed the crime story was the most inherently filmic of genres: it was “said that of all types of plot those dealing with crime and its discovery were best suited to the film medium. Undoubtedly they were in vogue throughout the period, with a popularity which was probably greatest between 1908 and 1911, but which never failed” (197). Though often dismissed as a marginal cinema, the British film industry made significant contributions to crime film as an international genre. Jonathan Auerbach argues, “As early as 1901 British filmmakers had combined crime with the chase to create an exciting kind of fast-paced drama that powerfully influenced Porter and other Americans” (810). With crime fiction’s ubiquity in the literary marketplace, magazine crime series’ heavily imagistic narrative format, and the interlocking histories of visual technology and policing, crime narrative transitioned easily to the visual medium of film. In Conan Doyle’s stories, for example, the fictional focus on the detective’s expert “eye” made crime narrative a visual genre even before it was taken up by film.

Two of the earliest narrative pictures in British film history were crime stories. Birt Acres’s *The Arrest of a Pickpocket*—the “first dramatic photoplay made in England”—was a Kinetoscope film that debuted in April 1895 (Barnes 1:230). R. W. Paul’s *The Arrest of a Bookmaker* was, according to Denis Gifford, projected on screen in May 1896, only a few months after the Lumière brothers’ Cinématographe arrived in England. Both films climax in the “arrest” of a wrongdoer who succumbs to authority’s grasp. The Sherlock Holmes tradition is apparent in this plot structure: each of Conan Doyle’s stories focuses on a particular investigation, and whether or not they conclude with an arrest, Holmes usually asserts his authority by unraveling the case. It did not take long for early British filmmakers to depart from this formula, however, and even actively to satirize it. British crime film is obviously in debt to the generic conventions of crime fiction, but there are substantial differences between the two forms. As early filmmakers adopted the literary conventions of crime fiction, they also altered the formula: in film, the line between “cops” and “robbers” is more ambiguous, figures of authority are less effective, and the narrative perspective is more sympathetic toward criminals.

Prior to World War I, British cinema audiences were almost exclusively working-class, and these audiences took pleasure in a different kind of crime narrative than the “master detective” stories that domi-

nated fiction.²¹ In his history of early British film, Michael Chanan writes, “The enormous social impact of cinema reached the most remote corners of society long before the upper echelons knew what it was really all about. Previous new inventions, like the telephone and the phonograph, entered the market somewhere near the top and then filtered down. Film, after initial screenings for society audiences, went the other way” (206). Some early British crime films followed the same narrative structure as the Sherlock Holmes stories, depicting thieves being caught at the end of the story.²² More often, however, early crime films favor neither narratives of effective social authority nor master detectives like Holmes, and filmic police and detectives are more apt to produce disorder than to contain it.

A survey of film titles and descriptions suggests the pervasiveness of antiauthority themes in this era. Many of these films, in contrast with the Holmes stories, focus on the visual gullibility of police and detectives. In *An Interrupted Rehearsal* (1901), a policeman “mistakes rehearsing actors for murderers” (Gifford no. 00434). *The Bobby’s Downfall* (1904) and *The Meddling Policeman* (1904) feature tramps who play tricks on sleeping policemen. In *The Misguided Bobby* (1905), a policeman “mistakes [a] fancy dress dancer for real burglar” (Gifford no. 01193). The title character from *The Defective Detective* (1913) attempts to trap a burglar, who turns out to be his fiancée’s uncle.²³ *Our New Policeman* (1906) depicts an overzealous officer who interrupts a “burglary” being staged for a cinematographer; he becomes the butt of two girls’ practical joke, and ends the movie with a bucket of paint over his head.²⁴ Many early films encourage an “us against them” collective mentality in the audience; Clarendon’s *Everybody against the Policeman* (1908) depicts a boy, a woman, a man, and a sign-painter united in their ire against a policeman, who also ends the film with a bucket of paint over his head.²⁵ *The Eviction* (1904) similarly advocates collective opposition to authority: it depicts a landlord who evicts his tenants and summons the police to help get rid of them. The clumsy and incompetent police engage in a violent but comically slapstick battle with the tenants, who eventually drive the police off the property. Encouraging the audience to identify with the tenants rather than the agents of law, the film presents both the officers and the landlord as objects of working-class indignation.²⁶ Apparently, it was a crowd-pleaser: *The Eviction* was still being exhibited in Islington as late as 1909, five years after its initial release (Burrows, “Penny Pleasures II” 180).

As in *The Eviction*, police in early British film are generally the pro-

tectors of upper-class property, or metonymic stand-ins for the social order generally, as Thomas Sobchack has also argued (15). While crime fiction typically appeals to audience desire for containment of criminals and transgressors, crime film appeals to audience resentment of the class system and the authorities who uphold it. Indeed, crime film departs from fictional convention not only in humiliating police and detectives, but also by valorizing clever crooks. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, shrewd male criminals like Moriarty tend to be loathsome and biologically degenerate, and while Conan Doyle's and L. T. Meade's series both depict villainous women criminals as glamorous, they stop short of outright approbation of their behavior. In fiction, female criminals tend to be more appealing than their masculine counterparts, but in early film, female criminals can be overtly heroic.

B & C's film series *The Exploits of Three-Fingered Kate* is the most striking example of this trend in early British film. The series, which Alex Marlow-Mann calls "the first real example" of the series format in film (149), focuses on the "adventuress" Three-Fingered Kate, a master of larceny.²⁷ Her detective adversary is named "Sheerluck," and he is as inept as his name implies. Sheerluck lives on Baker Street, wears a bowler hat, and carries a cane.²⁸ Parodying Sherlock Holmes in this way, the film demythologizes the image of the detective constructed in Conan Doyle's stories. Instead of representing omnipotent social control via expert surveillance and systematic criminological method, the great detective's investigative power is "sheerly" based on "luck." The film series documents a strong intertextual relationship between late-Victorian magazine culture and early film, but also indicates a cultural gap between the two media. Holmes—a protector of bourgeois property, clients, and values—appears to be a less attractive subject for working-class audiences than has hitherto been appreciated.

The first film in the series, released in 1909, was called *The Exploits of Three-Fingered Kate*. According to a description in the contemporary trade journal *Bioscope*, the film depicts Kate successfully robbing a jeweler and eluding Sheerluck through disguise: she "takes refuge in the public baths, gets into a cabin, exchanges her garments, and walks out—her disguise being so complete that Sheerluck does not recognize her. He arrests the woman who comes out of the baths in Kate's clothes, but discovers that his captive has five fingers, and is a negress. There is general consternation."²⁹ Like Irene Adler in "Scandal in Bohemia," Kate eludes detection by cross-dressing; in depicting a specifically racial form of cross-dressing, however, the film counters not only the myth of the

detective's all-seeing eye, but racialized theories of criminal typography as well. In the second film of the series, *Three-Fingered Kate—Her Second Victim, the Art Dealer* (1909), Kate and her sister rob a baron's art gallery, and in the third film, *Three-Fingered Kate—Her Victim the Banker* (1910), Kate again uses cross-dressing to circumvent arrest. A contemporary review says *Her Victim the Banker* "is by far the best of the films so far issued dealing with the adventures of this character, and, popular as the earlier ones were, we anticipate a still greater demand for this."³⁰ The film shows Kate "passing" forged banknotes and also "passing" to elude detective Rickshaw, who faces off against her in this film: "examining the notes, [he] finds on the back of one the imprint of three fingers, which tells him that his old enemy is concerned in the latest crime" (ibid). Rickshaw's criminological gaze identifies Kate's fingerprints, but still he cannot penetrate her cross-class disguise: this time, she changes clothes with a flower girl to elude detection.

In the fourth episode of the series, *Three-Fingered Kate—The Episode of the Sacred Elephants* (1910), Rickshaw and Sheerluck join forces against Kate, and this is the only film of the series in which she is caught. The arrest won't permanently deter her, however, as a contemporary review notes: "For the first time Kate, in this subject, suffers a reverse, although probably only a temporary one, in her struggle with law and authority."³¹ The film shows Kate robbing a retired colonel from India "who has brought home with him from a native temple two priceless images of the 'sacred elephants,' worshipped by the natives" (ibid). Kate easily relieves the colonel of his colonial plunder, and initially deters Sheerluck and Rickshaw by cross-dressing as a male antique dealer. In the end, however, "the handcuffs are put upon her wrists for the first time." Remarkably, Kate's capture is not the end of the series, but the midpoint; three more films follow the fourth episode, and in all of them Kate escapes without arrest.

The only film of the series to survive is the fifth, *Three-Fingered Kate—Kate Purloins the Wedding Presents* (1912), which I discuss in detail in the next section of the chapter; it was followed by *Three-Fingered-Kate—The Case of the Chemical Fumes* (1912), and *Three-Fingered Kate—The Pseudo-Quartette* (1912). In *Chemical Fumes*, Kate robs a baron's house party. A fictionalization of the film in the fanzine *The Pictures* describes the baron as "a man of wealth unbounded. Kings and cabinet ministers, statesmen and members of Parliament, those who look so big to us, looked nothing at all to him . . . he looked upon ordinary men, upon their labours and joys and sorrows, as ordinary men look upon cats

and flies” (Norman 16–17). To rob such a man, for working-class audiences, would be hardly a crime at all. The baron hires Sheerluck to guard his home during his house party, but according to *The Pictures*, Sheerluck is flirting in the garden during the robbery and misses the whole thing. In the final film of the series, *Pseudo-Quartette*, Kate and her gang rob the house party of another wealthy aristocrat by posing as hired musicians. Lord Malcolm’s guests are “wealthy” and “be-jewelled,” so Kate makes quite a haul.³² Sheerluck again fails to capture his nemesis in this final episode: “Kate’s car breaks down, and she leads her pursuers through the bushes in almost a circle until emerging at practically the same spot she annexes their car, leaving ‘Sheerluck’ and his companions to their own reflections on the road, with a broken-down car on their hands.”³³

All of these films pit Kate against the wealthiest and most privileged members of her society: bankers, barons, colonels, and lords. The goods she steals are luxury items of the rich: jewelry, art, and priceless colonial loot. In the tradition of the populist outlaw, Kate’s crimes do not alienate audiences, but attract them. She was played by the actress Ivy Martinek, who drew legions of fans among moviegoers for her work in the Three-Fingered Kate series, as contemporary film periodicals indicate. *The Cinema*, a fanzine, printed portrait-cards of Martinek that could be clipped and traded, as part of their “People’s Popular Players” series.³⁴ Figure 19 shows a photograph and profile, which says she has “worked her way into the hearts of thousands of picture theatre patrons.” In figure 20, Martinek graces the cover of the fanzine *The Pictures*. *The Pictures* also advertised postcards with Martinek’s image, available for a penny, and answered readers’ questions about the actress in its “Our Postbag” column.³⁵ In an article entitled “How to Become a Cinema Star: A Warning to Would-Be Picture-Actresses,” the magazine cautioned readers against fantasizing that they could play Three-Fingered Kate:

Imagine it . . . a young lady knowing nothing about acting or making up, or all the thousand and fifty things that a picture play actress has to know, manages in one single month to freeze out a leading lady . . . we are requested to believe that the Director unceremoniously dispensed with Miss Dorothy Foster or Miss Ivy Martinek, for what? For the sake of putting in a practically unknown lady, a stranger to the public. . . . Our fisher maiden of Cornwall and our precious Three-Fingered Kate are replaced by someone who could only have a spectators’ knowledge of these characters.³⁶

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Fig. 20. Cover from *The Pictures*, 24 August 1912)

If a mainstream film magazine could refer to an unrepentant thief as “our precious Three-Fingered Kate,” popular film culture obviously had decidedly different norms of narrative liability than we see in contemporaneous crime fiction.

Three-Fingered Kate also appears in Jean Rhys’s autobiographical novel *Voyage in the Dark*, indicating Kate’s resonance among early-twentieth-century audiences. Rhys’s novel was published in 1934, but she wrote it about twenty years earlier as a memoir of her life in London 1909 to 1910 (Athill ix). In the novel, the narrator, Anna Morgan, attends a Three-Fingered Kate film, and while the description of the film is completely inaccurate, it provides a fascinating window into Kate’s cultural significance. Rhys describes two Three-Fingered Kate films that never actually existed, *Three-Fingered Kate, Episode 5: Lady Chichester’s Necklace* and *Three-Fingered Kate, Episode 6: Five Years Hard*, and presents the series as conservative and moralizing, which it wasn’t. Like Rhys’s novel, the Three-Fingered Kate films are stories of overzealous female consumption, but Rhys reimagines the films to accentuate her society’s penchant for punishing wayward women. Kate thus becomes an exaggerated version of Rhys’s victimized protagonist, who, in the course of the novel, has an abortion after being abandoned by her wealthy lover. The fictional film audience’s pleasure in Kate’s punishment mirrors the casual sadism that Anna faces from men, landladies, and society at large:

On the screen a pretty girl was pointing a revolver at a group of guests. They backed away with their arms held high above their heads and expressions of terror on their faces. The pretty girl’s lips moved. The fat hostess unclasped a necklace of huge pearls and fell, fainting, into the arms of a footman. The pretty girl, holding the revolver so that the audience could see that two of her fingers were missing, walked backwards towards the door. Her lips moved again. You could see what she was saying. ‘Keep ’em up. . . .’ When the police appeared everybody clapped. When Three-Fingered Kate was caught everybody clapped louder still. (67; Rhys’s ellipses)

The audience roots for the wealthy, aristocratic victims and the police who protect them rather than for Three-Fingered Kate; Rhys emphasizes the irony of this response, given that the “cinema smelt of poor people, and on the screen ladies and gentlemen in evening dress walked about with strained smiles.” The irony is not lost on Anna, who complains, “Damned fools. . . . Aren’t they damned fools? Don’t you hate

them? They always clap in the wrong places and laugh in the wrong places” (67). Rhys uses Three-Fingered Kate to illustrate British society’s clamoring eagerness to discipline “bad” women, but it is important to realize that the actual *films* were firmly on the side of Kate rather than the police.

NEW WOMAN CRIMINAL: *KATE PURLOINS THE WEDDING PRESENTS*

It is a great disappointment that only one of the Three-Fingered Kate films has survived, for *Kate Purloins the Wedding Presents* is a brilliant satire and a fascinating film. The episode of the series released just before *Wedding Presents* depicted Kate’s arrest, but here she returns to crime with a vengeance. Advertisements for the film emphasize that Kate was in no way chastened by her capture: “Do you remember ‘Three-Fingered Kate’? She’s up to her little games again. After lying low for nearly two years she has resumed her criminal career and stolen £1,000 worth of ‘WEDDING PRESENTS.’ The ingenious way in which the burglary was executed is shown in a new B. and C. film bearing the above title. LOOK OUT FOR IT.”³⁷ The long gap between *Wedding Presents* and the film preceding it may indicate that the filmmakers had intended Kate’s arrest to conclude the series, but ultimately depicted her return to crime, in a manner resembling Sherlock Holmes’s return to detection after his ostensible death at Reichenbach Falls. With Three-Fingered Kate, however, the potentially endless chronology offered by the series as a narrative format—a format that demands no conclusion—corresponds with the films’ challenge to narratives of legal containment. For Kate is not only as audacious as Madame Sara or any of the worst female villains of crime fiction, she pointedly lacks the regulating influence of a competent male adversary. Late-Victorian crime stories correlate the female criminal with the New Woman and first-wave feminism, as the Kate series does, but never depict criminal women as so obviously superior to male authority as we see here. In keeping with early crime film’s class politics, Kate’s association with New Women and independent femininity also correlates feminist objections to patriarchal authority with working-class resentment toward the wealthy ruling class.

Like many female criminals in crime fiction, Kate’s thievery is motivated by a desire for consumer goods. She is the unintended consequence, or logical outcome, of London’s new consumer economy and

its ever more shrill appeals to female shoppers. As discussed in chapter 2, this economy was characterized by a saturation of advertising, department stores with prominent visual display, and other means of provoking consumer desire for unnecessary or luxury commodities. Kate's thieving tends to involve luxury items appealing to women, such as jewelry or domestic embellishments. She is the female consumer gone criminal, the lady shopper gone mad. Tammy Whitlock has described a nineteenth-century "scourge of light-fingered ladies" as expanding opportunities to consume offered expanding opportunities to shoplift (*Crime* 127). The invention of kleptomania in the second half of the century—a diagnosis "exclusively used for middle and upper-class women" (208)—signifies a widespread effort to pathologize women's insatiable consumer desires. *Wedding Presents* does not, however, use Kate to deride the excesses of female consumption. Instead, Kate's single-minded pursuit of material rewards, no matter what laws she must break, celebrates the pleasures of subverting paternalistic authority. Thus the film is ideologically feminist and antipatriarchal, but not necessarily anticapitalist. As with L. T. Meade's *Madame Sara* series, the film imagines female consumption as a means of feminist expression.

The first two scenes of *Wedding Presents* form a striking juxtaposition, pitting Kate not only against legal authority but against paternal power more generally. The film begins with a bride- and groom-to-be presenting an armful of wedding presents to the bride's father, Douglas Carrington. Carrington opens the gifts, suggesting his unusually central role in his daughter's wedding, as though he is the beneficiary in this ritual exchange of property. Spatially, his daughter is the literal and figurative channel of exchange between the men: as her father unwraps the packages, she has her arm around her father's shoulder, and the groom has his arm around her. Afterward, the men shake hands as though completing a transaction. The daughter's unusual name, Evadne, signals her deference to male authority: in Greek mythology, Evadne threw herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, committing suttee-like suicide after his death. In her popular 1893 *New Woman* novel *The Heavenly Twins*, Sarah Grand employed this name ironically for her heroine, Evadne Frayling, who deserts her husband within minutes of their wedding after learning the truth about his lewd sexual past. Facing fierce opposition from her parents—her mother laments, "all your beautiful presents, and such a trousseau!" (105)—Evadne consents to live in her husband's house, but not to consummate the marriage. As her childhood friend Diavolo observes, Evadne's marriage to the colonel little resembles that of

her classical antecedent: “Evadne—classical Evadne—was noted for her devotion to her husband, and distinguished herself finally on his funeral pyre . . . wouldn’t it be fun to burn the colonel, and see Evadne do suttee on his body—only I doubt if she would!” (603). In *Kate Purloins the Wedding Presents*, the name Evadne associates the film’s bride not only with a feminine tradition of self-renunciation, but with Grand’s widely read feminist attack on this tradition. At the same time, the film’s focus on Evadne’s wedding presents, worth a thousand pounds, symbolizes the substantial social rewards of sexual normativity for women as well as men.

In contrast to the opening scene’s depiction of patriarchal and bourgeois domesticity, the next shot presents Three-Fingered Kate at home. An intertitle separates the scenes, simply stating: “Kate and her sister Mary.” The brief text introduces a family made up of only two sisters. Lacking both men and parents, it is a family without a traditional figure of authority, unlike the Carrington family. The appearance of Kate and her sister, sitting in their parlor, is likewise a striking juxtaposition to the Carringtons: the two women smoke cigarettes and have short “bob” haircuts, associating them with New Women, bohemianism, and an early “flapper” style of femininity. Kate is lost in thought while Mary reads. The tableau accommodates various stereotypical images of modern women, dressed in “fast” styles, smoking, and engaged in intellectual pursuits. The style of the women’s home likewise connects Kate and Mary with the “modern” or the “new.” An art nouveau mirror, with contours reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley’s languorous curlicues, hangs above Kate’s fireplace. Her mantel is adorned with a small statue of a naked woman, suggesting that Kate’s aesthetic tastes are unorthodox, if not avant-garde. The scene’s costumes, props, and *mise-en-scène* serve to distinguish between the Carringtons’ patriarchal domesticity and Kate and Mary’s independent femininity.

Such external differences are sharpened by the parallel actions of the characters. Shortly into the second scene, Mary gets up and sits on the arm of Kate’s chair, putting her arm around Kate as the two women laugh. The actresses’ positions and laughter mimic the body movements, blocking, and action of the first scene, but with two women rather than one woman and two men. The second scene is a mirrored reversal of the first, suggesting that the opposition between Kate and the Carrington family is more than an opposition between criminal and noncriminal: it is an opposition between traditional and new conceptions of family, gender, and domesticity. Indeed, Kate’s and Mary’s behavior during their

comfortable domestic scene implies an even deeper dimension of familial unorthodoxy. After their maid leaves the room, Mary strokes Kate's hair, and Kate embraces and kisses Mary before leaving the house. Their kiss, rather long and passionate, may not prove that Kate and Mary are "sisters" in the metaphorical nineteenth-century sense of lesbianism, but it signals at least a heightened degree of sisterly intimacy. Regardless of the scene's specific sexual implications, Kate and Mary's sororal bond contests the hegemony of male authority, as in Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market." They represent an alternative to the heteronormative, patriarchal family structure embodied by the Carringtons.

Kate's bodily disfigurement—her right hand has only three fingers—provides a context for viewing her as lesbian.³⁸ In the decades preceding this film, Havelock Ellis and Richard Von Krafft-Ebing had argued that homosexuality was symptomatic of bodily degeneracy, and associated lesbianism with physical pathology. Prior to this, a tradition of associating lesbianism with bodily defects is apparent, for example, in Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel *The Moonstone*: hunchbacked Rosanna Spearman and deformed Limping Lucy plan to move to London together and live "like sisters" (184). Likewise, George Moore's 1886 novel *A Drama in Muslin* has a hunchbacked character, Cecilia Cullen, whose desires are pointedly lesbian. Kate's deformed hand may be the physical manifestation of a similar sexual "pathology."

If Kate is physically deformed and sexually pathologized, she fits Lombroso's and Ellis's female criminal "type," but the film emphatically avoids offering a criminological perspective on deviance. Rather than casting the expert gaze of social authority upon Kate, *Wedding Presents* reverses crime fiction convention by disrupting viewers' allegiance to representatives of social control. It asks us to identify more closely with the criminal "other" than with the detective or victim. Marie-Christine Leps has argued that an opposition between the noncriminal "reader" and the criminal "other" developed in late-nineteenth-century newspapers and print media, providing the underlying discursive structure for detective fiction as a genre, but *Wedding Presents* rejects such a structure. Most scenes focus on Kate, rather than the detective or the victims, and the arc of the story revolves around her enactment of the crime rather than Sheerluck's attempt to solve it or the Carringtons' marriage plot. The film also highlights Kate's skill and distinction as a criminal, encouraging the audience to admire her. She has a gang of "confederates," who report to her "to receive their daily instructions." Her two male henchmen do the criminal dirty work—digging out a tunnel between Kate's

fireplace and the Carringtons' fireplace next door—but Kate plots the crime and performs the theft on her own. A hero in the tradition of Odysseus, Kate is crafty rather than honorable. She eavesdrops on the Carringtons, steals a letter from a little girl by pretending to help her mail it, and steams open the letter to access its content surreptitiously. Even the “good” characters in the film obliquely celebrate her criminal ingeniousness: in a particularly ironic use of editing, the twenty-seventh shot of the film depicts Kate's celebratory return home after completing the theft, which is juxtaposed, in the twenty-eighth shot, with an image of the wedding guests' champagne toast. The effect of the montage is that guests appear to toast the success of Kate's crime.

Indeed, a significant portion of the film consists of ironic cross-cutting between Kate's theft and Evadne's wedding celebration, associating the two events. The dialectical editing likens the marriage to a crime, and likens the crime to a surrogate marriage ceremony for Kate. That Kate has all the presents at the end of the film supports such a reading; her haul of wedding gifts ironically suggests that she has undergone a nuptial rite of passage in enacting the theft. The end of the film juxtaposes Evadne's tears in the penultimate shot with Kate's gleeful laughter in the final shot. The contrast asks viewers not to sympathize with the woman who has submitted to male authority and expects the social rewards of complicity (symbolized by the presents), but to admire the woman who has taken those rewards for herself without undergoing the social transaction meant to precede them. An earlier scene in which the wedding guests admire the gifts supports such a reading: one present that gets particularly appreciative attention is a wide necklace that looks very much like a chain.

Perhaps Kate's most appealing characteristic is her gratuitous and audacious antagonism toward figures of authority. After stealing the Carringtons' wedding presents, for example, she sets an alarm clock to ring in the room where the presents are stored. When it rings, the alarm alerts Sheerluck's assistant, standing guard outside the locked room, that she has stolen the gifts. Why would Kate purposely leave herself just twenty minutes to escape? An intertitle explains that she does it “out of bravado.” Further, after climbing back through the tunnel in the fireplace, Kate leaves a note for Sheerluck in her drawing room. He finds the message after she has escaped: “Compliments to ‘Detective Sheerluck’ from Three fingered Kate.” Kate is so certain of his inability to catch her that she claims responsibility for the crime. The last shot of the film highlights this audacity: turning her rebellious bravado onto the

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viewer, she faces the camera directly, holds up her three-fingered hand, and laughs in the viewer's face, apparently flipping the audience off with an obscene gesture *and* defiantly brandishing the physical marker of her criminal deformity. The shot is unsettling not only for its lack of attention to the fourth wall, but for the aggressiveness of Kate's appeal. She escapes uncaught, and is apparently quite proud of it, as well as of her malformed hand. Figure 21 shows a promotional still of Kate in this trademark pose, though in the film, Kate's flaunting of her hand appears more disconcerting since she is standing and laughing rather than sitting and smiling.

In the detective series discussed in the first two chapters, the detective's point of view is always prevalent, but *Wedding Presents* not only takes Kate's side, it takes seemingly excessive delight in subverting the efforts of the detective. Because Sheerluck stands in parodic relation to Sherlock Holmes, the film's pleasure in Kate's coup is also pleasure in undoing the vision of modernity that Conan Doyle's stories construct, characterized by the possibility of omnipotent social control. If we believe the film, Holmes's investigative triumphs are the result of "sheer luck," not panoptical vision. Conan Doyle's detective stories and late-Victorian criminology educe a fantasy of perfect legal surveillance, but in questioning the legitimacy of legal authority and in portraying outlaws sympathetically, the Kate films engage a very different set of desires. In chapter 1, I argue that female criminals disrupt Holmes's otherwise infallible system of visual detection; Three-Fingered Kate performs the same office far more deliberately. Sherlock and Sheerluck exemplify the intertextual relationship between magazine series and early film, but their differences indicate that Holmes was less attractive to film's working-class audiences, except in parodied form, than to the middle-class audience of the *Strand*.³⁹

CLASS, GENDER, AND FILMIC FEMALE CRIMINALS

Other early crime films likewise employ the female criminal to demystify modern social authority, but the gender politics of such films are rarely as radical as *The Exploits of Three-Fingered Kate*. Four years before the first Three-Fingered Kate film, Cecil Hepworth's *An Interrupted Honeymoon* (1905) depicted a crafty and appealing female criminal who faces off against inept enforcers of the law.⁴⁰ The film, like *Wedding Presents*, includes both a wedding and crime, but here it is two criminals

who marry. As its title suggests, *An Interrupted Honeymoon* ingeniously pits the marriage plot against the detection plot, so that viewers must choose between the criminal honeymooners and the police on their trail. Because a policeman literally *interrupts* the honeymoon, also interrupting consummation of the marriage, the film uses the conventional dramatic device of the blocking figure to generate audience resentment against the interfering officer. Rather than challenging familial, domestic, and sexual norms, as the *Kate* film did, this film draws on audience investment in such norms to generate support for the outlaws.

The film opens with a juxtaposition between two disparate scenarios: after a prototypically romantic proposal scene, the groom-to-be robs a jeweler. The first scene shows a couple punting on a river, where the groom proposes to the bride. The sentimental scene entangles viewers' sympathies in the love story before the crime occurs, and desire for the marriage plot's fulfillment takes precedence over the desire for containment and comeuppance that crime stories typically elicit. Indeed, the marriage almost seems to depend upon the crime, since the groom gives the bride stolen jewelry as a wedding gift. As in *Kate Purloins the Wedding Presents*, *An Interrupted Honeymoon* strips away the sentimentality of wedding gifts, which become subject to theft and appropriation like any other property. In this case, the bride doesn't commit the robbery, but as with *Kate*, her acquisitive desire for jewelry is the implicit catalyst for the crime.

Directly after the couple leave the church where they have wed, a policeman arrives looking for the jewel thief. Spectators of the wedding appear to point him in the wrong direction, indicating that the audience within the film has taken the couple's side against the police, just as the film's audience is expected to do. As in *Wedding Presents*, *An Interrupted Honeymoon* cross-cuts between scenes of a wedding and scenes of a criminal investigation; whether or not the newlyweds will be caught is its central narrative tension. As the bride and groom toast their honeymoon, the groom sees the authorities approaching outside the window. He removes the jewelry from the bride, hides it, and pleads her forgiveness on his knees. After a brief remonstrance, the wife quickly metamorphoses into a cunning criminal. She hatches a plan to avoid detection, and like Irene Adler and Three-Fingered Kate, her plan involves cross-dressing. The bride dresses in her husband's suit and top hat, while he dons her dress and a wig. The woman is much shorter than the man, so they make a comical drag couple in ill-fitting clothes at the end of the transaction.

When the policeman and jeweler enter the drawing room where the bride and groom had been sitting, they find the couple's leftover champagne, and the officer convinces the jeweler to have a drink with him. Earlier in the film, the groom had been able to steal the jewelry in the first place because the jeweler was drunk; in both scenes, emphasis on the jeweler's drinking detracts from his victimization. In yet another filmic example of drunk and incompetent policing, the officer is evidently intoxicated in the scene that follows: after downing a drink and hitting his chest with his fist, he pries open the door to the adjoining bedroom.⁴¹ The wife (dressed as a man) approaches the officer, puffs out her chest with bravado, and assumes an indignant attitude. The officer is about to hit her with a stick, but notices how small she is, and gathers that this is the wrong man. He checks his description and measures her with tape, while the husband (dressed as a woman) hangs back shyly and weeps into his handkerchief, thereby avoiding the policeman's gaze. In a similarly exaggerated affectation of gender roles, the bride stands with her legs wide apart and hands on her hips, dominating the space around her body. Amid the policeman's confusion, the "wife" faints on the bed and the "husband" orders him out of the room; when he refuses to leave, they put a pillowcase over his head and tie him up. Binding the policeman to the bed and running out of the room, the couple escapes, presumably to finish their interrupted honeymoon. The last shot lingers over the officer's comic predicament, wriggling around helplessly and dragging the bed across the room with a pillowcase over his head.

An Interrupted Honeymoon's female offender is not the instigator of the theft, but exhibits a skillful criminal instinct in coming up with the idea to cross-dress. As in *Wedding Presents*, the film's narrative perspective is the criminal perspective; the police devolve into blocking figures for the marriage plot. In privileging the resolution of the love story above the resolution of the crime, the film perhaps merely reinforces one governing social institution over another, but its use of cross-dressing suggests that an overly rigid sense of gender roles prevents the officer from detecting the criminals. Such narratives—common in turn-of-the-century crime plots—can be read as a contribution, perhaps unintentional, to feminist arguments about androgyny and gender roles. The politics of *An Interrupted Honeymoon*, however, are most striking in their representation of class: the police represent an unjust and irrational force dedicated to preserving an unequal share of wealth, property, and luxury consumption.

Even films that follow a more formulaic criminal plot share this per-

spective toward police authority. The 1910 Hepworth film *A Woman's Treachery* moralistically punishes its female criminal, but resists conventional legal containment. The film, directed by Theo Bouwmeester, depicts a housemaid who is a thief and traitor, but in contrast to similar depictions of female domestic workers in crime fiction, it emphasizes her treachery toward her lover rather than her employer. The film is set in a wealthy household, where the butler James is in love with the beautiful maid.⁴² The maid, tempted by vanity and acquisitiveness, steals one of her lady's necklaces; she is motivated, like other filmic female criminals, by desire for consumer commodities and luxury goods. When the lady realizes her necklace is missing and summons the police, James takes the blame for the theft and is imprisoned. An intertitle reads: "Three months later ~ On with the new love." The next two shots contrast the maid, kissing a new butler, with James, kissing the maid's photograph in prison. The film uses a fading effect to blend the two shots, highlighting the maid's betrayal. When James escapes from prison, she betrays him again by telling the police where he is. Eventually the maid is punished, but not by the law: in the last scene of the film, the maid and the second butler are just about to marry, when James arrives and denounces the maid, so that her new love rejects her. *A Woman's Treachery* thus punishes its female criminal for betraying her lover, but not for stealing the necklace. The maid is never disciplined for theft, and James's escape from prison indicates that the film has little attachment to legal institutions or procedure. In general, early crime films were not interested in reinforcing authoritarian narratives of social control, particularly when it would require taking the side of a wealthy woman with stolen jewels. The narrative of *A Woman's Treachery* reinforces "womanly" values of domestic fidelity, but not "citizenly" values of legal obedience.⁴³ Early British films are not always feminist, but almost never do they depict a woman criminal "caught" by police or detectives.⁴⁴

Most filmic female criminals are motivated by the desire to consume, but just as in crime fiction, some early British films portray women criminals as avengers rather than consumers, acting from noble intentions rather than greedy, acquisitive desires. Such representations can serve to reinforce idealized notions of femininity, but can also establish women's capacity for just intervention into traditionally male social transactions. A 1913 film called *The Tube of Death* depicts a widow as suicide bomber: in a parodic inversion of the birth canal, she uses an explosive "tube of death" to blow up the anarchists who caused her husband's death, killing herself in the process.⁴⁵ The film was promoted as exceptionally shock-

ing: “Enough of [*sic*] sensation is contained in the three reels to satisfy the most *blasé habitué* of a theatre.”⁴⁶ Cricks and Sharp’s *A Wife’s Revenge; Or, the Gambler’s End* (1904) also depicts a woman killing her husband’s killer. As the film begins, she attempts to pull her husband—a compulsive gambler—from a game of cards, but is perfunctorily dismissed by the men in the game. The husband, continually losing, eventually realizes that he is being cheated, and challenges one of the cheaters to a duel. When he dies in the duel, his wife—obscured in a long cloak—demands to fight his killer. She throws off the cloak, picks up her husband’s sword, and makes a beautiful spectacle dueling in a white lace dress with flowing sleeves. The fight is set outdoors, with high trees in the background; the film’s sense of space and height gives a heroic and epic feel to the action, but ironically the wife rather than the husband becomes the hero. She wins the duel and kills the villain, wielding her husband’s sword to greater effect than he did himself. As in Conan Doyle’s story “Charles Augustus Milverton,” the female avenger’s weapon aligns her with a form of social power associated with the phallus.

FEMALE TROUBLE: SUFFRAGETTE TERROR ON FILM

With her mastery of the sword, the female dueler in *A Wife’s Revenge* reflects an escalating narrative interest in female militancy, a trend that corresponds with the intensifying campaign for women’s right to vote. During the early years of film, suffragettes were a serious threat to national security, and suffragette violence was an everyday reality in urban Britain.⁴⁷ Violent and encroaching upon traditionally male spheres, the militant suffragette embodied all of the fears and anxieties surrounding representations of female criminality. Nevertheless, suffragettes on film, whether committing crimes or not, differ markedly from other filmic female criminals. Villains like Three-Fingered Kate or the maid in *A Woman’s Treachery* steal out of a greedy desire to consume goods, an impulse that essentially accords with the individualist and consumerist values of modern English capitalism. Militant suffragettes, in contrast, want to achieve social change through violent collective action, which at root was a far less tolerable offense than individual criminal deviance.

Because militant suffragettes posed a threat of collective feminine action, they were no less threatening to lower-class male filmgoers than

middle-class male fiction readers. Even in the antiauthoritarian context of early British film, representations of suffragettes attract a great deal more vitriol than conventional female criminals. The 1898 comedy *Suffragette in the Barber Shop*, for example, depicts a suffragette infiltrating a space of “male privacy” and “the havoc wreaked by the woman who usurps the law of such a space” (Monaghan 27).⁴⁸ In *Sweet Suffragettes* (1906), a suffragette is punished for infiltrating male discourse: she is pelted with eggs after giving a speech. Other films satirize the suffrage movement as permanently hampered by women’s vanity. *The Suffragettes and the Hobble Skirt* (1910) depicted a “persecuted man” who “gives women hobble skirts and they are jailed” (Gifford no. 02588). The hobble skirt, popular 1910–14, was so narrow that it impeded walking; the film suggests, like Max Beerbohm’s essay discussed in the last chapter, how self-imposed fashion regimens can effectively “jail” women who might otherwise pursue liberation. *Scroggins as a Census Official* (Cricks and Martin, 1911) likewise depicts vain suffragettes who protest the census only because it requires them to reveal their age.⁴⁹

Suffragettes were extremely common figures in early film, and in the era of first-wave feminism, this new medium served as a venue for reflecting upon and sometimes satirizing women’s new political and social freedoms. As a specifically visual medium, film changed the way the feminist movement was represented and understood: early suffragette films anticipate visual mass media’s profound effect on gender and on civil disobedience throughout the twentieth century. Antisuffrage narrative films, for example, often minimize suffragettes’ visual markers of femininity, signifying the heightened attentiveness to surface manifestations of gender that accompanied the birth of visual mass media. The defeminization of suffragettes thus emerges as the filmic countermovement to the glamorization of female criminals. “Actuality” and newsreel films documenting militant suffrage action, meanwhile, focus not on suffragettes’ individual bodies, but on the cumulative effect of en masse militancy on public space. These newsreels express how film could, in some cases, actually facilitate the suffrage campaign by realizing its public effects.

The campaign for suffrage in Britain was more militant than in other countries, and aroused particular derision in British popular culture. It included a faction of so-called guerrilla suffragettes who employed aggressive civil disobedience to further their cause, including arson, bombings, window-smashing, destruction of public and private property, and acts of self-violence such as hunger strikes. In 1912, a suffrage group in

Dublin (British at the time) even tried to burn down a theater by placing “a handbag containing gunpowder inside of the cinematograph box” and then tossing in a lighted match (“Irish Rush”).⁵⁰ Filmic depictions of suffragettes, unsympathetic to such tactics, are often strongly informed by criminological theory, in sharp contrast to glamorous depictions of female thieves and killers. Criminologists argued that suffragette violence was pathologically antisocial, not socially or politically grounded, and Havelock Ellis argued against affording such acts tolerance on the basis of political commitment (“Letter”). Some thought suffragette militancy was prompted by “primitive” impulses toward crime and destruction: Hargrave Adam asked in 1912, “Would any male . . . reformers . . . allow themselves to be guilty of such tiresome and contemptible monkey-tricks[?]” (16). At a time when criminality was indexed to biological degeneration, the phrase “monkey-tricks” depicts suffragettes as not only underevolved, but essentially opposed to civil society.⁵¹

The prevalence of men dressed as suffragettes in early film exemplifies how some filmmakers belittled suffragists by drawing on a long-standing stereotype that feminist advocates were mannish or ugly, a stereotype that was supported by scientific theorists of gender. Eugenist Karl Pearson, for example, wrote in 1894 that the women’s movement was dominated by “asexual” women who lack a “normal” woman’s “sex instinct” (“Woman and Labour” 234–38). Film took the type of the disgendered feminist to a new level simply by putting male actors in suffragette roles. The most famous example of this is Charlie Chaplin’s *The Militant Suffragette*, a 1914 U.S. film starring Chaplin in drag, but several British films predating Chaplin’s work also put male actors in drag to play ugly, disgendered suffragettes.⁵² Cross-dressing often functions to critique ideologies of gender, but it does not always do so. Images of men cross-dressing as women do not inevitably denaturalize gender; sometimes, as Anne McClintock argues, cross-dressing can actually solidify existing inequalities by staging the “right to ambiguity” enjoyed by those in power (68).

Bamforth and Company’s *Women’s Rights* (1899) exhibits this kind of privileged ambiguity, depicting men in drag as suffragettes to burlesque the women’s movement rather than gender itself.⁵³ In the first shot of the film, as figure 22 shows, two women played by male actors talk in front of a fence. In the second shot, two men sneak up behind them, eavesdrop, and nail their dresses to the fence (figure 23). The “women” catch the men but are too late, and the final shot of the film shows them flailing wildly attempting to escape (figure 24). Casting the suffragettes



Fig. 22. First shot from *Women's Rights* (1899)

with men means more than topsy-turvy, vaudevillian carnivalesque: it is antifeminist satire, positing a distinction between “suffragettes” and “women” and suggesting that suffrage advocates have nothing to say on “real” women’s behalf. Depicting suffragettes’ physiological grotesqueness and the gendered degeneracy of their bodies, *Women’s Rights* disciplines gender by casting suffragettes with men: the actors’ bodies are deterrents, signifying the absence of femininity in women who campaign for equality, and this is conveyed seemingly “immediately” through visual image, anticipating twentieth-century feminist theories about the power of visual, bodily manifestations of gender in image-saturated societies.

As the film constructs a gendered distinction between “women” and “suffragettes,” it also orchestrates a sharp division between “men” on one side of the fence and “women” on the other. The formal arrangement of shots emphasizes the schism between the actors who play women and those who play men, and the choice to position the film’s



Fig. 23. Second shot from *Women's Rights* (1899)

action on two sides of a fence exacerbates the divide between them. In this arrangement, men and women are literally on separate sides, and the rift between their perspectives is intensified by the chronological gap between the first two shots of the film. After showing the women speaking and gesturing angrily on their side of the fence, the camera cuts to the other side, showing the same span of time from the men's point of view. *Women's Rights* juxtaposes back-to-back scenes from two different perspectives of what we are to imagine as the same span of time. This method allowed filmmakers to evoke chronological simultaneity before the innovation of cross-cutting, but in *Women's Rights*, the curiously disparate simultaneity of this stylistic choice underscores the characters' formal separation. Without montage, there is no union between the two "sides" through visual form. Not only do the women and men inhabit different filmic spaces demarcated by the fence, they inhabit different filmic chronologies.

By successfully nailing the suffragettes to the fence, the men in *Women's Rights* literally demonstrate how to keep women in their



Fig. 24. Third shot from *Women's Rights* (1899)

metaphorical place. Fences typically serve to demarcate private space from public, so on an allegorical level, the film humorously advocates keeping women on “their” side of the fence and out of the public political sphere via voting. Moreover, the film’s costuming pits against one another two social groups that were campaigning to get the vote: women and labor. The men in the film wear aprons, indicating that they—like most of the film’s audience—are members of the working class. The “women,” in contrast, have ladies’ elaborate costumes and are identified as “ladies” in the alternate title of the film (see note 54). Anti-suffrage propaganda often targeted working-class men, in an effort to drum up fear about “petticoat government” among a sizable though not universally enfranchised demographic; this film similarly serves as a cautionary tale to working-class men who may fear that women’s suffrage would put them in metaphorical dresses.

Suffragettes’ Downfall; Or, Who Said Rats? (1911) does not stage the confinement of women to private space, like *Women’s Rights*, nor use male actors to embody suffragettes, but instead specifies how the suffrage

campaign infests domestic space. The film opens in a middle-class home where a “Votes for Women” sign, rather than a “Home Sweet Home” sign, hangs above the mantel. A bourgeois couple argues as the wife gestures toward the sign, indicating that their dispute is about suffrage. A maid comes in to serve tea, but trying to read a newspaper as she pours, she drops a dish on the husband. He yells and shakes his fist at the maid, but the wife comforts her, kisses her, and takes her part. The maid simulates a punch to the husband’s face, and the wife grabs him by the ear and slaps him. In this home, the wife and the maid are overtly engaged in political discourse—via the suffrage campaign and the newspaper—to the detriment of their domestic roles. The wife has a greater allegiance to her maid (a member of her sex) than to her husband (a member of her class), and the husband is at the mercy of their physical domination.

In the next scene, the wife leaves with a friend to play golf, a sport that was associated with New Womanly athleticism as well as with militant suffragettes, who were known to sabotage golf courses as a form of political agitation (Tickner 135). The women are dressed in a masculine style, with neckties and severely tailored outfits; *The Suffragette’s Downfall’s* action and iconography thus present the suffragettes as bodily disgendered, masculinized, athletic, and violent. The surviving copy of the film ends here, but is incomplete; descriptions of the film in contemporary trade journals describe its original conclusion:

While the two ladies are busily making wild swings with their golf clubs, hitting the turf, caddies—in fact, everything but the ball—the good man is making the round of the shops, placing the articles he buys in the pram on top of the infant. His last call is at a pub, and here, detailing his wrongs, he is sold a cage containing a rat, and hides the latter under a dish cover on the table at home, and releases it when his wife begins to upbraid him on her return. The effect is marvelous. With her friend she flies to the table and gladly signs a declaration afterwards forswearing the suffrage movement for ever, and promising to attend to her own duties.⁵⁴

In the film’s missing segment, the husband is further emasculated by being forced into the feminine role of consuming shopper, but ultimately the film suggests that gender will trump politics and “order” will be restored.

Such a stance was common among antisuffrage narrative films. *Child of a Suffragette* (1913) presented militant feminism as a dangerous perver-

sion of conventional family relationships. Here, a suffragette mother bombs a mailbox and a residence, but repents the error of her ways when her own daughter is nearly killed in trying to defuse one of her mother's bombs. The film no longer exists, but garnered positive reviews in the *Bioscope*, which praised the film—absurdly enough—for its realism: “as a study of militant methods, it is amazing in its intimacy.”⁵⁵ The writer thought the film would “create wide interest amongst a public so morbidly fascinated by the doings of political women as ours.”

The public appetite for suffragette films was not limited to narrative cinema, and “made-up” films were not alone in drumming up fear about suffragettes and the demolition of the home. A 1911 advertisement for Pathé, who produced many newsreels about the suffragettes, proclaimed the popularity of these topical: “THE SUFFRAGETTES BREAK WINDOWS. WE BREAK RECORDS.”⁵⁶ *St. Leonard's Outrage*, a 1913 Pathé newsreel, was not unlike *The Suffragette's Downfall* or *Child of a Suffragette* in pitting women's rights against domestic tranquility. Depicting the torched spectacle of a house severely damaged by recent suffragette militancy, the film presents suffragette political action as violence against the home and all it stands for. The opening frame reads: “Damage estimated at £10,000 was caused by suffragettes firing the residence of Mr. Arthur DuCros M.P.” The newsreel does not show this Member of Parliament, nor does it show any suffragettes; it only surveys the ruined house and the onlookers who have come to gaze upon it. The first shot shows the front of the burned home and a crowd of thirty-two spectators gathered to see it. The camera's inclusion of the crowd in this shot reminds us that a private family home has become the object of public gawking. The film's second shot focuses on a workman, standing on a ladder and knocking burned debris from the roof. The final shot takes viewers inside the ruined house, still smoking and completely destroyed.

The film narrates the devastating effect of the suffrage campaign on the “home,” stunningly portraying the force of suffrage action en masse. Obliquely, it may have served suffragette interests by emphasizing their power. Indeed, *St. Leonard's Outrage* expresses its own status as filmic documentation in ways that suggest film's unique capacity for furthering the suffrage cause. During the first shot, which takes in the outside of the house, the crowd of onlookers gradually becomes more interested in the camera than the house. As the shot lingers, spectators turn their gaze away from the wreckage to look at the camera, until eventually there are far more people looking at the camera than the house. This reminds viewers that film and other visual innovations of modernity require a re-

organization of vision: not only *better* vision or *more* vision, but sometimes the withholding of vision to maintain the illusion that the camera does not exist. The meaning of this film changes when its subjects fail to sustain that illusion: their interest in the camera highlights the filmic nature of the scene, reminding us that the image of devastation will be projected to an incalculable number of observers, and suggesting how militancy is changed in the age of visual mass media.

Not only does *St. Leonard's Outrage* emphasize the expanded number of spectators that film creates, it also stresses how film offers a privileged view of the event. By moving ever closer into the damage, the camera provides a more intimate view of the devastation than on-site witnesses would see. The progression of shots is particularly important in this regard: the first shot shows the front of the house, which any random passerby could see; the second shot is high, giving viewers a close-up of the damage to the roof and paralleling the visual perspective of the man on the ladder, above the "crowd in the street" view of the first shot; the final shot goes into the wreckage of the home, not only taking spectators within private property, but to a position of some danger, since the fire continues to smolder and the house appears structurally unstable. As the newsreel progresses, it marks more and more insistently film's capacity for *realizing* the destructive activities of the suffragettes. Not only does it spread these images to a mass audience, it purports to give them a privileged view of the action. The camera sees what the crowd outside does not.

St. Leonard's Outrage depicts the power of suffragette violence as well as film's unique capacity for revealing that power. The suffragettes themselves were keenly aware that the new visual technology of film could be used to forward political ends. A 1908 article in *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* describes suffragettes giving exclusive rights to cinematographer W. Jeapes to document their "pictorial history" (Low 151), and Chanan describes the 1908 *Suffragette Film*, no longer surviving, made by suffragettes who intended it as propaganda (235).⁵⁷ Likewise, some seemingly "objective" newsreels hint at the suffragettes' savvy approach to the new medium. *The Suffragette Derby of 1913* appears at first to be a filmmaking accident: while covering the Epsom Derby, a cinematographer caught on film the death of suffragette Emily Davison, who ran onto the racetrack right in front of the king's horse. Historians are unsure whether Davison intended to commit suicide by this act; she had a suffrage banner in her pocket, which she may have merely planned to unfurl for the cameras.⁵⁸ The newsreel of the event shows her ducking under the fence and onto the course mere seconds before being tram-



Fig. 25. Photograph of Emily Davison's death, captured on film in *The Suffragette Derby of 1913*.

pled; by darting out directly in the path of the king's horse, Davison brought on her own demise, and managed to position herself center-stage for the newsreel camera. (See figure 25.)

Feminist historians have considered Davison's funeral procession, which drew several thousand spectators, as one of the great public spectacles of British feminism, "Davison's last gift to the movement she cared so passionately about" (Stanley 172). Davison's death, however, was a spectacle that reached even more viewers than her funeral; large audiences, including prominent members of Parliament, witnessed Davison's act on Gaumont's film. The extent to which Davison purposefully orchestrated the film's creation is not clear. The opening frame's title prepares us to view the film as completely accidental, not an orchestrated performance: "The Gaumont Graphic alone secured the thrilling incident at Tattenham Corner, resulting in the death of Miss Davidson [*sic*]." Gaumont frames the spectacle as exemplifying the power of film itself, not the power of suffragettes like Davison to manipulate it, but this filmic event nonetheless portends the powerful shift that visual mass media would have on activist politics, as organizers of political protest have steadily focused more and more on obtaining visual media coverage. *The Suffragette Derby of 1913* implies a sea-change in civil disobedience, with a newly vital emphasis on performance rather than demonstration.

The 1913 Pathé newsreel *Trafalgar Square Riot* similarly conveys the power of the new medium to communicate the disruptiveness of suf-

fragette action. The opening frame notes that Sylvia Pankhurst, the infamous radical suffragette, participated in the riot, but the film itself does not focus on Pankhurst or any other individual body. Instead, it shows a group of suffragettes peaceably carrying banners, the crush of the crowd gathered to watch the event, and omnibuses struggling to navigate through the protest. The emphasis is on the suffragettes' capacity to disrupt the normal functioning of the city and its inhabitants. Likewise, *Suffragette Riots at Westminster*, a 1910 Pathé newsreel, shows footage of a London protest and focuses on the resulting urban commotion. The camera is positioned at the level of the crowd, not an elevated vantage point, thus few suffragettes are visible at all; the film lingers instead on masses of crowding people, there to watch rather than riot. We might contrast this approach with the popular 1897 films of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee: at this early moment in filmmaking, the cameras were placed high above the crowd, to capture the procession as it "really" looked—not how it looked to the spectators—and to de-emphasize its status as a film-mediated event. As Barnes notes, "We are never shown the faces of the cheering crowd, the children, or the fluttering flags and decorations" (2:198). Thirteen years later, *Suffragette Riots at Westminster* stresses the mass spectatorship of suffragette action rather than the "action" itself. As more and more of the crowd—including the police—turn to look at the cinematographer, watchers of the riot become watchers of the camera, underscoring the event's status as filmic spectacle.

On screen and off, suffragette newsreels quite literally provided suffragette militancy with an audience. A century before reality television, "actuality films" of suffragette activism indicate that political theater and "film-friendly" news were already intertwined. In his memoir of the early years of British cinema, cartoonist and screenwriter Harry Furniss describes an event in which a suffragette kidnapping was staged for filmic representation. Spectators of the event, confused, moved to rescue the male "victim," only to learn that the filmmakers were simply trying "to obtain realistic pictures of a suffragette demonstration" (*Our Lady* 136). As this anecdote suggests, early film responded to suffragette militancy in ways that echo other forms, but film as a medium also changed the way that contemporaries understood the suffrage movement. Suffragette films reveal the conflicting consequences of modernity's visual innovations: some enact a criminological gaze that works to discipline gender, but others enhance the legitimacy of mass political action by proffering visual proof of its clout.

Most films about suffragettes do not fit the genre of “crime film,” but nevertheless highlight the surprising contrast between representations of glamorous, individual female criminals in crime film, and representations of en masse female militancy in films about suffragettes. Crime film risked a far more radical narrative perspective than crime fiction toward class, authority, and power, but such radicalism breaks down when film touches upon collective feminist movements for social change. The suffragette films help us make sense of crime film’s anti-disciplinary accounts of female criminality: films about female criminals, as we have seen, naturalize women’s desire for consumption, possession, and material gain; insofar as they encourage viewers to value and desire luxury-level consumption, such films are hand-in-hand with the individualist and consumerist values of capitalism. But just as *Three-Fingered Kate* valorizes consumption to make a feminist point, many early films about female criminals valorize consumption to make a *democratic* point: that all viewers deserve to—and ought to be able to—consume abundantly. This hyperconsumerist message occurs at the expense of conventional authority figures, whose function in such films is to police consumption in favor of a plutocratic class order. Films about female criminality thus reinforce the idea that consumer capitalism has an implicit democratic sensibility: a “utopian vision,” as Thomas Richards has put it, in which everyone is “equal in the sight of things” (61). These films depict the female criminal as the emblem of modern, democratic, individualist, and consumerist values.

British crime film’s early marginality and lower-class audience meant that it celebrated different values than crime fiction and engaged a diverging set of desires: it questioned the legitimacy of legal authority and portrayed outlaws sympathetically; as a visual medium, it intensified the glamour of female criminality; and as a lower-class medium, it was resistant to containing criminal women via forces of social control. Prior to 1913, film’s decentralized production and distribution allowed a surprisingly heterodox crime film tradition to flourish, which challenges critical presumptions about the disciplinary prerogative of mass culture. Critics following Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have viewed mass-cultural escapism as a force of class complacency, but in the early days of cinema, conservative voices considered film to be dangerous to the status quo precisely *because* it encouraged film viewers to aspire to middle-class lifestyles and consumption patterns.

When cultural conservatives claimed that crime films would encourage “thieving” among the lower classes, they were essentially protesting film’s hyperconsumerist ideology, since attempts to legislate against crime film stemmed from the idea that such films incite criminal behavior by valorizing it.⁵⁹ Film was accused of encouraging antisocial behavior in “sensitive” populations—especially youth, women, and the working classes—and early opponents considered it a degenerative and dangerous cultural force. It was practically synonymous with the “modern,” and largely because of its depictions of crime, became a target for reactions against social change. Film seemed to erode traditional social distinctions, and not only those based on class and consumption: the cinema itself sat somewhere between public and private space, public because the spectators are strangers to one another, but private in the intimacy imposed by the absence of light.⁶⁰ Associations with darkness and illicit sexual activity meant that female filmgoers were a cause of anxiety, but accompanying fears about moral corruption was a fear that cinema might actually cause physiological corruption in its audience.⁶¹

Even among proponents of cinema, such rhetoric was common. Furniss wrote that when audiences leave the movies, “they rush, they struggle, they run. What they have seen has entered into their being. . . . The never-ceasing movement of the pictures so inoculates the spectators, that they are prone to carry out in real life what they see upon the screen” (*Our Lady* 30). Here, the modern shock of moving pictures is akin to hypnosis or subliminal influence.⁶² According to a 1912 article, some doctors did believe in the “curious effect which the motion picture has upon many spectators in the matter of hypnotic suggestion” (“Cinema and Hypnotic Suggestion” 3), and in “The Craze for Sensation,” a trade journal bemoaned the “orgy of sensationalism” in contemporary film: “many producers labour under the delusion that it is necessary nowadays to tickle the public palate with as many nerve-racking sensations as can be crowded into a limited number of feet of film” (1). Fears about early cinema’s shocking, nerve-racking, and hypnotic effects echo earlier reactions against penny dreadfuls, sensation fiction, detective fiction, and dynamite fiction. This parallel was not lost on Furniss, who wrote in a procensorship piece, “in the past the juvenile criminal was wont to tearfully allege in the dock of the police-court that it was the perusal [*sic*] of cheap-and-nasty sensational literature that caused his lapse from the path of virtue. Now his secession from the straight and narrow way is attributed to what he sees on the cinematograph screen” (“Wanted—A Censor” 81).⁶³

As film producers and exhibitors strove to attract middle-class audiences, many of early film's unconventional narrative tendencies were suppressed in an attempt to snuff out film's reputation as an inciter of crime. The film industry believed greater profits were to be found in higher-class audiences, so they engaged in a campaign to raise the status of cinema. An article called "Penny Shows Must Go!" in the *Bioscope* argued: "The opening of so many theatres de luxe, with their comfortable seats, cosy appearance, and high-class show of films, has sounded the death-knell of the penny picture show, which will, except in the very poorest districts, be soon as dead as a door-nail" (4). By appealing to higher-class customers, this piece argued, an exhibitor might "charge double the former price of admission": "The penny showman is going the wrong way to work. That is, he is making himself and his show too cheap, with the result that the majority of his patrons are riotous children and illiterate aliens who cannot understand and appreciate the difference between good shows and bad. And whereas he should and can make pounds a week profit, he is only making shillings" (4). This is a running theme in cinema trade journals of the era; they presume that the advancement of film as an art and a business will entail its gentrification. Beyond purpose-built theaters, other practices instituted in the 1910s to gentrify the British film audience included tiered pricing, longer films unsuitable for the variety show format, and adaptations of "respectable" literary classics.⁶⁴ Censorship was a key part of the gentrification project: the British Board of Censorship was established in January 1913 by the film industry itself as a means of boosting its own respectability. Official criteria for censoring a film included "scenes tending to disparage public characters and institutions," and "scenes calculated as incentive to crime" (Low 91). Unsurprisingly, such developments curtailed the antiauthority tradition in early British film, as well as the appreciative and admiring depictions of female criminals like *Three-Fingered Kate*.

