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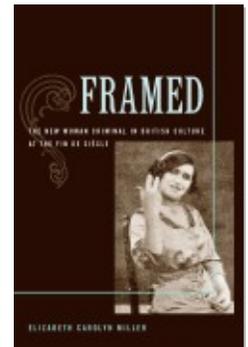
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FIVE

“AN INVITATION TO DYNAMITE”
*Female Revolutionaries in Late-Victorian
Dynamite Narrative*

Nineteenth-century iconography commonly represented “the spirit of revolution” with the image of a woman, but with the rise of dynamite narrative in the 1880s, female revolutionaries emerged as complex characters rather than abstract or allegorical symbols.¹ There were hardly any real female political criminals in fin de siècle Britain, until the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) began a militant, “guerilla” suffrage campaign in 1903, yet years before this, fictional female political criminals were a common feature of British dynamite narrative. This chapter considers three late-Victorian dynamite narratives that focus on revolutionary female protagonists: Oscar Wilde’s first play *Vera; Or, the Nihilists* (1883); Olivia and Helen Rossetti’s autobiographical novel *A Girl among the Anarchists*, published under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith (1903); and *The Dynamiter* (1885), a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson. These texts suggest that the emergence of modern “terrorism” calls for new conceptions of criminal agency, but also that the emergence of modern feminism and democratization calls for new conceptions of political agency; they show that in the context of first-wave feminism and women’s swelling political voice, the female political criminal took on a powerful new symbolic value.

Consider, for example, Britain’s widespread interest during the 1880s

and 1890s in a female assassin who was neither British nor Victorian: Charlotte Corday. Corday assassinated Jean-Paul Marat, leader of the radical French Jacobins, in 1793. She supported the Girondists—moderate republicans—and viewed Marat as a threat to democracy and to France. So she dressed up, had her hair done, pretended to be Marat’s comrade, and stabbed him in his bath. Authorities guillotined her shortly thereafter, but contrary to their hopes, an autopsy on her corpse proved that she was, indeed, a virgin.² Corday was regularly memorialized in Victorian literature, and was a visual subject for tableaux vivants and staged photography.³ At the end of the century, there was a surge of interest in Corday, and numerous popular histories of her life appeared in print: Jeannette Van Alstine published the first full-length English biography of Corday in 1890, for example, and Mary Jeaffreson published another in 1893, marking the centenary of Corday’s execution.⁴ In the story of Corday, late-Victorian readers found a curious parallel to New Women and suffragists: a woman who defined herself in public, political terms rather than private ones. She functioned as both a French “other,” against whom to define English identity, and a “self” who encapsulated modernity, democracy, and feminism as Britain was experiencing them.

Cesare Lombroso discussed Corday at length in his influential study *The Female Offender*, published in English in 1895, and references to Corday abound in other late-Victorian works of criminology. In his widely read study *Crime and Its Causes*, William Douglas Morrison reported to English readers that Corday was the subject of major dispute in international criminological circles. At the Paris Congress of Criminal Anthropology in 1889, when Corday’s skull “was subjected to examination, Lombroso declared that it was truly a criminal type of skull; [Paul] Topinard, on the other hand, gave it as his opinion that it was a typical female skull” (181). Lombroso was Italian and Topinard was French, but the conflict over whether Corday fit the “criminal type” was not simply a national contest: it reflected a broader debate within criminology about whether specifically political crimes derived from biological or sociological bases. As a woman, Corday occupied a particularly key position in this debate, since women’s status as political actors was already subject to dispute. Debates about the nature of political crime thus paralleled debates about women’s political access: both revolve around a central disagreement about essential identity versus politically constructed subjectivity.

In the late-Victorian period, Britain had Europe’s most tolerant policy regarding political criminals. The British government did not extend special treatment to political crimes committed on its *own* soil, but under

the Extradition Act of 1870, it liberally granted exile to dissidents from other countries. This policy reflected a tacit belief that political crime constituted a special category of deviance: it implied that political criminals were not biologically or constitutionally predisposed to crime, like “regular” criminals, but rather were driven to their actions by historical and political circumstances. Britain’s sanctuary for such exiles was a major source of conflict with other European powers such as Russia, as I discuss in chapter 4, but also a major source of debate and contention within Britain. The 1905 Aliens Act reflected widespread public anxiety about immigration and cosmopolitanism, not only due to xenophobia, territoriality, and job shortages, but also to paranoia about foreign radicals and terrorism.⁵

Exiled radicals actually had little to do with political crime in Britain, however.⁶ Though one would never guess it from dynamite fiction, Irish nationalists committed almost all the terrorist acts of the dynamite era, as I discuss in chapter 4. In the 1880s and 1890s, Irish-American Fenians regularly targeted London’s railway stations, political buildings, and national monuments. During this time, the United States’ refusal to extradite Fenian dynamiters, who had the overt and covert support of many in the heavily Irish U.S. population, was met with outrage in Britain. An 1884 editorial in the *Times* sums up the general feeling: the United States “is a very paradise for the dynamiter. It supplies him with arms, it sends him out upon his mission of evil, and it gives him a refuge when his work is done. There is no other civilized country in the world where he would have these chances within his reach, or where public opinion would tolerate the stigma to which America submits by suffering them.”⁷ Dynamite narrative is full of sympathetic depictions of female radicals, but tends to steer clear of the “Irish question”—for example, Joseph Hatton’s *By Order of the Czar*, an 1890 dynamite novel about a Russian female nihilist, supports nihilism and harshly criticizes the czarist regime, yet includes a digressive denunciation of Fenianism: “America had shamefully abused the privileges of blood and friendship in permitting a gigantic conspiracy to be hatched and kept alive on her free soil, to the detriment and danger of the mother-country” (1:222).⁸ The passage serves to disconnect the apparently justifiable political crimes of Russian nihilists from the “shameful” acts of Irish nationalists. In law and in literature, a fundamental conflict existed in Britain’s treatment of political criminals: lenient toward continental dissidents, appalled by Fenian dynamiters. This meant that the concept of “political crime” was inordinately divisive. To call a crime “political” was to acknowledge that it

stemmed from legitimate or at least comprehensible grievances. To call someone a “political criminal” was to admit them, to some extent, into the political sphere.

Writers in the dynamite genre engage such problems by contemplating the psychology, motivations, and character of the “terrorist.” At the root of such imaginary narratives are profound questions, the same questions that Lombroso and Topinard asked with respect to Charlotte Corday: are political crimes manifestations of individual deviance or the inevitable outcome of social conditions? Are these modern crimes “private” or “public”? The relatively unfamiliar threat posed in the 1880s by campaigns of political terror was at variance with British crime fiction’s tendency to locate criminal agency in the lone individual. Detective stories favored a “detective versus criminal” plot structure, as I describe in the first two chapters, but this conception of criminality was ill-suited for narratives of political crime. Not only did organized political insurgency threaten to deindividualize criminal guilt, as the controversy over Corday’s skull suggests, it was often aimed at collective rather than individual targets, randomizing victimization and raising unnerving questions about the complicity of private lives in crimes of the state. Dynamite narrative, as a genre, works to convey this broadening out of criminal guilt and victimization, which was inherent in collective political crimes. This was a new task for crime fiction, and women’s tenuous relation to political agency made them apt subjects for it.

The female political criminals of Wilde, the Rossettis, and the Stevensons express the new, uncomfortable sense of public-private interconnectedness embedded in modern terrorism. Because of women’s contested political access, a female political criminal captured the ambiguous nature of “terrorist” agency that the dynamite genre sought to represent. These authors use the female revolutionary to show that modern manifestations of “terrorism” or “political crime” demand broader, more collective notions of criminality *and* political representation. Because women’s agency was already viewed as an ambiguous proposition, and because women were already understood less as autonomous actors than as channels for the will of the social body, the figure of the woman terrorist dispersed guilt and victimization in the same way that political crimes seemed to do. Moreover, depicting terrorists as women, who in legal terms were extrapolitical subjects, linked the modern problem of political crime to debates about who should have political representation.

Dynamitings and “terrorism” were new additions to the fabric of life in 1880s and 1890s Britain, providing a historical basis for the emergence

of dynamite narrative as a popular genre. The literature itself, however, rarely depicted realistic insurgency; the prevalence of socialist and anarchist terrorists, such as in Henry James's and Joseph Conrad's novels, is one indication that this is the case, since these groups committed no major attacks in Britain. Female revolutionaries are a similarly fantastic aspect of the genre. Aside from the anti-Fenian would-be assassin Mrs. Dudley—who was compared to Charlotte Corday in the British press but was ultimately acquitted on the grounds of insanity—there were no women assassins, bombers, or dynamiters in late-Victorian Britain.⁹ In the dynamite genre, however, with its tales of assassinations and conspiratorial plots, women terrorists appeared commonly from the 1880s onward.¹⁰ Why was this so? I argue that the narrative figure of the female revolutionary conveys a newly modern, newly deindividualized, and newly “public” narrative of crime. Wilde, the Rossettis, and the Stevensons portray revolutionary women with incompatible personal and political commitments, emphasizing that revolutionary action conflicts with traditional divisions between public and private—a salient theme in the context of New Women and first-wave feminism. The texts do not come to the same conclusion about what the “revolutionary woman” means, but they all correlate feminism, democratization, and organized political insurgencies as modern challenges to traditional political authority, and they all use the female revolutionary to embody these modern demands for wider political representation.

VERA; OR, THE NIHILISTS

Oscar Wilde completed the first version of his first dramatic effort in 1880 and the final version in 1883, making *Vera; Or the Nihilists* an early example of a late-Victorian trend in representing female revolutionaries. The unusualness of Wilde's nihilist heroine, Vera Saboureff, conveys the unusualness of organized political crime in modern Britain. She evokes two real-life Russian nihilists, Vera Zasulich and Vera Figner, who were involved in assassinations or assassination attempts in the years leading up to the play, but for Anglo-American audiences, the figure of the female terrorist was a novelty.¹¹ Moreover, while Wilde's play intersects with widespread international coverage of Vera Zasulich's case in particular, his Vera little resembles the “Vera Zassulic” described by Stepniak in *Underground Russia*. Published in 1882, after Wilde had written *Vera* but before he revised it for the stage, *Underground Russia* ac-

quainted a great number of English-speaking readers with the principal figures of Russian nihilism. In the section on Zassulic, Stepniak claims: "In the whole range of history it would be difficult, and, perhaps, impossible to find a name which, at a bound, has risen into such universal and undisputed celebrity." Still, according to Stepniak, Zassulic herself "obstinately shunned fame" (106), and "has nothing about her of the heroine. . . . She is not beautiful. . . . She is very negligent with regard to her appearance. . . . She has not the slightest trace of the desire which almost every woman has, of displaying her beauty" (107). Wilde's Vera Sabouroff resembles this Vera in her celebrity, but little else.

Wilde wrote *Vera* at a moment in his life when he was deeply fascinated by various diva actresses, including Lillie Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt, Ellen Terry, and Helen Modjeska, and the character of Vera Sabouroff reflects his profound interest in the power and potentially dangerous glamour of the woman on stage.¹² *Vera* is the first of Wilde's dramas to render the female criminal as the perfect embodiment of the actress's fatal allure and active spectacle, but later works such as *The Duchess of Padua* and *Salomé* also employ murderous women to signify the aura and power of female glamour. Wilde imagined that such parts would be played by famous actresses, who would bring to the roles the force of their own celebrity in a modern, image-centered culture. He sent copies of *Vera* to several of his favorites, hoping they would play his nihilist heroine. When Marie Prescott ultimately starred as Vera in the New York production, Wilde specially provided vermilion silk for her costume, as was often noted in publicity surrounding the play. Prescott's personal fame was central to the play's marketing and promotion: figure 29 shows the program cover from the New York production, prominently emphasizing Prescott's name, and figure 30 shows a tribute to her talents as an actress from page 2 of the program. Reviews of the performance indicate that Prescott did not live up to the hype, but whatever the failings of Wilde's first drama, *Vera* is remarkable and important in its early representation of the figure of the female terrorist. Like other female criminals we have seen, Vera Sabouroff suggests the growing significance of women's image in a visually oriented consumer society, but more unusually, she also poses a range of fascinating questions about feminism's connection to political terror and democratic reform. Wilde's depiction of Vera thus unites seemingly disparate debates about women's public presence in the modern world, foregrounding the political resonance of debates about gender and visibility considered throughout this study.

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FOR REMAINDER OF PROGRAMME, SEE THIRD PAGE.

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"Marie Prescott's voice is simply wonderful! Her mobile face expresses the gamut of every passion. She can be a lioness in rage and is the very embodiment of grace and simplicity. Who, among all American artists possesses such magnetic power, such stage presence, such charm of person, musical intonation and perfection of utterance. NONE."

Marie Prescott will have the special support of Mr. Morrison, the favorite actor, and Mr. George E. Boniface, Mr. Ed. Lamb, Mr. B. W. Turner, and other well-known artists.

Fig. 30. From page two of the program for the New York production of *Vera; Or, the Nihilist*. (Courtesy of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.)

Like James and Conrad, Wilde hoped that writing a dynamite narrative would be profitable. In an 1880 letter, he describes his ambition for *Vera* in unambiguously material terms: “I have not yet finished furnishing my rooms, and have spent all my money over it already, so if no manager gives me gold for the *Nihilists* I don’t know what I shall do; but then I couldn’t really have anything but Chippendale and satinwood—I shouldn’t have been able to write” (99).¹³ His taste for luxurious furnishings notwithstanding, Wilde’s motivation for writing *Vera* was political as well as pecuniary. In an 1881 letter to an Oxford friend, Wilde called the play “my first attack on Tyranny” (117), and in an 1883 letter, published in the *New York World* to advertise the New York production, he wrote: “I have tried in [*Vera*] to express within the limits of art that Titan cry of the peoples for liberty, which in the Europe of our day is threatening thrones, and making governments unstable from Spain to Russia, and from north to southern seas” (214). The later Wilde found no such “limits” in art—in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “There is nothing that art cannot express” (14)—but this letter reveals Wilde’s early debt to Percy Bysshe Shelley and clearly communicates his political purpose for *Vera*: to render dramatically the modern tide of democratic and socialist movements in Europe.

When Wilde was writing and revising *Vera*, Russian authorities were continually being attacked by nihilist revolutionaries, so the political content of his play was disturbingly pertinent. In 1881, Czar Alexander II was killed by a nihilist bomb, causing *Vera*’s London performance to be canceled.¹⁴ Wilde wanted the play to be staged, and in some versions of *Vera*, he set the action in 1800 to protect the play from censorship. The final version is undated, but quite obviously addresses the political conditions of contemporary Russia: the story occurs after the 1861 emancipation of the serfs (in the prologue, a Colonel says, “You peasants are getting too saucy since you ceased to be serfs” [134]), and the play’s many references to extortionate taxation connect it to a major source of anti-Czarist outrage in the 1870s.¹⁵

Despite the timeliness of the play and its pronihilist slant, critics have not taken its politics seriously, preferring to see it as an exercise in conventional sensationalism. In a 1907 assessment of Wilde’s dramatic oeuvre, Archibald Henderson called *Vera* “a mere *Schauerstück* [thriller] of the weakest type” (Beckson 272). More recently, Julie Buckler has argued that “in staging . . . melodramatic affinities as late as the 1880s, Wilde’s *Vera* affirms essentially conservative values in politics *and* art” (66). Recent rereadings of melodrama have disputed the idea that it is a

fundamentally conservative or apolitical form, however, and while Wilde's first drama is undeniably immature within his oeuvre, many of its apparent weaknesses (such as unelaborated character motivation) suit the generic context of nineteenth-century melodrama.¹⁶ Melodrama, in fact, shares a key formal feature with dynamite narrative as it developed in the late-Victorian era: the disavowal of logical cause and effect structures of plot progression. Dynamite narrative does this through chronological disordering—both *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Secret Agent* follow a chaotic timeline, for example—but melodrama also disavows cause and effect through seemingly inadequate character motivation or abrupt shifts in plot or tone. The effect in both cases is to call into question notions of modern progress and to destabilize narrative authority. Wilde's melodramatic dynamite drama is far more politically engaged than most critics have recognized, and its melodramatic form contributes to the play's overall assault on traditional structures of authority. Through his revolutionary characterization of Vera the nihilist, Wilde depicts feminism, democracy, and nihilist political crime as anti-hierarchical, anti-patriarchal, and anti-autocratic forces in the modern world.

My argument about *Vera* taps into a broader dispute about the status of Wilde's politics; literary critics have embraced Gay Wilde and Irish Wilde, but Socialist Wilde is still a figure of contention.¹⁷ Sos Eltis has argued that Wilde's socialist politics were a key component of his authorship, duly recognized by his contemporaries, and Jonathan Freedman considers "The Soul of Man under Socialism"—an essay that commonly sparks discussions of this topic—brilliant socialist polemic precisely because it presents socialism as "the inevitable fulfillment of the central assumptions of its seeming antagonist, bourgeois individualism" (73). The doubleness, paradox, and play in Wilde's writing, however, have led other critics to suspect his political engagement. Some maintain that Wilde is simply too individualistic for one to take his claims for socialism seriously. Simon Joyce reads Wilde's socialism as "idiosyncratic" and "consciously solipsistic" ("Sexual" 514). Amanda Anderson claims that Wilde defines self-realization in terms of social rebellion, so that "'Socialism' in Wilde's conception" is "self-consciously utopian," a "desire for a purer realm of freedom" outside social negation (154). Josephine Guy argues that to the extent that the essay makes any argument at all, "Soul of Man" advocates not socialism but Individualism, a political philosophy resembling libertarianism and *opposed* to socialism ("The Soul").¹⁸

Disputes about Wilde's politics partly stem from the functionally dif-

ferent categories at work in nineteenth-century radical politics, and attention to this context suggests that “socialism” and “individualism,” for Wilde, are not mutually exclusive. At the time Wilde was writing, Marxist socialism was beginning to take root in Britain, but so were the ideas of anarchist socialists like Peter Kropotkin, whom Wilde admired. The anarchists were part of the First International coalition of socialist groups, but rather than advocating a powerful centralized state as Marxist socialists did (at least as an intermediary condition), anarchists envisioned a society of small, cooperative, communist collectives, based upon the principles of free choice and voluntary association. Far from wanting to centralize the state, they believed that the state, by exercising coercion, violates individuals’ inherent right to freedom.¹⁹ The group had some overlap with the Individualist movement with which Guy associates Wilde: anarchists opposed private property (the lodestar of Individualism), but like the Individualists emphasized autonomy and personal liberty, believing bureaucracy and statecraft to be inherently corrupt.²⁰

Wilde, as Eltis has shown, was quite attracted to the anarchist vision; as he said in an 1894 interview, “I think I am rather more than a Socialist. I am something of an Anarchist” (15). His regard for Kropotkin is widely documented, and in 1889, Wilde signed a public petition protesting the hanging of anarchists in Chicago’s Haymarket fiasco, a risky decision for a man who wanted an audience, given mainstream animosity toward anarchism.²¹ Russian nihilism, like anarchism, was an anti-authoritarian political philosophy; Stepniak describes it as “a struggle for the emancipation of intelligence from every kind of dependence, [which] advanced side by side with that for the emancipation of the laboring classes from serfdom” (3–4). Considering Wilde’s political tendencies, it is not surprising that his play is generally supportive of Russian nihilism, nor that Vera is a heroic figure. Not all of its nihilists are as admirable as Vera, but the play concurs with the nihilist position on czarist rule: it depicts the czarist regime in Russia as a stagnant, repressive despotism that devalues individual liberty. Russia’s human rights abuses were notorious in nineteenth-century Europe; dissenters to the czar or his vast network of bureaucrats could be exiled to Siberia, without benefit of trial, merely for speaking out against the state. *Vera* does not offer a straightforward political program, yet is emphatically a play about the importance of individual liberties. It champions individualism as a salutary corrective to autocracy and as an avenue toward collective good. The play thus makes essentially the same individualist–socialist argument that Wilde made eight years later in “Soul of Man,” suggesting that his

political opinions were far less erratic than many critics have claimed. Both works argue for a socialism that is economically collectivist, does not impinge on individual expression, and is suspicious of institutional centralization. In this way, *Vera* expresses a political perspective that would persist throughout Wilde's career.

Despite widespread international awareness of czarist brutality in Russia, Wilde's sympathetic depiction of nihilist political criminals raised contemporaries' eyebrows. Russia was the first nation besieged by modern "terrorism," and as other parts of the world experienced this new form of organized political crime, Wilde's treatment of the subject jarred with the prevalent reactionary mood. Mixed reviews of the New York performance were obviously tinged by fears of political terrorism. The *New York Times* prefaced its review by editorializing on the "difference between the frank and beautiful love of freedom [in the United States] and the lurid horrors of Nihilism." The reviewer was openly repelled by Wilde's politics: "The Nihilist, as we know him to-day, is an enemy of social order. . . . We are unable to feel pity for the men who threw dynamite under the carriage of the Czar Alexander. . . . A dramatist, in consequence, who puts a gang of Nihilists upon the stage on the ground that they are interesting characters of the time and that their convictions make them dramatic, does so at his own peril" ("Amusements").²² Wilde's drama does exploit fear of, and fascination with, political crime, making use of secret oaths and other tropes of dynamite sensationalism, but with his choice of protagonist, Wilde takes a highly innovative approach to his material: Vera's gender perfectly expresses the newness and unfamiliarity of organized political crime in the modern world. Such a character was far too alien for many of the drama's critics. Reviewers of the New York production sniffed at its depiction of women, finding Vera unbelievably unfeminine.²³ The *New York Daily Tribune* argued that the very idea of a female revolutionary doomed the play to fail: "To make a woman the leader of a national insurrection was foolish" (qtd. in Reed xxxiii). Resistance to Vera as a character was clearly not only because she was a nihilist, but because she was a nihilist woman.

Wilde's play documents a genuine feminist strain in Russian nihilism, yet relies heavily on a conflict between Vera's gender and her politics. The step toward radicalism, Wilde stresses, is a much longer stride for women, who have less training and preparation in political consciousness. Indeed, it is particularly significant that Wilde's Vera is of humble origins, unlike the female revolutionaries in *The Princess Casamassima*, *A Girl among the Anarchists*, *The Dynamiter*, and most other dynamite narra-

tives of the day. Philip May's *Love: The Reward*, an 1885 novel also featuring a female nihilist named Vera, is typical in this regard. May's nihilist heroine is of noble birth but has been shut up in a convent for most of her girlhood, like Charlotte Corday: "She was a little Cinderella, who had come from the convent instead of from the kitchen" (1:144). Wilde's play, predating all of the aforementioned texts, takes greater political risk in providing Vera with peasant origins, alienating her further than a woman of higher birth from audience sympathies and from means of political access.

We learn early in the drama, for example, that Vera's brother Dmitri became a nihilist while being educated in the Russian metropolis of Moscow; Vera, in contrast, is left in the rural wilds, where she is expected to milk cows and marry her peasant neighbor. That she exhibits interests in politics and ethics is surprising and peculiar to those around her. As the prologue of the play opens, Vera's father, Peter Saboureff, and her would-be suitor Michael discuss whether Vera will ever agree to marry. The root of her intransigence, they believe, is that she has "too many ideas," too much "seriousness," and "is always thinking of others" (120–22). Vera's expansive intellect and sympathy, it seems, are preventing her from settling comfortably into her domestic lot as a woman. In Vera's first appearance in the prologue, upon returning home and hearing Michael's plea for her love, she says that "there is so much else to do in the world but love" (125). Vera's resistance to love and marriage pointedly link her to a burgeoning discourse of female autonomy in 1880s Britain.²⁴

By act 1, despite pressure to marry and stay home, Vera has become the most feared nihilist in Russia. Her femininity and lesser physical strength have not hindered her effectiveness in this sphere: the nihilist goal of assassinating the Czar, she says, could just as easily be accomplished by a woman as a man: "Oh, to think what stands between us and freedom in Europe! a few old men, wrinkled, feeble, tottering dotards whom a boy could strangle for a ducat, or a woman stab in a night-time" (150–51). This line articulates one of the most feared aspects of terrorism: the idea that political crime put the sort of national or public influence usually limited to the state into the hands of rogue individuals. James's and Conrad's novels refute this notion of terror by depicting utterly inept revolutionists, but in making his nihilist a woman, Wilde instead underscores the idea that political crime gives power and influence to otherwise insignificant individuals, which correlates it with democracy as a political force.

Indeed, as we have seen in other genres of crime narrative, Vera's femininity actually helps her circumvent forces of social control. The Czar has put an enormous price on her head, but she is "as hard to capture as a she-wolf is, and twice as dangerous" (141). In act 1, she attends the Grand Duke's masked ball at the palace in disguise, and as a beautiful woman in full ball dress, is never suspected. The General of the police force admits that she has terrorized the nation's leader: "I heard at the council to-day that that woman Vera Sabouroff, the head of [the nihilists], had been seen in this very city. The Emperor's face turned as white as the snow outside. I think I never saw such terror in any man before" (167). He calls Vera the most "dangerous" woman in Europe, but also claims that "she is not a woman at all; she is a sort of devil!" (168). The General's remarks stress the unsettling duality of Vera's identity, as a woman and a nihilist. Just as the play's nihilists view the existing social order as on the verge of being turned upside down, so Vera—as nihilist and woman—constantly threatens to be the "opposite" of what she seems. This "nihilist" form of characterization has the effect of destabilizing femininity and political criminality as specific *categories* of identity.²⁵

Throughout the play, Wilde extends this dual critique of gender and politics to the topic of paternalism, linking nascent feminism with the democratic and antiautocratic force of nihilism. Women and nihilists are presented as "modern," while patriarchal authority on the familial and state level is revealed as outworn. In Peter Sabouroff, Vera's father, Wilde creates a satirical portrait of the respectable, heartless patriarch. Set in the aftershocks of a particularly harsh Russian winter, the play depicts Peter as utterly unmoved by the suffering of others in his community: "Let God and our little Father the Czar look to the world. It is none of my work to mend my neighbour's thatch. Why, last winter old Michael was frozen to death in his sleigh in the snowstorm, and his wife and children starved afterwards when the hard times came; but what business was it of mine?" (122). Peter goes on to enumerate a list of local tragedies, including a flood that killed a group of children trapped in a schoolhouse, none of which are any concern to him. He repeats four times, "Let God and the Czar look to it" (122–23).

Russia has its own "little Father," the Czar, and in the play's religious cosmology, God is a patriarchal authority not unlike the Czar: "heaven is a despotism," one character says (181). The inherent fault in such structures of belief, in Wilde's depiction, is that they centralize all power into one paternal figurehead, leaving no sense of agency in those below him. Fostering the little domain of his inn, Peter feels no compulsion to

act for others, and he sees justification for such narrowness in the political and religious structures he has been taught to revere. With Peter, Wilde's play shows the failure of autocratic, paternalist structures of authority in religion, the home, and the state. Vera, in contrast, fully appreciates how the ideology of religious patriarchy lends justification to corrupt political patriarchy, and recites an inverted version of "Our Father" in honor of the czar: "a father whose name shall not be hallowed, whose kingdom shall change to a republic, whose trespasses shall not be forgiven him, because he has robbed us of our daily bread; with whom is neither might, nor right, nor glory, now or for ever" (149).

Peter's children thus reject their father's conception of paternalist authority. While studying law in Moscow, Dmitri becomes involved with nihilist radicals and commits his life to overturning autocratic power: "To give liberty to thirty millions of people enslaved to one man" (131). Dmitri is sent to die in the mines of Siberia, however, after he is caught printing a nihilist newspaper. Wilde pointedly makes Dmitri's crime one of political discourse rather than violence, ensuring audience outrage at his sentence. Vera also rejects her father's unquestioning acquiescence to czarist authority. Even before learning of her brother's imprisonment, which prompts her conversion to nihilism, she has already begun to question the political status quo.²⁶ When her father's inn is visited by a group of military police escorting a chain gang to Siberia, she asks their leader, "Who are our masters?" Questioning authority is a dangerous practice in czarist Russia, however, as the leader tells her: "these men are going to the mines for life for asking the same foolish question" (128). Vera is indignant about the treatment of the prisoners, but Peter views it merely as the making of his fortune. When he realizes that a new road will bring his inn more business from soldiers escorting prisoners, he is elated: "Men in chains! Why, we are in luck, my child!" (125).

Through his depiction of the melodramatically wicked Czar, Wilde's play skewers the paternalist notion that one is better off when taken care of under patriarchal authority. That Wilde extends his critique of paternalism to government as well as families is particularly significant in light of late-Victorian feminism and legal interventionism. In contrast to Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, which support an interventionist state at the expense of the patriarchal home, Wilde's play depicts state authority as merely an inductive manifestation of patriarchal authority in the home. This point is particularly clear in act 2, when the drama moves inside the walls of the palace. The Czar has been imprisoning his son in the palace out of fear that the Czarevitch will murder him in a fever for ac-

cession. When the Czarevitch greets his father in act 2, the Czar responds: "Don't come too near me, boy! Don't come too near me, I say! There is always something about an heir to a crown unwholesome to his father" (182–83). Later, he asks an advisor whether he shouldn't just murder his son to rid himself of the risk: "Shall I banish him? Shall I [*whispers*] . . . ? The Emperor Paul did it. The Empress Catherine there [*points to picture on the wall*] did it. Why shouldn't I?" (195; Wilde's ellipses). Wilde's characterization of the Czar reminds us that patriarchal institutions of monarchy, inheritance, and patrilineage have a long history of encouraging perverse mistreatment of others rather than security or stability.

Indeed, the Czar cares neither for his son, whom he plots to kill, nor for the people he rules as "father" of the nation. A proclamation announcing the implementation of martial law is warranted "By order of the Czar, father of his people" (149), but the act is intended to starve the populace. A ruthless advisor, Prince Paul, tells the Czar that martial law "will carry off your surplus population in six months, and save you any expense in courts of justice." The Czar finds this Malthusian argument sound: "Quite right. There are too many people in Russia, too much money spent on them, too much money on courts of justice" (194). Wilde uses the heartlessness of the Czar to put the nihilists' crimes in perspective—there are far more Russians killed by the Czar than political figures assassinated by the nihilists—and his drama asks whether violence at the hands of the state is any more justified than violence at the hands of the nihilists; Vera reflects on "how easy it is for a king to kill his people by thousands, but we cannot rid ourselves of one crowned man in Europe!" (150).

Wilde's political critique also extends to hereditary aristocracy. Russia's ruling class, in *Vera*, ruthlessly exploits the people who finance it. In one scene, the Marquis de Poivnard asks another aristocrat, "What is the use of the people except for us to get money out of?" He then demands "forty thousand roubles . . . my wife says she must have a new diamond bracelet" (242). The heavily taxed peasants who provide such men with riches are—like the prisoners to Peter Sabouroff—of no account except to generate wealth. Wilde's Russian aristocrats betray all the symptoms of a decadent, obsolete institution: one courtier says, "I am bored with life, Prince. Since the opera season ended I have been a perpetual martyr to ennui." Prince Paul responds, "The *maladie du siècle*! You want a new excitement, Prince. Let me see—you have been married twice already; suppose you try—falling in love for once" (179). Such epigram-

matic repartee rings familiarly of Jack and Algernon, Wilde's celebrated caricatures of the English aristocracy in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but *Vera's* satire of decadence is decidedly more caustic: one courtier tries, for example, to arrange another's death in order to facilitate an affair with his wife.

Vera emerges as a threat to this moribund patriarchal order, not only because of her nihilism, but because of her independent femininity. She refuses the attentions of Michael, the farmer whose courtship is sanctioned by her father, and even converts him to nihilism. Upon joining the nihilists, she forsakes her father and vows never to marry at all, in accordance with the nihilist oath: "To strangle whatever nature is in me; neither to love nor to be loved; neither to pity nor to be pitied; neither to marry nor to be given in marriage, till the end is come" (135).²⁷ The nihilists pledge to annihilate the hierarchies of the past in favor of a new society, yet still, Wilde's version of Russian nihilism does not fully assimilate women into its fraternal ranks, a point that becomes clearer as the central conflict of the plot takes shape: Vera violates her nihilist oath by falling in love with the Czarevitch, who has revolutionary sympathies and joins the nihilists posing as a medical student named Alexis. Wilde presents this conflict as a tension between political and personal commitment as well as a tension between Vera's womanhood and radicalism. At one point, she asks herself, "why did he come amongst us with his bright young face, his heart aflame for liberty, his pure white soul? Why does he make me feel at times as if I would have him as my king, Republican though I be?" (156–57). Later, in the midst of reciting the nihilist oath, she breaks off, "Oh, I am a woman! God help me, I am a woman! . . . I am a traitor. I love" (255). Vera's femininity made her espousal of the nihilist oath more shocking for 1880s audiences, and Wilde treats her conflicting loyalties as a symptom of that femininity.²⁸

Vera most explicitly addresses the conflict between her femininity and her nihilism at the end of act 3, when she agrees to assassinate Alexis because he has taken the title of czar upon his father's death: "I am no woman now . . . my heart is as cold as steel" (233). Given her choice of weapons, Vera opts for the phallic dagger rather than poison, a choice inflected with a rejection of the feminine, since murderesses were uniquely associated with poison, as discussed in chapter 2. In the same scene, Vera imagines herself committing infanticide, a virulent refutation of maternal "instinct": "if I was a mother and bore a man-child, I would poison my breast against him, lest he might grow to a traitor or to a king" (234). At the height of this dramatic scene, Wilde directly links

Vera to the historical female political criminal most familiar in the Anglo-Victorian imagination; Vera says, “Methinks the spirit of Charlotte Corday has entered my soul now. I shall carve my name on the world, and be ranked among the great heroines. Ay! the spirit of Charlotte Corday beats in each petty vein, and nerves my woman’s hand to strike, as I have nerved my woman’s heart to hate” (237). Corday was a heroic figure in the Victorian imaginary, but represented the ambiguous nature of female political agency, as I discuss at the beginning of the chapter.

Wilde’s invocation of Corday parallels Thomas Carlyle’s in *The French Revolution*, a history that Wilde described in “The Decay of Lying” as “one of the most fascinating historical novels ever written,” since “facts are either kept in their proper subordinate position, or else entirely excluded on the general ground of dullness” (980). *The French Revolution* was published in 1837 and pored over by legions of Victorian readers; it practically ensured Corday’s symbolic value for the Victorians by presenting her as the epitome of Manichaeian, angel/demon femininity:

She is of stately Norman figure; in her twenty-fifth year; of beautiful still countenance: her name is Charlotte Corday. . . . What if she, this fair young Charlotte, had emerged from her secluded stillness, suddenly like a Star; cruel-lovely, with half-angelic, half-daemonic splendour; to gleam for a moment, and in a moment be extinguished: to be held in memory, so bright complete was she, through long centuries! (645)

Noting her youth, beauty, seclusion, and high birth, Carlyle aligns Corday with idealized femininity, yet she is also “cruel-lovely” and “half-daemonic,” compound descriptors that signify the profound bifurcation at the root of her identity as a woman *and* a political assassin. The passage presents Corday’s political deed as at odds with her sex; she “emerge[s] from her secluded stillness,” into the realm of political combat, only “for a moment.” Carlyle reconciles her violent deed with her feminine body by describing her political agency in mystical terms, as though it came from somewhere outside herself.

When Vera calls upon Corday’s spirit, Wilde similarly mystifies her decision to assassinate the Czar: her body remains feminine in this passage—“my woman’s heart” and “my woman’s hand”—but is possessed by another spirit, allowing her to agree to the assassination despite her love for Alexis. Vera’s mystical communion with Corday presents her as a channel for social and historical forces rather than an independent po-

litical agent, but Wilde pointedly rejects this characterization in the final scene of his play, when Vera abandons her mission and decides *not* to assassinate the young czar. Hovering above Alexis's body, brandishing her dagger, she has a change of heart. After hearing his intentions for reform, she determines that it will be better for the people of Russia to have him alive than dead: "you must live for liberty, for Russia, for me!" (260). Knowing that the nihilists below are waiting for the dagger to signal her completion of the deed, she decides to stab herself and toss the bloody knife to the conspirators, thwarting them from entering the palace and killing Alexis. Her words in this scene show she is not motivated by love; she reneges on her nihilist oath, but public commitment still trumps personal attachment. Her last words, after she stabs herself, are also the last words of the play: "I have saved Russia! [*Dies*]" (261).

This ending valorizes the effectiveness of women's political agency, albeit in the problematic form of self-immolation. Vera's act of individual heroism can be read as feminist, but also entails her rejection of a collective revolutionary movement in favor of an individual or liberal model of political agency. The feminism of *Vera's* conclusion is undeveloped, yet throughout the play, Vera's support for democracy and her rebellion against patriarchal authority are inseparable from her feminist autonomy. A letter written by Constance Lloyd, who would marry Wilde soon after *Vera's* staging, gives us a window into his ideas about the ending: "Oscar says he wrote it to show that an abstract idea such as liberty could have quite as much power and be made quite as fine as the passion of love" (Wilde, *Complete Letters* 222). In keeping with melodramatic tradition, *Vera* privileges individual heroism and advocates a democratic sensibility, yet the play also breaks from melodrama in valuing "liberty" above heterosexual love. Vera's final gesture could be said, indeed, to exemplify the most fundamental individual liberty of all: the right to die.

The political consequences of Vera's suicide are unclear, since the play ends with her death, and does not resolve whether the new czar follows through on his promises of reform. In the last act, Alexis's private meditations on the seductive power of the crown and scepter suggest that Vera may have misjudged his incorruptibility, yet the play's ending seems to promote a reformist rather than a revolutionary solution for political disputes that were constantly erupting into violence at the end of the nineteenth century. Earlier in the play, one of the aristocrats states, "Reforms in Russia are very tragic, but they always end in a farce" (244); it is significant, however, that only unappealing characters express such

cynicism about reform. Ultimately, the play does not advocate a coherent plan for democratic change, but it does position Vera squarely in the realm of political action, even though she is a woman and even though she is a nihilist. In linking together the modern political phenomena of democracy, first-wave feminism, and political terror, *Vera* calls for a serious reconfiguration of public and political representation at the end of the nineteenth century.

Wilde's first drama should give critics pause in underestimating the political thrust of his later satirical comedies, for it reminds us that Wilde's public debut as a dramatist occurred via a play sympathetic to Russian nihilist terrorism. Under the circumstances, Lady Bracknell's humorous lines in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, for example, are decidedly more menacing: "Fortunately, in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square" (17). *Earnest* was Wilde's biggest hit, and its most crucial prop is the handbag that held the baby Jack, which Miss Prism left in the cloakroom at Victoria Station. Remarkably, the 1884 Fenian dynamiting of Victoria Station was also achieved via a "heavy small bag" left in the station's cloakroom ("Dynamite Outrage" 10). This may appear coincidental, but consider Lady Bracknell's response when Jack tells her that he was found in "an ordinary hand-bag" left in the cloakroom of Victoria Station: "To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to?" (19). These lines might appear to exemplify the Wildean non sequitur, but Lady Bracknell's association of "terror"—via the Reign of Terror—with a bag left in the cloakroom at Victoria Station actually followed logically in late-Victorian England. Moreover, when Lady Bracknell goes on to remark that "a cloak-room at a railway station . . . could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognized position in good society" (19), Wilde explicitly correlates antidemocratic ideology with explosive truths emerging from bags left in railway station cloakrooms.

If *The Importance of Being Earnest* is indeed associating Fenian dynamitings with aristocratic exceptionalism, it is not politically afar from the overtly democratic *Vera*. Indeed, given Wilde's Irish background and his support for Irish nationalism, it is impossible to read his description of the corrupt Russian empire in *Vera* without being reminded of England's own empire, or to encounter his nihilist political criminals without

thinking of Irish republicans. Wilde does not directly name Ireland in the play, but his nihilists describe Russia's brutal sway over neighboring Poland—"unhappy Poland! . . . we must not forget our brothers there" (534)—and his Russian peasants work their land for mere survival, while others profit, like Irish tenant farmers working for English landlords. In a manuscript draft of *Vera*, held at the Clark Library, Wilde spelled out this connection more explicitly in an act 2 speech by the Czarevitch: "The land which is theirs we have taken from them." Whether or not Wilde's audience saw such parallels, Fenian dynamite must have played a role in the critical hesitation surrounding *Vera's* treatment of terrorism. For in the context of the czar's assassination and the first Irish nationalist dynamiting in London—both of which occurred in 1881—*Vera* put forth a surprisingly radical investigation into the nature of political crime in the modern world.

A GIRL AMONG THE ANARCHISTS

*V*era was loosely inspired by a real female revolutionary, but *A Girl among the Anarchists* represents a far more direct redaction of biography into dynamite narrative. The lives of its authors, Helen and Olivia Rossetti, intersected with a staggeringly wide range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, politics, and art, yet the women have remained relatively obscure to scholars of British culture. Their parents were William Michael Rossetti and Lucy Madox Brown; thus Christina Rossetti was their aunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti their uncle, John Polidori their great-uncle, Ford Madox Brown their grandfather, and Ford Madox Ford their cousin. The sisters grew up amid bohemian intellectualism and republican, secularist political ideals, but as teenagers, they rejected their family's respectable radicalism for thoroughgoing anarchism. At the ages of sixteen and twelve, they began to publish an anarchist newspaper called the *Torch* from the basement of their parents' home.²⁹ William Michael Rossetti was "an ardent lover of Shelley and freedom," according to Olivia, and "was rather amused and rather proud of" his daughters' anarchist activities (Tryphonopoulos and Surette xv). He was also a civil servant in the British government, however, and eventually the *Torch* had to relocate elsewhere.³⁰ The Rossettis' involvement in the paper lasted until 1896, at which time Olivia moved to Italy with her Italian anarchist lover and Helen left England for a long sea voyage meant to cure her consumptive lungs. Soon, both sisters aban-

doned anarchism for internationalism, and Olivia worked many years for David Lubin, one of the League of Nations' progenitors. Ultimately, however, the two women became supporters of hypernationalist Italian Fascism.³¹

In 1903, long before converting to Fascism, the Rossettis published *A Girl among the Anarchists*, narrating with fictional license their experiences as teenagers in the late-nineteenth-century London anarchist movement. The novel is heavily inflected by the genre and tropes of dynamite fiction. Written under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith, which is also the name of the main character, *Girl* depicts an unusually independent revolutionary female protagonist. Like Wilde's Vera, however, the protagonist eventually abandons her radicalism, and the novel concludes with an abortive courtship and an unresolved political quest. The novel's ambivalent ending indicates the impossibility of women's full development as political subjects under existing social conditions, and the Rossettis' semiautobiographical dynamite narrative thus correlates feminist discontent at women's lack of political representation with the frustrations that prompt radical campaigns for political change.

I suggest in chapter 4 that *A Girl among the Anarchists* was a key source for Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, published four years later. Conrad revisits a central event of the Rossettis' narrative, Martial Bourdin's botched Greenwich Park bombing of 1894, and appears to have been heavily influenced by its account, though he never acknowledged it (see chapter 4, note 10). If my claim is correct, it suggests the Rossettis' importance in defining the anarchist movement for contemporaneous dynamite literature, which is unsurprising given their prominent social position in London's literary and cultural elite. Interestingly, however, the Rossettis' amalgamated autobiographical "self," Isabel Meredith, does not benefit from a prominent social position. In fictionalizing their story, the Rossettis drastically alter their life and situation, and the changes they make help convey the novel's feminist contentions. They depict Meredith as a woman on her own, lacking the protective net of patriarchal domesticity. This situation is not presented as frightening or debilitating, as in George Gissing's *The Odd Women*, where the Madden sisters are left "adrift" by the sudden loss of their father, nor as sterile and empty, like Vivie Warren's life at the end of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, but rather as rich in freedom and possibility.

As the story begins, Meredith's parents have died, leaving her with an unusual degree of autonomy. She lives virtually alone in bohemian London; her brother also resides in the house, but spends most days and

nights at a hospital training to be a doctor. Meredith says, “I was used to looking after myself and depending on my own resources for amusement and occupation” (1). The novel thus begins like a *New Woman* novel; Meredith’s search for fulfillment and occupation, in a setting inhospitable to women, is what brings her to radicalism. Given women’s limited opportunities outside the home, she grows weary and bored: “Time used often to hang rather heavily on my hands in the big house where I was generally alone. I was the housekeeper, but such cares did not take up much of my time. . . . I became restless and dissatisfied” (11). In the tradition of 1890s *New Woman* novels, housekeeping and domesticity do not fill Meredith’s interests and ambitions, and she instead seeks a role in public life.

Like the late-Victorian *New Woman*, Meredith is independent and self-sufficient; she wanders around the city at night, sometimes returning from political meetings at one in the morning or later (54), and regularly makes late-night visits to disreputable pawnshops: “since my connection with the Anarchist movement . . . I had become quite familiar with the ins and outs [of pawnshops]” (224). She also has detailed knowledge of London public transportation, which she negotiates on her own (178), and becomes just as comfortable in the political sphere as in public space: “my name had become well known in the International Anarchist Party” (120). In revolutionary politics, Meredith finds an outlet for her energy and autonomy. Initially, she is attracted to state socialism, but she finds a more satisfyingly revolutionary platform in anarchist communism. She is enthusiastic about the anarchist plan to abolish poverty—a central theme of the book—and philosophical anarchism appeals to her belief in “the right to complete liberty of action” (18), since it is less dogmatic than Marxism or state socialism. In this narrative context, Meredith’s intense attraction to the ideal of “liberty” seems as much a feminist as an anarchist impulse.

Outside of paternal authority, Meredith finds a surrogate community and an alternative form of home with her anarchist comrades. Sometimes, after working late, she sleeps in the newspaper’s office with other members of the staff, many of whom are male. The staff is often likened to a large egalitarian family, a microcosm of the form of social organization that the anarchists want to bring about: voluntary and communitarian rather than hierarchical. Meredith rejects the “housekeeper” domesticity she is born into, defined by property ownership and a gendered division of labor, and embraces an alternative kinship with anarchist comrades. Their revolutionary agenda, the novel suggests, involves find-

ing new models of social organization suited for an egalitarian and communitarian society, unlike patriarchal domesticity.

Exploring forms of community beyond the hierarchical and patriarchal family, Meredith also explores—from the outside—sexual alternatives to bourgeois marriage. Her sympathetic account of anarchists who advocate free-love principles suggests that such arrangements accord with feminist objectives: jealousy and possessiveness in love enforce women's social role as sexual property; free-love advocates, who move beyond such parsimoniousness, show greater respect for women's personal liberty. One such advocate, Giannoli, explains his free-love doctrine to Meredith: "It was a woman . . . who completely altered my views of life, and made me see how perverted and unnatural are our ideas of sex and love and morals" (196). He reclaims the rhetoric of "perversion," applying it to normative bourgeois sexuality rather than free love: "All my previous ideas and prejudices appeared to me monstrous and iniquitous. I saw the falseness of all our ideas of morality, the absurdity of placing conventions before nature and the detestable character of our dealings with women" (200). The novel thus offers a feminist argument for free love, and indeed women initiate all the free-love unions discussed in its pages, including one that a young woman "insisted" upon (205). The fin de siècle saw a widespread effort, in radical circles, to theorize a model of sexuality better suited for the future democratic and egalitarian society.³² Meredith participates in this discourse by imagining a kind of love rooted in communitarian social principles.

Meredith herself does not engage in free love, nor in the "propaganda by deed" advocated by her more extreme revolutionary comrades, but she is nevertheless a revolutionary heroine and a political criminal, who takes part in activities that could land her in jail.³³ She endures detective and police harassment for her work on the anarchist newspaper, and describes in the course of the novel various efforts to spirit wanted dynamiters out of the country, to harbor men being searched for by the police, and to provide money and counsel for men who have been arrested. Meredith characterizes her interactions with the police in these instances in terms of resistance to governmental paternalism. As an anarchist, she is not persuaded by the idea that legal interventionism is a sound means of ensuring liberty, and in this way she differs from many contemporary feminists. Late-Victorian women's groups championed the campaign for interventionist legal reform, as I discuss in chapter 1, but Meredith views police intervention as coercive enforcement of normative behavior in the private sphere. In one scene, she takes a male anarchist from Scotland

in for the night, much to the disgust of the neighborhood constable: "As I was getting out my latch-key the local policeman chanced to pass: 'That fellow has been hanging about for the last hours, miss,' he said to me. 'Shall I remove him for you?' 'Certainly not,' I replied firmly, and opening the door, I requested my unknown comrade to enter. I can still see in my mind's eye that constable's face. It looked unutterable things" (58).

Tackling paternalism, interventionism, and free love, the Rossetti's novel addresses the newly redistricted public and private spheres of modern Britain; it conjoins the New Woman novel with dynamite narrative to describe a society in which traditional structures of authority are crumbling amid feminist and democratic appeals for liberty. Like Vera, Isabel Meredith finds a prototype for her anomalous position as a revolutionary woman in the story of Charlotte Corday. She recalls an old friend of her father's who would goad her, as a child, about her fascination for the French Revolution:

He had nicknamed me Charlotte Corday, for . . . I had plunged into the French Revolution, glorying in its heroisms and audacity, and it had become a favourite amusement . . . to enact scenes drawn from its history. . . . The old professor loved to tease me by abusing my favourite heroes; and when he had at last roused me to a vigorous assertion of revolutionary sentiments, he would turn to my father and say, "There's a little spitfire for you; you will have to keep a look-out or she will be making bombs soon and blowing us all up." (7-8)

As in Wilde's play, Meredith's radicalization is bolstered by identification with Corday, but while Meredith and Vera both reflect the ambiguity of Corday's angel/demon image in British culture, Vera's summoning of Corday's spirit is far more ominous than Meredith's youthful emulation of the French assassin.³⁴

Still, the novel does not neutralize the threat its protagonist poses as an anarchist revolutionary. In a discussion of "propaganda by deed," Meredith takes on a crucial issue of dynamite narrative: she attempts to make sense of the modern crime of terrorism, typically represented in dynamite fiction as so utterly random and purposeless that it is nearly impossible to understand as a "crime" at all. Meredith positions herself as an interpreter, a figure on the periphery between anarchism and "normal" society. A "normal man," she says, is "morally incapable of judging" fanatical anarchists because he "cannot grasp their motive, their point of

view” (187). She attempts to explain that point of view, arguing that there is something “terribly, if pervertedly, logical” in a dynamiter’s reasoning: “Earnest thought and reflection told him that if any section of society suffered, then society at large was guilty: all the thoughtless, all the indifferent members of society were equally responsible for its abuses” (189). The dynamiter, in other words, believes that “society at large” is responsible for poverty and oppression; it is from here that the dynamiter comes to advocate random violence: “Society at large is guilty; society at large must suffer. Society is fairly well represented by the mixed crowd in a café. I will attack this crowd indiscriminately” (189–90). Meredith rejects such logic and stresses that the vast majority of anarchists also reject it, but insists that a dynamiter believes he is “performing his duty according to his own lights just as much as a soldier when he obeys orders and fires on the enemy” (189). In comparing a dynamiter to a soldier, she reminds her audience that state-sanctioned violence also occasions civilian casualties, “collateral damage,” and the death of innocent bystanders.

Much of the outrage about dynamite terrorism in late-Victorian London, of course, had to do with its seemingly indiscriminate victimization. On 24 January 1885, Fenian dynamiters set off near-simultaneous explosions in the Tower of London, the Houses of Parliament, and Westminster Hall, as I discuss in chapter 4. No one was killed, but several tourists and sightseers were severely injured. An article on the attack in the *Times* reported: “To inspire terror is with the Irish-American enemies of England . . . both an end in itself and a means to other ends. It gratifies a malignity of temper which has been festered till it has become a ruling passion.” The author can only understand such random violence by imagining the Fenians as independent actors with independent failings, a “malignity of temper.” He cannot view them as acting within a more generalized colonial conflict. A Fenian, the article states, “chuckles at the infliction of pain and fear upon men, women, and children absolutely disconnected with and many of them literally ignorant of, the so-called ‘wrongs of Ireland.’” He “sweeps them at random into the meshes of his murderous plot” (“London”). The fact that “women and children,” in particular, could be victims of dynamite bombs seemed a violation of the rules of civil engagement; thus “innocent women and children” are evoked ad nauseam in mainstream newspaper accounts of dynamite terror.³⁵

Meredith’s attempt to make sense of propaganda by deed, though she acknowledges that the dynamiter’s philosophy is misguided and even

mad, is thus especially striking in that it comes from a woman. The rhetoric surrounding dynamite attacks often appealed to the victimization of women to establish terrorism's disregard for public and private social divisions. To harm women and children, these articles suggest, represents a failure to distinguish between the politically conscious and the politically ignorant, between those who have the vote and those who do not. In the *Times*, assassins were considered worse than other kinds of murderers, but were not wholly incomprehensible since they targeted public figures: "To compass the assassination of a Sovereign or a Minister, or even the destruction *en masse* of a legislative body, must be, without doubt, condemned and pursued to punishment as crimes inconsistent with the elementary forms of civilization. But such designs are at least intelligible; they go straight to their mark" ("London"). Dynamiters, by contrast, are random; rather than targeting official representatives, they consider every member of a society its "representative." Meredith asserts that in the mind of the dynamiter, "society at large is guilty," which shockingly erodes the distinction between "innocent women and children" and valid political agents. Because the novel is largely about Meredith's efforts, as a woman, to find an outlet for her political agency, the democratic violence of dynamite stands out against legitimate British politics, which do not count women as representatives.

The novel thus correlates revolutionary democratic politics, feminism, and political crime, in that all three modern phenomena call into question traditional notions of who "represents" the nation.³⁶ Despite this bold assertion of what a New Woman revolutionary signifies, however, the novel's conclusion is decidedly pessimistic. The title indicates where the story will end up: the heroine is merely a "girl," not an independent woman, and is merely "among" the anarchists, not of them. She eventually gives up on her effort to assert political agency via anarchism, and correlates her rejection of anarchism with the onset of maturity, as do other characters in the story. A letter from her sister, who has long been out of the country, says: "I expect by now Isabel has had time to grow out of her enthusiasm for revolutions and economics, and will feel less drawn toward baggy-trousered democrats and unwashed philosophers" (281). The letter angers Meredith, but by the last page of the novel, she too calls the anarchist print-shop "the place which had witnessed so much enthusiasm, so many generous hopes and aspirations, and where so many illusions lay buried" (302). In the last line of the story, she leaves the anarchists for good: "I walked forth into the London street a sadder if a wiser woman" (302). This ending is deeply ambivalent. The

references to Meredith's newfound maturity position the tale as a novel of development or *bildung*, but at the conclusion, she has nothing to replace the purpose and meaning that anarchism gave to her life. Instead, she is stuck at her new stage of maturity. She is no longer an anarchist, but still lacks a place in mainstream public life.

The novel depicts this dilemma as a specifically bodily one, indicating that Meredith's female body is the root of the problem, for it is not the dynamiters or free-love advocates who drive Meredith outside the movement through extremism, but the purity advocates. Toward the novel's end, Meredith becomes fixated on what she considers the folly of hygienic strains in revolutionary politics, such as the temperance movement and vegetarianism. Her frustration with those who deny their bodies emerges just as she suffers from sexual rejection; Meredith's virulent reaction against ascetic strains of anarchism thus appears to be displaced anger regarding her own inability to reconcile body and politics. The object of her desire is Ivan Kosinski, a Russian anarchist famous for "his absolute unswerving devotion to his ideas" (26). Kosinski is known to hate women, making consummation of their relationship seem unlikely: "From the first moment Kosinski interested me. His manners were not engaging; towards women especially he was decidedly hostile. . . . perhaps his evident aversion to my sex . . . had for me a certain fascination. I felt attracted towards the man" (29–30). Kosinski's misogyny stems from suspicion about women's political commitment: "Women are rarely of much use in a movement like ours. They so rarely seem able to forget *themselves*, to detach themselves from the narrow interests of their own lives. They are still the slaves of their past, of their passions, and of all manner of prejudices" (233). Meredith's inability to square her political beliefs and bodily desires is, to Kosinski, a specifically female failing, but his analysis neglects to account for the fact that it is precisely women's *bodies* that impede their full political participation.

Hence, at the end of the novel, Meredith is stuck between a radical asceticism that cannot satisfy her body, and a mainstream society that cannot occupy her mind. After suppressing her feelings for Kosinski for much of the narrative, she finally speaks: "We Anarchists are always talking of the rights of the individual, why are you deliberately sacrificing your personal happiness, and mine? . . . I love you, and I *know* that you love me" (267–68). Kosinski's response exercises a privilege that is revealed in the novel to be specifically male—the privilege of denying the body: "An Anarchist's life is not his own. Friendship, comradeship may be helpful, but family ties are fatal" (268). The novel ends with no reso-

lution to the fundamental problem of the text: the conflict between Meredith's female body and her desire for political agency.

THE DYNAMITER

The Rossettis' novel is one of many late-Victorian narratives about anarchism; indeed, anarchists frequently appear in dynamite fiction, which as I have noted is a historically incongruous aspect of the genre, as is the absence of Ireland and Fenian dynamite. The corrupt Russian empire in *Vera* may be an implied condemnation of British imperialism, but neither Wilde nor the Rossettis directly address the "Irish question." Irish nationalism is, however, one of the causes motivating the revolutionaries in Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's 1885 novel *The Dynamiter*. Ireland is rarely mentioned in the text; still, among all the dynamite narratives in this study, it is the only one that openly correlates with the acts of political violence that the British reading public confronted in daily life. In the years surrounding the novel's publication, Irish nationalist groups mounted many attacks, dynamiting numerous buildings and railway stations, stabbing Lord Frederick Cavendish and his undersecretary in Dublin's Phoenix Park, and assassinating dozens of Anglo-Irish landlords and officials.³⁷ Despite *The Dynamiter's* more intimate proximity to the reality of late-Victorian terror, however, it is a pointedly antirealist text, an assiduously antimimetic and humorous satire.

The target of the novel's satire is reflexive rather than overtly political: narrative conventions, literary realism, and genre fiction are all blasted to bits. As is often the case, the Stevensons helped solidify "dynamite narrative" as a genre by parodying it. Their novel employs hyperbolic excess, unreliable narrators, and structural irony to mock the conventions of detective, dynamite, and sensation fiction, as well as realism, colonial adventure stories, and other popular forms of Victorian narrative. While this seems like a decidedly risky literary enterprise for such grave subject matter, the novel was a commercial and critical hit. In her preface to *The Dynamiter*, Fanny states that it was "as well received as we could have hoped" (xv), and that their hopes for the novel were exclusively pecuniary: "On one of these occasions when money was absolutely necessary, we cast about for something that could be done quickly and without too much strain" (xiv).³⁸ Despite its inauspicious beginnings, the novel went through three editions in four months upon

its publication in April 1885. The London *Times* gave it a very flattering review; Victorian tastemaker Henry James also wrote admiringly of it, as I note in chapter 4; and G. K. Chesterton likewise praised it in print. The critic E. Purcell, who often disparaged Stevenson's work, published a glowing review in the journal *Academy*: "the art is phenomenal . . . it charms by its very audacity. . . . no modern English book contains such a profusion and superfluity of talent as this little 'Dynamiter.' It is a masterpiece . . . no novelist can read it without gnawing envy" (Maixner 196).

Why was the novel so eminently uncontroversial, in spite of the levity with which it treats the perilous subject of Irish dynamite? The depiction of its female revolutionary, Clara Luxmore, is largely responsible for the novel's appeal. In Clara's first appearance in the text, she is fleeing from the scene of a dynamite bomb, but is "charming both in face and figure, elegantly dressed and gloved: a lady undeniable" (12). Like other female criminals of the era, she is likable, attractive, and appealing. Throughout the narrative, she manipulates the novel's unsuspecting male protagonists into aiding insurgent conspiracy. The novel begins when these three young men, fresh out of university, decide to become detectives to escape financial straits. Anticipating Conan Doyle, who had not yet invented Sherlock Holmes, they imagine the detective as the consummate gentleman: "our manners, habit of the world, powers of conversation, vast stores of unconnected knowledge, all that we are and have builds up the character of the complete detective. It is, in short, the only profession for a gentleman" (6).

The men prove to be no good at detecting, however, and are continually hoodwinked by Clara, who is a key predecessor for characters such as Conan Doyle's Irene Adler. Clara's ability to con is partially due to her image. One of the men describes her in terms that evoke cinema's glamorous female criminals, discussed in chapter 3: "Her face was warm and rich in colour; in shape, it was that piquant triangle, so innocently sly, so saucily attractive . . . ; her eyes were large, starry, and visited by changing lights; . . . her arms, bare to the shoulder, gleamed white; her figure, full and soft in all the womanly contours, was yet alive and active, light with excess of life" (139). References to "starry" eyes with "changing lights," "gleaming" white arms, and a body "light with excess of life" liken Clara to the flickering, fleeting figure of the *passante*—Baudelaire's dazzling yet vanishing woman of the modern city. Her very name, Clara Luxmore, literally evokes "clear light." "Innocently sly" and "saucily attractive," Clara is desirable yet ungraspable, aligning her with a pecu-

liarily modern and consumerist conception of glamour and desire, in which distance intensifies visual enticement. Walter Benjamin's well-known Marxian reading of the *passante* has described this figure as a phantasmagoric abstraction of consumer capitalism, emblematic of nineteenth-century consumerism's manipulations of desire via vision and distance (exemplified, in the latter half of the century, by plate-glass windows and department store display).

Recent feminist work by critics such as Deborah Parsons, however, has also linked the figure of the *passante* with the rise of modern, autonomous femininity, and the Stevensons' novel resonates with such readings; for Clara is not only characterized by her intangible allure, but by her independence and autonomy, which connect her with the figure of the New Woman. Her mother explains at one point in the novel that Clara left her family to participate in revolutionary politics:

she ran away from home. . . . Some whim about oppressed nationalities—Ireland, Poland, and the like—has turned her brain; and if you should anywhere encounter a young lady (I must say, of remarkable attractions) answering to the name of Luxmore, Lake, or Fonblanque (for I am told she uses these indifferently, as well as many others), tell her, from me, that I forgive her cruelty, and though I will never more behold her face, I am at any time prepared to make her a liberal allowance. (79)

Like Vera, Clara conjoins the late-Victorian figure of the New Woman with the rise of democratic social movements, but also with modern, consumerist forms of feminine glamour of less interest to the era's major New Woman novelists such as Sarah Grand or Thomas Hardy. The Stevensons depict their female revolutionary as an extra-domestic, autonomous woman, but while Vera and Isabel Meredith are shocking political criminals largely because they are women, Clara's desirable, attractive femininity functions to preclude umbrage at the buoyancy with which the authors handle their subject.

Clara is nevertheless an extremely volatile narrative presence, associated with all kinds of modern threats to the social order. Perhaps the most fundamental of these threats is her disruption of novelistic form. Occasionally, she takes over the story from its third-person narrator and tells tales in first-person narrative voice. Like Scheherazade, she deploys narration as a form of subversive power, spinning sensational yarns about Mormon Utah and colonial Cuba to bend the novel's male protagonists

to her ends. Part of the genius of the novel, much appreciated by its contemporaries, is that it is not always clear which parts are “real” and which are Clara’s lies, reflexively reminding readers that all fiction is a lie. The book is thus surprisingly ungrounded and “anarchic” in form, and its chaotic point of view gives it a whiff of amorality or modern relativism that emerges largely from Clara’s role in the text. That both Robert and Fanny Stevenson claimed authorship of the novel, as indicated on its title page, reinforced this idea of modern women undermining traditional structures of narrative authority, by violating the convention of a unified authorial voice.

The form and effect of Clara’s narration, in fact, echoes dynamite terror itself, as represented in the late-Victorian press. Newspapers of this era often depict terrorism as a confusingly disorienting excess of technological modernity; after the January 1885 bombing involving three explosions, the *Times* wrote: “the worst acts of mediæval tyrants and of savage tribes have now been surpassed by . . . men domiciled as citizens in the most progressive country of the modern world” (“London”). Progress and modernity mingle with primitive medievalism and “savagery” in this account. The writer presumes that modernity should correspond with progressive improvement, but a “savage” revolutionary movement rooted in the United States—the “most progressive country of the modern world”—has disrupted this faith in modernity and progress. Clara’s narration similarly associates the modern with disorientation rather than progress. Her sections of the novel disregard progressive narration in a self-consciously modern way; they initially seem to advance the novel’s overarching plot, but ultimately prove to be pointless digressions.

Her first “lie,” moreover, likewise deals with the curious intermingling of the “modern” and the “primitive” in the United States: it is a tale of “harems” and forced marriage on the Mormon frontier of Utah. The story is told as true, but it so violates the tenets of realism that it leaves Clara’s listener, one of the gentleman detectives, utterly bewildered and confused:

It was an excellent story; and it might be true, but he believed it was not. Miss Fonblanque was a lady, and it was doubtless possible for a lady to wander from the truth; but how was a gentleman to tell her so? His spirits for some time had been sinking, but they now fell to zero; and long after her voice had died away he still sat with a troubled and averted countenance, and could find no form of words to thank her for her narrative. (49)

Reviews of the novel regarded such “lies” as modern literary experimentation, but like dynamite, Clara’s unreliable narration represents modernity’s disorientation, its denial of traditional assumptions that function as a stable ground for perspective. Indeed, the novel’s chief dynamiter, Zero, later makes an explicit comparison between women and dynamite: “chemicals are proverbially as fickle as woman, and clockwork as capricious as the very devil” (117).

With its chaotic point of view and its seemingly indiscriminate vacillations between the “real” narrator and Clara’s erratic tales, the novel echoes another key attribute of late-Victorian dynamite: arbitrariness. Just as the novel jumbles perspective by haphazardly intermingling reliable and unreliable voices, dynamiters were said to disregard the perspective of their victims, to bomb indiscriminately the politically savvy and the politically ignorant. As I discuss with respect to the Rossettis’ novel, it was considered particularly ignominious that extrapolitical subjects such as women and children could be victims of political terror. Clara’s illicit, ungrounded narration thus evokes the egalitarian arbitrariness of dynamite. At one point, Zero exclaims: “behold this field of city, rich, crowded, laughing with the spoil of continents; but soon, how soon, to be laid low! . . . Then shall the pallid constable flee side by side with the detected thief” (134). In dynamite’s randomness and capacity for creating unexpected juxtapositions—the pairing of a constable and a thief, for example—Zero finds a democratic appeal.

Despite the inclusion of Clara’s volatile, mutinous narration, however, *The Dynamiter* does dispense moral principle at key points in the text. The novel’s explosive satire is framed, at the beginning and end, in the earnest, hyper-conventional language of bourgeois domestic sentiment—a complete shift in tone from the vast midsection of the novel.³⁹ In its conclusion, Clara falls in love with one of the male detectives and renounces her past, and the exiled Prince of Bohemia, a character who also appeared in Stevenson’s *The New Arabian Nights* (1882), chastises the repentant Clara for her dalliance with dynamite:

“I speak with some severity, and yet I pick my terms. I tell myself continually that you are a woman; and a voice continually reminds me of the children whose lives and limbs you have endangered. A woman,” he repeated solemnly—“and children. Possibly, madam, when you are yourself a mother, you will feel the bite of that antithesis: possibly when you kneel at night beside a cradle, a fear will fall upon you, heavier than any shame. . . .” (203)

When it comes to revolution, the prince is hardly a neutral arbiter—readers of *New Arabian Nights* will remember that “a recent revolution [had] hurled him from the throne of Bohemia” (226)—but here he dwells not on Clara’s revolutionary instincts but on her unwomanliness and on the supposed unnaturalness of her disregard for children. The pathology of the specifically *female* revolutionary thus takes narrative precedence at the novel’s resolution, staving off a coherent discussion of political violence.

After all the satirical excess of the novel—a full third of which is made up of Clara’s melodramatic fibs—the tone shifts to moral realism with Clara’s eleventh-hour conversion: “Oh! Harry . . . I am a dangerous and wicked girl. . . . From first to last I have cheated and played with you. And what I am I dare not even name to you in words. Indeed, until today . . . I never grasped the depth and foulness of my guilt” (188). On its surface, this conclusion is far more conventional than most contemporaneous narratives about female criminals, yet in many ways it is less conventional than it seems. Having already been established as an inveterate liar, Clara cannot fully reclaim credibility when renouncing her past; even more significantly, at the story’s end, she is the only one of the novel’s dynamiters to survive, and she is the only one who is female. Her ability to segue from radical revolutionary to bourgeois wife in the final pages of the book is a testament to the malleability of her identity, and establishes the extent to which her beauty and image transcend all other aspects of her character.

Still, at the novel’s conclusion, the Prince steps forward as a representative of male authority, and his final lecture depicts marriage and domesticity as a fund of moral value in the service of English nationalism:

Is it not one of your English poets, that looked abroad upon the earth and saw . . . innumerable troops manoeuvring, war-ships at sea and a great dust of battles on shore; and casting anxiously about for what should be the cause of so many and painful preparations, spied at last, in the centre of all, a mother and her babe? These, madam, are my politics; and the verses, which are by Mr. Coventry Patmore, I have caused to be translated into the Bohemian tongue. Yes, these are my politics: to change what we can; to better what we can; but still to bear in mind . . . for no word however nobly sounding, and no cause however just and pious, to relax the stricture of these bonds. (204)

Alluding to Coventry Patmore, the prince here suggests that no matter what political grievances dissenters may have, the nation is always ethi-

cally superior by virtue of the domestic relations at its core. Clara takes issue with the Prince's conception of politics, but assures him, "I love my husband," which the prince deems "a good answer" (204).

The novel opens in the same key as it ends: upholding the natural, inherent worth of Englishness by referencing the "innocent women and children" threatened by Irish dynamite. Its dedication is to Constable William Cole and Sergeant Thomas Cox, two police officers who were injured while disposing of dynamite planted in the January 1885 bombing: "Whoever be in the right in this great and confused war of politics . . . your side, your part, is at least pure of doubt. Yours is the side of the child, of the breeding woman" (vi). The "child" and "breeding woman" function here as in the prince's speech: whatever England's political dealings, its domestic nucleus proves its decency. Past critics of the novel have viewed the dedication as disingenuous, but Stevenson's letters uphold its point of view, and contemporaries saw it as sincere.⁴⁰ It is not surprising that critics have seen *The Dynamiter's* dedication as insincere, since it is so at odds with the rest of the book. At one point in the novel, Zero expresses comic outrage at the implication that one of his bombings was a "fiasco": "'You will pardon me again,' returned Zero with positive asperity; 'a child was injured'" (186). That the Stevensons could joke about the dynamiting of children and still have a blockbuster on their hands indicates that their use of gender ideology in the novel's frame to diffuse its volatility was an incredibly powerful symbolic deployment.⁴¹ In this context, *The Dynamiter's* dedication and conclusion serve to recast the sides of political conflict the Stevensons depict: the essential conflict at the heart of modern political crime, we are to believe, is not between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the represented and the disenfranchised, men and women, or, in the case of the Irish question, colonizers and colonized.⁴² Instead, it is between home and the streets, babies and bombs. This accords with a broader cultural tendency, evident in this novel, to depict radicalism as anathema to the bonds of the nuclear family. In *The Dynamiter*, the supposedly self-evident value of normative domesticity effectively shuts down political debate.

Despite this ending, the vast bulk of *The Dynamiter*, like *Vera* and *A Girl among the Anarchists*, employs the female revolutionary as an attractive representation of modern challenges to established authorities; she unites democracy, first-wave feminism, and political terror as modern challenges to the configuration of national and public representation. Perhaps it was not finally in the best interest of feminism to have the New Woman coupled with dynamite, nor, certainly, with an overween-

ing emphasis on women's capacity to exercise power via visual spectacle, but it remains true that the rise of British dynamite narratives about female political criminals was followed, shortly thereafter, by an outburst of *real* female political criminals. As Wilde surely would have appreciated, art did not imitate life, but life imitated art. In 1903, the Women's Social and Political Union founded the first militant suffrage organization in Britain, which broke from the feminist movement's tradition of lawful agitation. Such radicalism may have been inspired, if we are to believe F. Henrietta Müller's 1884 pro-suffrage letter to the *Times*, by suffrage advocates' close attention to militant dynamite. Defending her decision to refuse taxation since she is denied representation, she writes: "The power, whether active or latent, to make oneself troublesome is the power which obtains justice; ultimately this is a premium on turbulence and disaffection. It is an invitation to dynamite" (Müller).

As this letter portends, the dispute over suffragette political crime engaged many of the same questions at issue in the three works I have discussed. From 1903 to the start of World War I, the militant wing of the British campaign for women's suffrage committed numerous "terrorist" acts, including bombings, arson, and sabotage. A suffragette named Mary Richardson famously slashed Velázquez's painting *The Toilet of Venus* in the National Gallery, an act of iconoclasm against the image of a female nude very much at odds with the image-centered brand of mainstream feminism we see in popular dynamite narrative.⁴³ The British government, known for affording "special" status to political crime, denied that such acts were "political" at all, viewing them instead as a kind of pointless, hysterical vandalism. Criminologists approved of this view; though Havelock Ellis supported women's suffrage, he argued, "To rank such crimes among political offenses would be disastrous, for . . . it would soon become impossible to claim any special privilege even for legitimate political offenders" ("Letter" 234). Ellis's comment reveals a painful tautology: the suffrage campaign was all about giving women a "legitimate" political voice, but women cannot commit political crimes if they are not recognized as political agents.

Wilde, the Rossettis, and the Stevensons address this same circularity: the question of whether or not women can be political actors intertwines, in their works, with the question of whether or not political "crimes" can be legitimately political "acts." All three of these dynamite narratives end in variously unsatisfying ways—*Vera* and *A Girl* totally ambiguously, *The Dynamiter* with a nod to the conventional marriage plot—which perhaps speaks to their uncertainty regarding the project

with which they are engaged. None of these authors knew how feminism would change the political sphere, nor did they know what the effects of terrorism or democracy would be, but they all foreground a central problem of representation and inclusion at the heart of these distinct political movements. In their depictions of female terrorists and in their focus on questions of gender, body, appearance, and image, the three works suggest that ultimately the political effects of feminism, democracy, and terror will be judged not according to ostensibly empirical or objective measures, but in terms of the images and representations through which they are seen. These narratives of female revolutionaries thus connect “representation” in its literary and visual sense with “representation” in its political sense, portraying a political modernity in which the image-centered culture of consumerism is inextricably tied to the possibility of a newly inclusive, newly feminist public sphere.