When in 1898 the International Anti-Anarchist Conference was held in Rome to find new means of controlling the seemingly rising threat of anarchist terrorism, this threat had already been framed as a serious crisis of visibility. Rendered possible by the invention of dynamite by Alfred Nobel, a previously unknown concept of enmity evolved at the close of the nineteenth century, and with the emerging figure of the dynamiter, nothing less than the disappearance of the visible enemy seemed to have set in. No longer limited to the old model of regicide or political assassination, this new threat affected theatergoers, strollers, and subway passengers alike; and since even small amounts of the dangerous substance were said to generate highly destructive effects, narratives of a mobile and invisible danger immediately emerged. “It is an unpleasant reflection”, *The Times* wrote in 1881, “that one of the clearest consequences of civilization is that it has armed folly and crime with terrible powers, and that it enables any one to carry out the threat contained in the famous letter to Lord Mont-eagle touching the Gunpowder Plot – ‘they shall receive a terrible blow, this Parliament, and yet they shall not see who hurt them’ – in a way which was but lately impossible.”

Equipped with clock mechanisms, the bombs referred to as “infernal machines” were presumed to explode any minute and any place. This kind of war was feared to break out anywhere, and, as United States Army Officer Philip Henry Sheridan suggested in 1884 with respect to recent threats in Europe, it could be waged by “infuriated people with means carried with perfect safety to themselves in the

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1 Editorial in *The Times*, 26 July 1881.
pockets of their clothing”. ² British police complained that in the massive crowds of London, the observation of suspects was doomed to failure, and even the identification of well-known offenders posed serious problems. ³

A narrative of disappearance hence pervaded the discourse of the dynamite threat, and this narrative was not restricted to the problem that policemen working on the streets failed to identify the bombers: it was also turned into a diagnosis of society. Foreigners were held responsible for the explosions, and they were now said to be irretrievably mixed up with the law-abiding British population: “They come”, The Times quoted a high official of the Metropolitan Police in 1910,

… into this country – whether in increasing numbers or not I cannot tell; a few thousand aliens, more or less, are soon absorbed in London – prepared to do any desperate job for money. Murder is nothing to them; and burglary, rather than political machination, is their real aim. They are, of course, chiefly anarchists, and they follow respectable callings, if at all, only as a cover for their lawlessness. ⁴

The invisibility of possible enemies and undiscovered dangers in the midst of society seemed to require continuous vigilance on the part of authorities and populace alike: “we must not allow ourselves”, The Times warned after one of the explosions in London, “to forget the presence among us of reckless enemies of social order”. ⁵ Turn-of-the-century fiction negotiated, in numerous variations, the anxiety that such enemies could no longer be identified. Whether in Doyle’s “That Little Square Box”, in which the narrator fails in his attempts to “classify and label” his fellow-passengers on a boat where he suspects an infernal machine; ⁶ or in the Preface of Lesesne’s Torpedoes; or,