

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Jason Zimmerman, MA

MURDER (1930)

Alfred Hitchcock

OVERVIEW

Director Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is perhaps the best-known British filmmaker and a household name. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. *Murder!* was his second full-talkie film. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, which have all earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

Film Hitchcock began production on *Murder!* almost immediately after shooting *Juno and the Paycock*, only directing the comedy short *An Elastic Affair* for the *Elstree Calling* comedy review between the two features. The film is a loose interpretation of the popular novel *Enter Sir John* written by Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson, released in 1928. *Murder!* is Hitchcock's third sound film, and we can see some experiments with off-screen sound similar to those in *Juno and the Paycock*: Hitchcock claims to have used a live orchestra on set rather than a recording to provide the music for the scene where Sir John listens to the radio. While this film did well in London upon release, it did not receive widespread acclaim.

Background Unique among Hitchcock's films, *Murder!* was selected by John Maxwell, British International Picture's co-owner, for multilingual release in Europe. A German-language version of the film, including different actors, was released in 1931 as *Mary*. Like 1925's *The Pleasure Garden*, Hitchcock's directorial debut, *Murder!* is performed in a theatrical setting. We are occasionally reminded of this by curtains rising and falling and overly theatrical extras or staging. There is a Hitchcock cameo towards the film's end; after Sir John's visit to the crime scene with Markham and his wife, the director can be spotted walking in front of the house with a female companion. Multiple restorations of *Murder!* exist and are available through many streaming services and distributors.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

Even in the restorations, there is an issue with audio capture and sound design. At several points throughout the film, music or sound effects cover up the dialogue making it difficult for viewers to follow some plot points. Damaged reels mean the screen occasionally fades to black in the middle of scenes as worn film frames flicker past. There are a handful of production mistakes as well. For example, during Sir John's interview of Diana Baring at the women's prison, the camera pans too far left, allowing us to see the edge of the set and some of the sound stage. Foley art is used at several points and, while a bit obviously overdubbed, is expertly done. Although somewhat sloppy in production, *Murder!* includes a number of Hitchcock trademarks, such as the leading man shaving on screen, an accused person who must prove their innocence, and theatrically comical directing of extras. The composition throughout the film is outstanding and displays Hitchcock's deep understanding of visual storytelling.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Sir John Menier	An actor of some renown and juror-turned-amateur-investigator
Diana Baring	An actress accused of murder
Doucie Markham	An actress and leader of a theater troupe with her husband, Ted
Ted Markham	An actor and leader of a theater troupe with his wife, Doucie
Handel Fane	An mixed-race actor and circus performer noted for his cross-dressing acts
Mr. Druce	An actor working in the Markham's traveling theater troupe
Mrs. Druce	An actress working in the Markham's traveling theater troupe

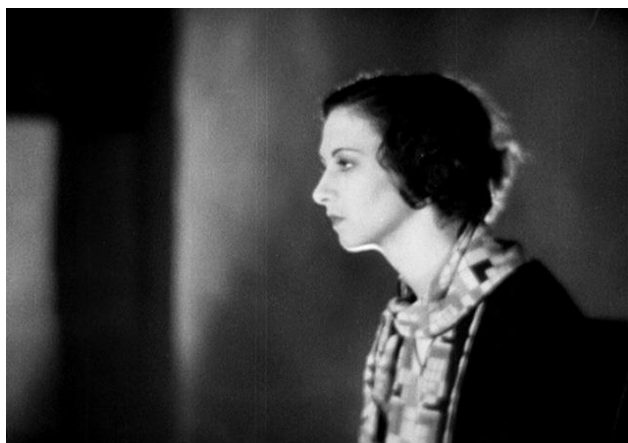
SYNOPSIS

When a young actress is found in a daze next to the body of her co-worker in a London tenement, there is little doubt of her guilt: The blood on her dress and the murder weapon beside her mark her as the killer. A dramatic court case ensues, which includes both damning evidence and a heartfelt plea for mercy. Although the jurors come to a quick conclusion, one among them, famed actor Sir John, can't shake the feeling that mystery persists. The accused lacks a motive, and several clues hint that a third party was present. He begins his own investigation, speaking to actors involved in the acting troupe and witnesses to the crime. Through careful interview and deduction, Sir John singles out several men for closer inspection. One by one, he confronts each until one suspect remains. Handel Fane cannot be found, but Ted Markham has a lead. He and Sir John track Fane to a circus where he performs disguised as a female trapeze artist. While watching the circus performance, Sir John hatches a scheme inspired by a scene in *Hamlet*: Sir John will invite Fane to try out for the role of the murderer in a play based on the Baring case. Fane responds and tries out for the part, showing guilt and insider knowledge of the crime as he performs the script. When Fane learns the play is unfinished and realizes Sir John may be aware of his mixed race heritage, he notices something is wrong and escapes from Sir John's trap with a polite exit. In the end, his suicide note reveals all: The husband of the murdered woman was going to blackmail Fane over his racial status and Diana willingly covered for his part in the crime. Fane, who couldn't bear to have his dual secrets revealed, passed judgment on himself instead of facing a court.

PLOT

A scream in the night- In the dark of night, a clock tower tolls 1:30. A shriek rings out, causing sleeping birds and stray cats to scamper, and an incessant hammering begins. Window after window opens as the residents of nearby homes lean out to investigate the late-night disturbance. Doucie and Ted Markham lean out in tandem. "Why can't they knock quietly?" asks Doucie. When she spots a policeman, her husband quickly dresses and leaves to investigate. She follows and joins the crowd gathering by a tenement door. The police officer manages to get the door open. He and the crowd pour inside.

Dead silent- All sound stops as the crime scene comes into view. Before a crackling fire sits the unresponsive Diana Baring with blood on her dress and a bloody fire poker laying by her feet. The police officer watches Mr. Druce attending to something on the floor as the camera pans down to the electric torch on his belt. Its light singles out Ms. Baring's profile as she sits limply. Then we see the body of Edna Druce lying in front of Diana. The officer speaks, telling someone to fetch an investigator as he tries to secure the scene. Multiple people come forward, saying they know both women and overwhelming the officer with information.



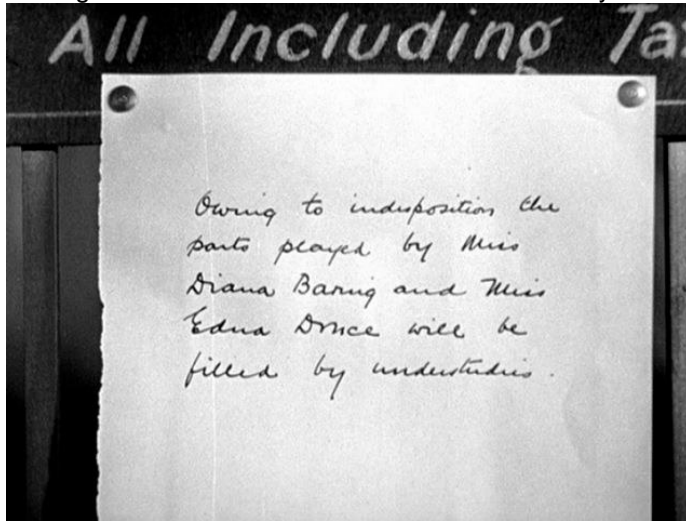
A cup of tea- “You always hated Edna,” Mr. Druce says to Diana. She remains unresponsive as Druce continues to mourn and has to be pulled away from Edna’s body by the police officer. When the policeman asks for brandy for Mr. Druce, Diana replies that there should be a full flask on the table behind her. “I was just giving some to Edna when...” she says before revealing that she cannot remember what happened. When the brandy bottle is empty, the landlady suggests a cup of tea and leaves to make it.



In the kitchen- Doucie follows the landlady into the kitchen. She lights the gas stove for the old woman and immediately begins to gossip. “Diana never did get on well with poor Edna Druce,” she says as she takes a seat by the table in the adjoining dining room. The landlady listens as she gathers several cups and saucers to clean in the kitchen sink before filling the pot with tea and letting it steep. While the landlady makes it clear several times she doesn’t care to gossip about the murder, Doucie follows her in and out of the kitchen and dining room while she does. The camera pans back and forth, comically following the flurry of activity. The pair emerge just in time to see Diana Baring escorted from the building in police custody.



“Owing to indisposition”-Many people mill about the city streets. We see children playing in the alley by a stage door and police officers walking their beats before being shown the ticket booth in a theater. A crowd pushes past to find their seats as the camera zooms in on the price board. Beneath the ticket prices, we see a handwritten note tacked to the board. As the crowd clears out, we can read it: “Owing to indisposition,” it says, understudies will play the leading ladies’ roles. An ornate curtain rises, revealing Diana Baring seated in a prison cell. She looks at the camera through the viewing slot in the cell door. Inside her mind, we hear someone announce her as if she has just finished a performance. Ms. Baring’s face lightens. She smiles and bows her head subtly as we hear a recording of applause.



Backstage interrogations- Two investigators stand backstage with the theater director, Mr. Markham. The players enter and leave the stage one after another, and the theater director calls them to speak to the police. Although each has some helpful information, each must go before the interview can be concluded because of stage cues. These comic interruptions continue as we are introduced to several actors, including Ion Stewart and Handel Fane. Through several incomplete interviews with several different people, the investigators begin piecing together the events leading up to the murder: Ms. Baring and Mrs. Druce had left the theater together that evening and quarreled for several weeks beforehand.



TRIAL

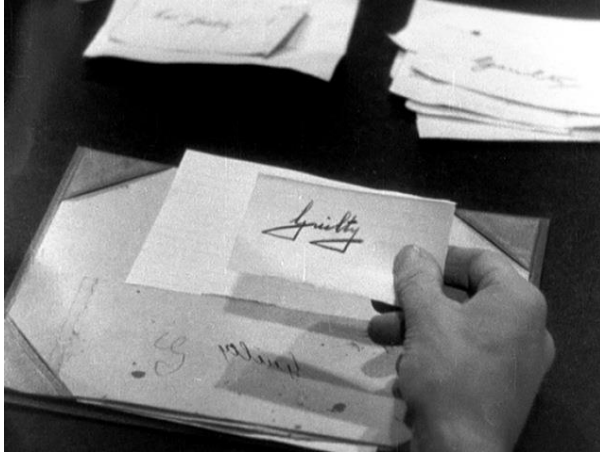
Rex v. Diana Baring- The murder trial of Diana Baring begins. We see the jury one by one as the prosecution reads out the charges. Ms. Baring takes the stand, saying she remembers the beginning of an argument but nothing more. Her defense denies that Ms. Baring is responsible for the murder, pointing to her behavior and composure as proof: “Is there anything so hardy as the behavior of sheer innocence?” The judge speaks at length before asking the jury to begin deliberations, reminding them that “truth is often stranger than fiction.”



The jurors deliberate- In the jury's chamber, we see a large, horseshoe-shaped table with chairs, pens, ashtrays, and notepads at the ready. The jurors take several moments to select seating and go over etiquette concerning smoking and getting comfortable while lighting pipes and cigars. One man reviews the facts of the case: The women were on bad terms, and the dinner was supposed to be a reconciliation. The prosecution believes alcohol and an argument about a man led to violence and murder. The physical evidence and eyewitness testimony are damning, but the defense doesn't deny this. Instead, they believe that Diana was in a fugue state and completely unconscious of the murder as if she was sleepwalking. They believe this should earn her a lesser sentence, as she didn't premeditatively murder Mrs. Druce.



A tally of votes- The head juror asks everyone to write their verdict on a scrap of paper. He takes several moments to tally the votes, occasionally dropping ballots in the wrong piles. The final tally comes to seven guilty, three not guilty, and two abstaining. The head juror leads the discussion from the majority's point of view, asking each abstaining and dissenting voter to discuss their opinions in turn.



The undecided- The first to speak is a man who abstained, Mr. Shackleton. "I think the whole business is hateful," he says, "It's too much responsibility put on our shoulders." Shackleton's distaste comes from the possibility that their ruling will be incorrect and a general disdain for the brutality of hanging and prisons. He berates the entire justice system: "It takes a civilized community to think up a punishment like that." Despite his initial uncertainty, he changes his vote to guilty. The other abstainer is Mr. Matthews. His confusion comes from the psychobabble in court, which he didn't understand. Once it is explained more clearly, he also changes his vote to guilty.



The minority speaks- With the two abstentions dealt with, the head juror moves the discussion to the minority opinion. A woman speaks first about 'modern psychology,' describing how a person can be driven to complete dissociation by any number of mental disorders. Another woman agrees with her logic but goes further, stating that Diana could be compelled to kill by this disorder again. Based upon their psychological analysis, the women decide that the risk of another unconscious murder outweighs the need for mercy. The woman changes her vote to guilty. The next to speak is a large man with a cigar who simply says that he doesn't believe such a comely young woman could do such a thing. After a moment's scolding by the other jurors for disobeying the will of the court -"neither youth nor beauty nor provocation can be held to mitigate the crime of murder"- he changes his vote.



"There's just Sir John"- "And now, we're practically complete," the head juror says as he organizes his notes, "There's just Sir John." The actor smiles, saying he won't be persuaded to change his mind easily. He speaks eloquently and at length about applying "the technique of [his] art to a problem of real life." Sir John is dissatisfied with the examination of the evidence, believing Ms. Baring when she said she hadn't had any brandy. The other jurors are upset by his unwillingness to accept Ms. Baring's guilt and overwhelm him with a torrent of arguments. Unable to get his point across satisfactorily, Sir John begrudgingly changes his vote to guilty.



The jury's decision- We see a clerk cleaning up the now empty jury chamber as court resumes off-screen. The judge asks for the verdict. "Guilty," comes the confident reply. The judge then asks Ms. Baring if she has anything to say in her defense. She says only that the situation is absurd. The bailiff calls out the sentence, saying that Ms. Baring will remain in prison until her execution. The screen fades to black.

SIR JOHN INVESTIGATES

Sir John's home- We are shown a sign which says "Berkeley Square" and then an ornate door and a doorbell reading "Sir John Menier." We see another ornate door, then the inside of Sir John's apartment. Sir John is in the bathroom, looking closely at his face in the mirror as he shaves. A servant enters with a radio, turns it on, and leaves. We listen to the broadcast as Sir John finishes. A reporter speaks about Ms. Baring's guilty verdict. The servant enters once again with a drink for Sir John. The actor asks his servant to call Mr. Bennet, Sir John's manager and administrative assistant. As the news report ends, the camera focuses on Sir John's face in the mirror.

Sir John's thoughts- A piece of classical music begins to play as Sir John thinks about the trial: "If I had stood up longer," he thinks, "I would have worn them down." He still believes that Diana Baring is innocent. "I wonder what her feelings are now," he ponders as he considers why the other jurors were so sure she was guilty. As he sips the brandy his servant has brought, he is struck by a realization: "Who drank that brandy?" He laments not driving the point home to the jury during the trial: "Easy to figure these things out afterward." Sir John then weighs Ms. Baring's testimony. She's sure she didn't drink the brandy yet cannot remember if she killed a woman. How can Ms. Baring remember such a small detail yet forget such a large one? He decides that there must have been a third party present.



A knock on the door- Sir John begins another thought when his servant knocks on the bathroom door. "Mr. Bennet has come up to see you," he reports. Sir John hastily washes his face and leaves the bathroom. Bennet seems disgruntled when Sir John greets him. The bad publicity of one of their actors being charged with murder seems to be his primary concern. Sir John asks Mr. Bennet to instruct his understudy to take over his part and to call his lawyer. While Mr. Bennet makes the calls, Sir John lays out his plan: To investigate the touring company, which employed Ms. Baring and Mrs. Druce, and discover the real killer.

Piano lesson- In the Markham home, we see a young girl practicing a piano piece, fumbling on several notes before moving on. The camera quickly pans around the room. We see Ted Markham waving a butter knife to the tempo of his daughter's tune and his wife, Doucie, reading before the general clutter of the room flashes by. An older woman, perhaps a maid or nanny, enters the room and begins to tidy up. After a few moments, Ted says to Doucie that they should take Sir John up on "his offer." The doorbell rings and the old woman leaves to answer, saying it's probably Sir John himself. Doucie says that their daughter will have to stay with an aunt. Their daughter complains that she'd rather go on tour with her parents. The old woman returns excitedly with a letter from Sir John inviting the Markhams to lunch. The husband and wife scurry off to dress as we're shown a montage of preparations.



"How do you do"- We're shown an ornate office before a close-up of Mr. Markham's nervous face. "How do you do, Mr. Markham," says Sir John from across the large room. We see a comic shot of the overly-luxurious carpet as Mr. Markham crosses the room. He sits at Sir John's invitation, but Sir John remains standing, pacing back and forth. Sir John begins speaking at length about the art of acting and truth, interrupting each of Mr. Markham's attempts to join the conversation with a comment like, "I know what you're thinking." After talking for several minutes, he gets to the point: He asks Markham to share the "inner history" of the Baring murder case.



Mr. Markham's reluctance- Mr. Markham hesitates to respond to Sir John's request. Sir John senses this, offering Markham a position as a stage manager in the upcoming winter circuit. Markham is excited by the job but unwilling to accept unless his wife will be included: "We've always been joint." After a lengthy discussion of her acting ability, Sir John agrees to allow Doucie to share the stage manager position with Ted. Learning that Mrs. Markham is waiting downstairs, he calls his assistant, Mr. Bennet, and asks him to bring her to the office.

"This is not a play"- Sir John becomes somber, sinking into a seat. He expresses guilt for "playing the part of a juror" and not pushing for justice. He says that it occurred to him after the ruling that "[t]his is not a play: This is life." Mr. Markham refuses to believe that Ms. Baring could be innocent. Sir John proves that the evidence which found Ms. Baring guilty is circumstantial given the lack of a second witness. On top of that, she was never examined by a doctor, nor was a full investigation ever launched. Mr. Markham begins to come around to Sir John's way of thinking. Doucie enters the room and is greeted by Sir John. The three share a few pleasantries, talking about food before Sir John asks a servant to begin bringing in lunch.



Doucie's reversal- Ted excitedly tells his wife about the new job Sir John has offered them. After a toast, Sir John speaks to Ted and Doucie about the murder. Several servants bring in their lunch on carts and set the table. When Sir John talks about proving Diana's innocence, Doucie is shocked. "Do you not share our conviction?" Sir John asks, "That Diana Baring is innocent?" Doucie reverses her earlier stated opinion about Diana, seeking to please Sir John and keep the stage manager position.



Macabre luncheon- The three move to a small table the servants have set. Doucie looks a bit uncomfortable as the conversation moves toward investigating the crime. Ted suggests that the best place to start would be the scene of the crime. Sir John asks for a day or two of the couple's time to show him around, and Ted quickly agrees. Doucie asks if Sir John believes someone else is responsible for the murder. Ted says it must be someone else if Diana isn't guilty. Ted and Doucie discuss some details of the murder, piquing Sir John's interest. He wants to know more about the policeman who first responded to the scene. Doucie describes seeing a policeman around the scene just as the disturbance started, but the policeman who took Diana into custody was a different man.



Druce crazed- Sir John and the Markhams stand in the Markham's bedroom, looking down on the street and reconstructing the events leading up to the discovery of Mrs. Druce's body. The first policeman Doucie saw walked away from the scene. Sir John asks if it wasn't the same policeman who was at the murder scene, but Ted agrees with his wife. The trio close the window and mill around the bedroom, thinking of what to do next. A banging begins down the road. All three stick their heads back out of the window to investigate. "My God, that's Druce," says Ted, "He must be crazy." They put on their coats and walk to the next tenement over. Druce accosts Ms. Baring's landlady in a drunken stupor. Ted grabs him by the arm and coaxes him away from the door. After the disturbance, the Markhams ask permission to view the crime scene to help with Sir John's investigation. The landlady agrees and welcomes them in.



The scene of the crime- Inside, Mr. Markham points out where the body was found and where Ms. Baring was sitting. He asks the landlady if she ever got her fire poker back and she replies, "I can't bear to talk about it!" Sir John begins looking around as she speaks, asking the landlady if she thinks anyone could have snuck in and out undetected. She describes a potential escape route that leads to the nearby theater. They can even see the stage door from the rear window of the tenement. Sir John asks the landlady if there was anyone who might have known the room's layout, and the landlady replies that Ms. Baring rarely had visitors, but lists Mr. Fane, Mr. Stewart, and Mr. Trewitt among them.

"Can't mistake a woman's voice"- Sir John thinks for a moment before continuing his line of questioning: the landlady's testimony states that she heard angry women's voices and he asks her to swear to it. She confirms this, saying, "You can't mistake a woman's voice." Sir John calls for the landlady, impersonating a woman's voice. The landlady cries out, "That's Alice!" When she appears genuinely worried, Sir John apologizes for playing a trick on her, but his point is proven. It appears the landlady can easily mistake a speaker's gender.



Ms. Baring's room- Although she's upset, the landlady agrees to show the three actors Ms. Baring's bedroom, as she wants to help prove Diana's innocence. The room is just how Diana left it. Beside the window, Sir John finds a framed photograph of himself. Suddenly pensive, he stares out the window. Mr. Markham gets his attention, "There's a lot more places to go, Sir John." The famed actor nods slowly and gingerly places the photo back where he found it.



A lot more places- Outside of the murder scene, the actors discuss their next move. Mr. Markham lists the stage door, Mr. Stewart's lodging, the police station, a local restaurant, and the local beat cop as potential sources of information. Sir John laments missing dinner, but Ted and Doucie are excited to discover more evidence. The trio walk away together, finding their way to the local theater.

Dressing room- We see the sign for the stage door before we see Ted and Sir John speaking to someone in the ticket booth. Ted asks if anything has happened and an unseen man replies that "some of [Ted's] chaps" broke a sink basin in one of the dressing rooms and never paid to replace it. The dressing room is shared by Fane and Stewart, two persons of interest. Inside the dressing room, Sir John surveys the scene. He notes a window above the broken basin, asking where it leads. The ticket taker responds, "The private houses 'round the corner." Sir John seems lost in thought for a moment before Ted mentions they should get moving. Later that night, we see the two men walking with Doucie once more. Everyone looks tired, Ted and Doucie yawning loudly. Sir John asks if he shouldn't stay at a nearby inn instead, but Ted replies they made plans for Sir John to stay with the officer who found the murder scene overnight to learn as much as he can about the case. Upper-crust Sir John seems unwilling to sleep and dine in such a lowly home, but he agrees, and they bid each other good night.



Busy morning- The following morning, we see the guest room where Sir John still rests. A woman carrying a screaming child enters the room and pulls up the blinds, letting the sunlight pour in. A gaggle of other children of varied ages follows, climbing onto the bed like it's a jungle gym. The woman, the police officer's wife, apologizes for the rowdy children as she hands Sir John a cup of tea. Despite her comically lower-class surroundings, she is an attentive hostess, offering him breakfast in bed. They discuss the Baring case as the children shout, cry, and play, one of the younger girls crawling over and hugging Sir John while he lies in bed. She says that one of her tenants in the past had a police uniform in his laundry that her husband mistook for his father's. Eventually, Ted appears, grinning at the famous actor's situation.

The cigarette case- The officer's wife herds the children from the room and closes the door behind them. Sir John invites Ted to sit and strikes up a conversation about the cigarette case found in the dressing room. Doucie told Ted that it belonged to Mr. Stewart. When she took it back to him, she also noticed a stain she and Ted believed it to be blood. Sir John has a look and agrees before asking if any of the players who had stayed here had police costumes. Ted replies, "Fane and Stewart." Sir John goes on to say that one of those men must have been the first officer Doucie saw the evening of the murder, adding impersonating an officer to the real killer's list of offenses.



Visit to the prison- We are shown the prison's imposing facade and a letter allowing Sir John to visit Ms. Baring before the camera settles on a visitation cell. Two chairs sit on opposite ends of a long table as a female guard leads Sir John in. After a minute, another female guard leads Diana Baring into the room. When she smiles and moves forward to address Sir John, the guard directs her to the other end of the table. One guard remains in the cell, watching over them, while the other paces back and forth outside. Diana expresses surprise at Sir John's visit and he says he's taken great interest in her case. Before he can continue, she interrupts, saying she doesn't want to talk about her case, instead asking him about his newest play. Repeatedly, Sir John tries to steer the conversation back to the murder, Diana interrupting with questions about his play and theater company.



Sir John's guilt- "Do you remember our meeting," asks Sir John. Diana confirms that she does, and Sir John states he feels partial guilt for her current situation: If he hadn't sent her on tour to gain experience, she wouldn't have been in the situation in the first place. He says there must be a way to appeal her case. "I knew someone would try and get me off and think they were doing me a kindness," Diana scoffs. After sharing her opinion on life imprisonment and the death sentence, Sir John says, "Tell me what I want to know and I'll have you out of here altogether." "What is there I can tell you?" asks Diana. Sir John asks for the name of the man she and Edna were fighting about.

“Black blood”- At first, Diana flat out denies that such a man exists. She quickly contradicts herself, however, saying that Edna was saying “horrible things about him,” and that she refused to fight. Diana claims that she plugged her ears with her fingers, saying she wouldn’t have heard someone else entering the room. He inquires further about the man’s identity but Diana refuses to speak. “You’re shielding this man,” Sir John says, “because you know you’re in love with him.” “Why that’s impossible,” Diana replies, “The man’s a half-caste.” She covers her mouth, knowing she’s said too much. Unable to get her to respond further, Sir John shows Diana the blood-stained cigarette case belonging to Stewart. “It’s Handel Fane’s,” Diana says matter-of-factly.



Person of interest- The guard says that visitation time has ended and leads Diana from the room. Before she leaves, the young actress admits great admiration for Sir John. The screen fades back to a weather vane as several men speak Handel Fane’s name. We’re shown a montage of the weather vane juxtaposed with Diana pacing around a room and the silhouette of a noose rising against the wall as the sun sets. Ted Markham and Sir John speak about not being able to find Mr. Fane and make telephone calls inquiring about him. It seems he’s disappeared until Ted stumbles upon a lead at a circus. “Got him at last,” he says triumphantly as the screen fades to black.



A bit of Hamlet- Ted and Sir John are seated in the front row of a circus. They intently watch a trapeze artist perform. “That’s him, alright,” says Ted, “dressed as a woman.” Sir John comments that it’s a clever way to hide and says he’s had an idea. “You know your Hamlet?” he asks Ted. He suggests a scheme similar to the famous ‘play scene’ in Hamlet’s third act: Sir John will invite Fane to try out for the part of the murderer in a play based on the Baring case. He and several others will be present to ascertain his guilt and take him into custody if need be.



Trap set- We see Sir John’s date book and the note “Handel Fane 1:30” as the actor looks at his watch. There’s a knock on the door. Mr. Bennet opens the door and leads Handel Fane inside. Fane takes a seat, lighting a cigarette before Sir John begins the interview. After going through the paces of general casting, Sir John hands Fane the script. “What kind of play is this exactly?” Fane inquires. “My subject,” says Sir John, “is the inner history of the Baring case.” Sir John sets the scene they are about to play, talking at length about several pieces of evidence. Fane reacts with guilt and anxiety.



The audition- Fane picks up his hat and cane to leave, but Sir John asks him to begin his audition. Fane wanders as if in a trance toward the window. "How on earth did you know the entrance is from a window?" Sir John asks, "You've forgotten your script." Fane accepts the script, trying to laugh off the mistake. He makes another slip when he mentions that he should grab the poker from the fireplace before entering the room. Sir John makes a note in the script and continues the scene. "May I have the poker?" asks Fane. After looking at the other men in the room, Sir John makes up an excuse about electric fires and offers a pencil for the prop.



"Perhaps later"- Fane continues with the script, play-acting the moments leading up to the murder. We can see on his face that he knows something is wrong, but he continues acting as prompted by Sir John reading the script, miming approaching the two women and brandishing the fire poker. Fane flips the page as Sir John speaks the line, "Don't you know that he's a half-..." The page is blank. Sweat rolls down Fane's forehead as the other three men in the room stare at him. He knows Sir John understands his motivation to keep his racial status a secret. "What a pity," Fane says, "The scene isn't finished." "I Thought perhaps, Mr. Fane," says Sir John, "that you might collaborate with us." Fane excuses himself, saying he knows little about playwriting and that he hopes Sir John will give him another reading when the script is complete. Although Mr. Bennet tries to stand in his way, Fane simply steps around him and leaves. Sir John throws the script away, frustrated and asking Mr. Bennet to find out when Fane is scheduled to perform at the circus.



Fane's dressing room- We see a shot of the circus stable before Sir John and Ted enter Fane's dressing room. Fane sits at a bureau, sealing and addressing a letter. He greets both men, expressing surprise at seeing Ted. Ted replies that he's working for Sir John. There's a bottle of brandy sitting nearby. A stage manager pokes his head into the room and tells Fane that he's on next. Fane begins applying makeup for his cross-dressing trapeze act. Sir John tries to confront him, but Fane puts him off, saying he will happily discuss anything after his act. Ted and Sir John leave.

Big top fiasco- Elephants and clowns parade around in the circus tent as Fane's assistants make the final touches to his ornate costume. Fane walks to a ladder and slowly begins to climb as an orchestra plays jaunty music. The show begins as Fane discards the large, feathered headdress. The audience watches in awe as he performs feats of daring. As he swings, Fane sees the faces of Sir John and Diana staring at him. He lands and accepts a round of applause, looking tired. The crowd seems shocked as it appears he might fall, but he collects himself. Fane motions for the orchestra to quiet down and grabs a rope. Hand over hand, he draws it up towards him, tying a loop after several lengths and placing the makeshift noose around his neck.



"Poor devil"- The entire circus erupts in screams as Fane takes his own life, jumping from the trapeze platform. The crowd scatters in all directions, knocking over decorations and facades as they flee. The rope holding Fane swings like a pendulum as the panic continues. "For God's sake; play something!" the circus master cries to the orchestra.

Suicide note- We see Sir John reading the letter Fane left before his suicide. He fills in all the missing pieces, clues falling into place as he confesses his crime. Fane's motivation for killing Mrs. Druce is the fact that she was about to reveal his racial status to Ms. Baring. The letter ends, "There's a melodrama for you, Sir John." "Poor devil," he says, "Diana Baring, she knew all the time he was a half-caste."

Happily ever after- We see an ornate parlor where Sir John stands. The Markhams enter with Diana Baring right behind them, approaching Sir John and taking his hands in hers. The Markhams smile at each other as Diana kisses Sir John. The curtain falls and an audience applauds as the screen fades to black.



THEMES

SOCIETY

Class- Class plays a small but important role in *Murder!*. We see it come up in many ways that are supposed to be comic, but today's viewers may not pick up on that. Class plays out mainly in Sir John's interactions with other people. He makes a joke about being a 'poor and lowly' actor in the jury's chamber, though when we see him in his own home, he is attended by a servant. Later, in his extravagant office, he reveals that he owns a summer home in the court district where Ms. Baring was tried, explaining his presence as a juror. Sir John often uses his wealth and status to get what he wants. The Markhams cave to his desires when he offers them a job as stage managers, Doucie going so far as to reverse her beliefs about Ms. Baring to assure she gets the job. Similarly, many minor characters cave to Sir John's will, accepting minor bribes or simply fawning over the famous actor as he continues his investigation. We see class used comedically when Sir John stays with the policeman. That night, he almost chickens out, asking Ted if he shouldn't stay at a famous inn nearby instead. Sir John is unwilling to experience the living standards of the lower classes. The policeman's children are comically mischievous and boisterous when they encounter the famed actor in bed, creating an adorable nuisance before being herded from the room. The policeman's wife is an outstanding hostess despite her unruly children. She brings Sir John his morning tea and offers breakfast in bed, showing the rich and famous Sir John hospitality befitting his social station.

Gender- Gender norms of the 1920s and 30s are displayed and explored in several ways throughout the film. The jury's deliberation gives us a glimpse of the etiquette of the period: The men make decisions, though they defer to the women concerning smoking and seating. However, we do see the inclusion of women in the justice system. Not only are there women on the jury, but we are also shown several women prison guards and some of the internal workings of the women's penal system. Ted and Doucie seem to share many responsibilities in their marriage and business, Ted describing them as 'joint.' Fane's cross-dressing, and the general acceptance of it among his peers, show us an interesting element of inter-war gender expression: All across Europe, cabarets and playhouses were full of male and female impersonators. For some, it was simply an expression of queerness, while for others, it was a critique of post-World War I society. In some people's view, the addition of women to the democratic process and their general increasing social power turned the world of gender on its head.

Race- Although it doesn't become clear until the film's second half, race plays a crucial role in the murder of Edna Druce. We see race expressed as sort of a boogiemans. The heroes and damsel in distress of the story are white, while Fane is mixed race (referred to as 'half-caste') but passes for 'white'. His attempts to keep his heritage secret lead him to murder, expressing a societal fear of the time that non-white people are somehow more prone to violence. Although his black heritage is displayed in a negative light, he is not cast as unintelligent: Fane is anything if not quick-witted. Fane's own experience with race is

one of terror. The law of the time restricted the movement and rights of people who were non-white or immigrant, and Fane saw himself losing not only face but societal acceptance if his heritage were to come out. Although she expresses distaste for Fane's black heritage, Ms. Baring is willing to face the gallows for Fane's secret, though we never learn why. This ends in tragedy, as Fane didn't know Ms. Baring was already aware of his racial heritage, making his suicide a tragic and useless loss.

JUSTICE

Justice/Injustice- Being a crime drama, justice and injustice are major themes of *Murder!*. We begin with a murder, one of the foulest injustices. Upon reaching the scene, the police officer cannot properly contain it as a couple of dozen onlookers elbow their way into the housing tenement. This contamination of the crime scene and lack of thorough investigation leaves several critical clues out of the ensuing court case. Although no one witnesses the murder, everyone seems ready to convict Diana Baring there and then, another small injustice. We hear the court system judged by one of the jurors who laments the incivility of the law and prisons. We also see a general commitment by the jurors to serve justice, even if their reasons are a bit warped. Sir John takes his commitment to justice as a juror so far that he begins his own investigation in the hopes of saving Ms. Baring from the noose. He states during his prison visit to Ms. Baring that he feels at least partly responsible for putting her there, showing that part of his drive to find justice is personal. Fane's final act of suicide is an attempt to evade justice, though it brings justice for Ms. Baring.

APPEARANCE vs. REALITY

Truth/Deceit- Truth and deceit drive many plotlines in *Murder!*. We learn late in the film that Ms. Baring is aware of who the killer is. She does everything in her power to protect him, facing the gallows instead of speaking his name in court. Despite her conviction and loyalty to the killer, we never learn Diana's motivations. This deceit leads Sir John to take up an independent investigation: He must reveal the truth. Mrs. Markham shows some deceit towards Sir John when she and her husband meet the famed actor for lunch. In a matter of a handful of sentences, she completely reverses her opinion about Ms. Baring to protect the stage manager position Sir John offers her and her husband. Mr. Fane shows the largest potential for deceit, using Ms. Baring to hide his involvement in the murder of Mrs. Druce. Not only does he use his acting ability to escape the crime scene, but he uses it to convince police that he has a solid alibi by not acting nervous in their presence. Also, his return to his cross-dressing circus act and using a woman's pseudonym are a deceit used to keep his whereabouts unknown. When Sir John learns the truth, he uses it as a trap for Fane. By gauging his reaction to the events leading up to the murder, Sir John attempts to get a confession out of Fane by making him feel immense guilt. It seems that it almost works, but the unfinished script allows Fane to realize he's in a bad position and leave. In a desperate effort to evade the truth and the embarrassment which would follow his exposure, Fane hangs himself during his trapeze act. His suicide note, however, contains the full truth of the Druce murder, acquitting Ms. Baring.

Appearance/Deception- Many themes in *Murder!* exist to mislead or distract both the characters and the viewers. Appearances matter greatly to the jury, who convicts Ms. Baring on circumstantial evidence. Some on the jury believe she couldn't have committed murder based only on the young and attractive woman's appearance. Though we never learn why, Diana Baring is willing to face the hangman's noose to conceal Fane's involvement in the murder. The entire movie is shot as a play-within-a-play: We see curtains, audiences, sets, and theater equipment in many scenes as if we are watching Sir John's completed play based on the murder. Some of these moments are goofs, such as seeing a glimpse of the Elstree Studios soundstage, but even they add to the illusion. Fane's attempt to evade police detection is also all appearance. He uses the guise of a policeman and a woman to avoid detection and suspicion. His acting ability allows him to lie and keep his cool when many others would crumble or confess.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Sir John Menier- (*Curious, Serious, Determined*)

Sir John is a famous actor who initially plays the part of a juror, though his passion to solve the mystery of Mrs. Druce's murder turns him into an investigator. He is a posh, well-kept man, living in luxury with several servants. He blames himself for Ms. Baring's predicament, as he told her to seek experience instead of hiring her for his theater troupe.

Curious Sir John has a curious mind. During the jury's deliberation, he is the only member for whom the evidence doesn't add up. Although the other jurors have their reasons for voting guilty, Sir John believes that no proper investigation has occurred, making Ms. Baring's guilt circumstantial. This curiosity, spurred by guilt, makes him take up his personal investigation of the murder. He enlists the Markhams, noting Ted's eye for detail and acting prowess in his selection, and they defer to his curiosity and the loose ends he discovers during his investigation. Things that might go unnoticed by others catch Sir John's attention. The out-of-place cigarette case, broken sink, empty brandy flask, and second policeman are very important evidence overlooked by all but Sir John.

Serious Although not without joviality, Sir John is a very serious man. Partly due to his high class and wealth, the famed actor takes etiquette and other formalities very seriously. Everyone calls him 'Sir John.' He is the only character addressed repeatedly by his title. He is always dressed to the nines and takes obvious pride in his appearance, marking him as a man of importance and wealth. Because of his posh attitude and fame, others often take Sir John very seriously, some to the point of fawning. While this occasionally drives the film's comic elements, the seriousness surrounding Sir John is simply matter-of-fact. He believes he and his goals should be taken seriously by others. His seriousness concerning etiquette does stop Sir John from confronting and detaining Handel Fane twice.

Determined Sir John's determination drives the film's plot. The only time it falters is during the jury's deliberation. He finds himself unable to defend his not-guilty verdict under the barrage of those who believe Ms. Baring guilty. The guilt stemming from this moment of weakness stimulates his determination to investigate the case. His determination -and a bit of bribery- find him an ally in the Markhams. Although both Ted and Doucie believe in Ms. Baring's guilt, they change their mind after hearing Sir John's determined display of the uninvestigated evidence. Because he finds fault in his actions at multiple points concerning Ms. Baring's murder trial, having been the one to send her on tour in the first place, Sir John takes it upon himself to save Ms. Baring from the gallows. This determination is redoubled after he visits the prison where Ms. Baring admits a great admiration for him. Love, guilt, and curiosity drive Sir John in nearly equal measures. A desire to see injustice corrected leads him to Fane, though the outcome may not be what he desired. His inability to make Fane confess during the audition drives Sir John to frustration as he hurls the script across the room, showing us that determination is similar to ambition: One's personality decides whether determination is for good or ill.

Diana Baring- (*Adventurous, Loyal, Calm*)

Diana Baring is a young and beautiful actress with aspirations of greatness. She admires Sir John, hoping to be a part of his famous theater troupe. When she is discovered at the murder scene, the blame for Mrs. Druce's death falls upon her.

Adventurous Diana shows great love for adventure. During the prison visit by Sir John, she admits to seeing her quest to become an actress as an adventure when she left home seeking a position in Sir John's troupe. While Diana doesn't have many spoken lines, we can see that the court case thrills her to some extent. The experience is frightening, but she still smiles through that fear.

Loyal Diana's loyalty is surprising, especially given her position. She refuses to tell the truth to protect Fane and his secret, though we never learn her motivation. She admits to knowing who the killer is several times to Sir John, letting little hints slip accidentally during their conversation in the prison. Even though she admits she could never love Fane, she does everything in her power to keep his presence at

the murder scene and his mixed race a secret. There aren't many people who would face the gallows for someone they only liked as a friend. At the end of the film, we get a glimpse of Diana's loyalty to Sir John as she embraces and kisses him before the curtain falls. The experience has created a great love between her and Sir John.

Calm We only see Diana's calm disappear once when she laments the possibility of life in prison. Even as she faces the court and the judge hands down a death sentence, Diana keeps her cool. All she has to say is that "it's absurd." She doesn't cause trouble as an inmate, and the guards seem to give her some leeway during the visit by Sir John because of that. When she enters the visitation cell, she beams at Sir John despite her situation. She wishes to share a normal conversation with him, calmly avoiding Sir John's attempts to get her to talk about the case, though she does accidentally give him a few leads pointing to Handel Fane.

Handel Fane- (*Intelligent, Confident, Coward*)

Handel Fane is an up-and-coming actor already somewhat famous for his cross-dressing acts. He is also a skillful acrobat, as displayed during his performances at the circus. His drive to keep his mixed-race secret spurs him to murder.

Intelligent Fane is incredibly observant. Using his acting ability and quick wit, he is able to avoid detection at the scene of Mrs. Druce's murder. Before he leaves the scene, Fane places the fire poker beside Diana. He observes that people typically ignore police officers, using his costume from a play to escape detection as he makes his way home from the theater. After covering up his crime, Fane uses his acting ability to distract the police from him, building up a solid alibi and keeping his calm during his interview with the police. His awareness allows him to escape the trap Sir John sets for him during the audition. When Fane realizes the play is only partially written, he realizes Sir John has connected him to the murder and makes his exit. However, his awareness doesn't save him from his ultimate fate. Convinced that his role in the murder will lead to his hanging and revelation of his mixed race to the public, Fane takes his fate into his own hands by hanging himself in the big top.

Confident Fane's confidence marks him as an excellent actor. He can convince all but Sir John of his innocence, even leading the police to believe he was uninvolved. Fane wears many different faces throughout the film, wielding each one expertly and effortlessly. Many people are unaware that he is a female impersonator, thinking of him simply as 'the flying woman.' Fane escapes Sir John's detection by confidently adopting a female guise. He exudes confidence in every scene, even in those where he is unsure or even cowardly. When he is caught in Sir John's trap, he pulls a smile and confidently leans on etiquette, evading capture. His confidence is a facade at times, as we see Fane afraid to expose his heritage.

Coward Fane's fatal flaw is his cowardice. His fear of exposure as 'half-caste' drives him to murder, and his fear of exposure as a murderer drives him to suicide. He is at Ms. Baring's apartment for some reason and overhears her argument with Mrs. Druce. When he overhears that he is the subject of the quarrel and that Mrs. Druce is about to speak about his racial status, he bludgeons her to death to keep her silent. We learn at the film's end that this is all for naught, as Ms. Baring already knew his secret. Fane seeks to avoid capture at all costs, taking his own life to keep Sir John from detaining him. Although there is a chance that his sentence could be commuted or appealed, he is afraid of facing the consequences for his actions.