CHAPTER THREE

The Odd Triangle

[Murderers are] served up in their whole biography and adventures—so many live romances with a bloody ending.

—Charles Dickens, letter to the Daily News, 28 February 1846

Extraordinary Discovery of a Murder,” the Times headline cried discreetly the next morning, and the national passion for the O'Connor murder had begun. The “penny-a-liners” of the metropolis, reporters paid by the line for coverage of crime and other news stories, took themselves off to Minver Place or, just as likely, stayed home and exercised their journalistic fantasy. An anonymous member of the press corps gave the case its gaudy sobriquet, “the Bermondsey Horror,” a name that was in its way a tribute to the macabre appeal of a single mysterious death in a neighborhood whose residents were dying by hundreds of a plague the doctors could not explain. The public could not read enough in the ensuing months of the past of the three characters in the drama or of the tortuous paths of their lives that had their final dramatic convergence in a Bermondsey kitchen.

We begin with Marie Manning, not out of lost notions of gallantry, but because the insatiable public obviously looked first for her name when the day’s news stories, true and false, were fed to them as daily breakfast and Sabbath fare. It is Marie alone of the three principal figures of the case who has rated an entry in the Dictionary of National Biography founded by Sir Leslie Stephen, and Manning and O’Connor, husband and victim, have become a part of her biographical data.
One of the appropriate definitions of a "beauty" in the dictionary of the English language would be "any accused murderess particularly when wearing a veil." Marie (or Maria, as she called herself in England) was predictably hailed by many newsmen as a beauty from the very outset, but as opinion hardened against her, her portrait changed as dramatically as the picture of Dorian Gray. We would therefore do best to introduce ourselves to her as she is described in the police bulletin circulated immediately after the discovery of O'Connor's body: "Maria Manning, a native of Geneva, 30 years old,* 5 feet 7 inches high, stout, fresh complexion, with long dark hair, good looking, scar on the right side of her chin, extending towards the neck, dresses very smartly, and speaks broken English. Has been a lady's maid and dressmaker."

Neither the police nor the responsible portion of the press could find out much about Marie's early life. It was known that her maiden name was de Roux and that she was born near Lausanne, Switzerland. Her parents, who had left her a small inheritance, were both deceased. But where facts were lacking, the journalistic retailers of gossip and purveyors of sensational literature rushed into the breach. Although most of their "revelations" are undoubtedly fictional, their writings were not without significance because they reflected a vision of Marie shared not only by the public at large but very likely also by the twelve men who were ultimately to serve as jurors in her trial.

The most voluminous surviving example of the Marie Manning sensation literature is a novelized account of her life and trial, *The Progress of Crime; or, The Authentic Memoirs of Maria Manning*, by Robert Huish. Its author had specialized in novels based on lurid crimes or the lives of royalty and nobility, two subjects he was able to combine in his book on the Manning case. The *Memoirs of Maria Manning*, which runs to more than eight hundred pages, was published in 1849 in penny-numbers of sixteen pages each. In his narrative of Marie's early life, Huish, while continually protesting pious disapproval of Marie's

*I have not attempted to reconcile the inconsistent contemporary accounts of the ages of the three principal figures in the Manning case. The Mannings were each about thirty and Patrick O'Connor was about fifty.*
conduct, sought to cast her in the romantic, and not wholly unappealing, role of a headstrong girl who surrenders to the temptations of the world because of strong sexual passion and filial disobedience. The story is heavily larded with appeals to the anti-Catholic feelings Huish calculated could be automatically aroused among his readers.

According to Huish, Marie “first beheld the light of this glorious world” at the eastern end of the Lake of Lausanne and lived in a chalet right out of the travel guides. The household included her parents, three brothers, and a sister. M. de Roux, whom Huish calls a “rigid Catholic,” destined one son for the priesthood and Marie for a convent. The fourteen-year-old girl, however, had her mind less on religion than “on those glorious and sublime works of nature which are presented by the Alpine mountains.” Her thoughts were brought back to earth by the arrival on the scene of a handsome stranger who won Marie’s heart by staring at her in church and then introduced himself to her parents as Ludovico Sangallo, a Florentine nobleman. The awful truth was that the young man was a disguised bandit chieftain named Montano. Despite the fact that one of Marie’s brothers, who had sniffed out Sangallo’s true identity, thwarted a rendezvous of the brigand with his sister by shooting him and inflicting a serious wound, the check was only temporary. On the very eve of her scheduled departure for the nunnery, Marie decamped, and though Huish is rather vague at this point in the narrative, he would apparently have us believe that Marie began her amatory career at the thieves’ den established by Sangallo/Montano in a ruined palace in the Alps. To add insult to injury, Sangallo’s bandits also made off with M. de Roux’s ancestral silver plate after accepting a bag of money that the bewildered householder offered them in place of the heirlooms.

Somehow Huish, in musing about this undoubtedly mythical romance, found the bandit more lovable than the wayward girl. Sangallo “was a contradictory mixture of great virtues and great vices” and had only taken to crime because “his parents had been driven from their patrimonial estates by the accursed acts of the Holy Inquisition.” Marie had at this period of her life “as yet been only faulty, not criminal,” but would “always appear as
Portrait of Marie Manning, from Huish's *The Progress of Crime.*
a lamentable example of the PROGRESS OF CRIME." She was "amongst all women perhaps the last, who in her emancipation from the unwelcome restraint of parental control, would remain long in the sober and regular paths of virtue and modesty." Marie lacked the one ingredient Huish regarded as essential to the "amelioration of the character of woman"—a sense of shame. Writing these early chapters before the trial for the murder of O'Connor took place, Huish was "not at present in a position publicly to state that Mrs. Manning was in reality the murderer of O'Connor, but that she was an accessory in the atrocious deed, cannot for a moment be questioned."

In the novel Marie is given a series of picaresque adventures on the Continent and in the British Isles before she makes her first appearance in a historically verifiable role, that of lady's maid to Lady Palk and then to Lady Blantyre, daughter of the Duchess of Sutherland. In Huish's pages Marie, after putting her fascination with Alpine banditry behind her, next turned up as a maid at an inn in Strasbourg, where she caught the eye of an amorous Irish tourist, Mr. Wentworth, who was traveling with his disagreeable wife. Wentworth convinced his competitive spouse that she could outdo all her neighbors' coiffures if they took Marie home with them as a lady's maid, although Mrs. Wentworth voiced her doubt as to how much a chambermaid would know about fashion. When the Wentworths, with Marie in tow, returned to their mansion of Ballincraig, in County Kilkenny, Mr. Wentworth's uncommon solicitude for his wife's hairstyling was put aside for a more personal interest in Marie. One night Mrs. Wentworth, "opening the door of the library in the softest manner," discovered "her beloved and continent husband sitting on the sofa with her chaste and immaculate servant affectionately seated on his knee." The outraged spouse, after leaving the marks of her fingernails on Marie's face and gown, ordered that the "vicious, abominable hussey sleeps not in my house to-night." Pretending to obey, Mr. Wentworth instructed Marie to take refuge in the cottage of an old tenant, Martin, a mile away, where he promised to communicate with her as soon as he could escape Mrs. Wentworth's jealous vigil. Unfortunately, he could not shake his
suspicious wife from his heels, and when he set out for the cottage, she insisted on accompanying him even though he chose the muddiest route he could find. When the couple reached Marie’s hiding place, the resourceful girl, Huish writes, expelled Mrs. Wentworth by extemporizing the role and costume of a witch and dousing her adversary with a pitcher of nauseous black liquid. In fact, Marie was no witch but a “tall masculine woman, who was completely shrouded in a white garment... abstracted from old Martin’s bed,” and the liquid that flowed down Mrs. Wentworth’s dress was not a hellish brew but a blend of water and chimney soot.

According to Huish, Marie eventually took her revenge on the importunate Mr. Wentworth as well. After she read a newspaper advertisement announcing the death of her father and requesting that she apply to the estate’s London solicitors for her inheritance, she no longer looked with favor on Wentworth’s persistent offer to settle her in a comfortable establishment as his mistress. She accepted his proposal with her fingers crossed, pocketed “with delicacy” the compensation they had agreed on—a bond of three hundred pounds per annum and a tip of one hundred pounds in cash to be used for appropriate mistress’s apparel—and immediately made off for London to escape Wentworth and to collect her legacy.

In about 1843 Marie de Roux finally freed herself from the shrouds of Huish’s fiction and emerged on the stage of the real world. She entered the employ of the family of Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk, at Haldon House, Devonshire, as maid to Lady Anna Palk. Sir Lawrence, M.P. for Devonshire, was the grandson of Sir Robert Palk, who had given over a chaplaincy at Fort St. George in India to enter the civil service of the East India Company. He became governor of Madras in 1763 and was created a baronet in 1772, after returning to England hugging a great fortune. In 1815 Sir Lawrence Palk, who had become the third baronet, married Anna Eleonora Hartopp, the widow of a gentleman of Leicestershire and the eldest daughter of Sir Bourchier Wrey.

According to Huish’s account, Lady Palk was in a precarious state of health at the time of Marie’s employment, and “her
ladyship had all the fretfulness and peevishness of the valetudinarian, the chief object of her life appearing to be to travel from place to place in search of some new doctor who could successfully prescribe for her numerous ailments.” Marie, though, was not disenchanted with her situation, taking pleasure in the opportunity to display her beauty “whether it be in a box at the Opera-house, a pew in a conventicle, or on the fashionable parade of a watering place.”

Lady Palk died in January 1846. Despite the lurid tales that Huish had spun about her earlier career, the real Marie de Roux must have garnered a favorable letter of recommendation from Sir Lawrence, because she was soon accepted in the service of Lady Evelyn Blantyre, daughter of the Duchess of Sutherland. The Sutherlands were an old and distinguished family that traced their lineage to Anglo-Saxon origins and held titles in the peerages of England and Scotland; the dukedom had been created in 1833. The family biographers tell us little about Lady Evelyn except that in 1843 she had married the twelfth Lord Blantyre, an ardent agriculturalist. Marie was probably with the Blantyres when they left London at the close of the season of 1846 to visit the Hebrides at the invitation of Lady Blantyre’s brother-in-law the Duke of Argyll. The Blantyres rusticated in a farmhouse at Knock, and Argyll and Blantyre found the local sheep farmer to be an ideal tenant, a former banker who was expending money on stone dikes to enclose the small precious area of level land.

Not only Lady Blantyre but the entire Sutherland family was in the shadow of Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, the wife of the second duke. If the portraits by Lawrence and Winterhalter and the memoirs of her descendants do not flatter her beyond pardonable measure, she was a beautiful and brilliant woman. Her grandson wrote of her: “She was tall, stately, and fair, with large blue eyes, a nose the slight high curve of which was rather dovelike than aquiline, and full lips whose frequent pleasant smile spoke the lovable nature of a mind charmingly receptive and benevolent. There was no cause which her judgment told her was good that she did not feel impelled to help. There was no fault or vice that could make her believe the offender was
wholly lost." Marie did not know when she entered the family's service that one day she would have occasion to test this last appraisal.

Appointed mistress of the robes by Queen Victoria on her accession, the duchess maintained a majestic London residence at Stafford House, and her receptions there were visited by the young queen and Prince Albert, by Whigs and Tories alike, and luminaries of the literary and art worlds. "It was during one of these receptions," one of the duchess's sons wrote, "that her Majesty, on entering the great hall, paid her hostess a compliment worthy of Louis XIV: 'I have come from my house to your palace.'" In fact, Stafford House (now named Lancaster House and used for government and diplomatic meetings) still stands as an elegant Palladian-style neighbor of Buckingham Palace, from which it is separated only by a short stretch of Green Park.

Marie de Roux had at last entered the marble halls scarcely dreamt of by young girls in Swiss chalets. If we wish to imagine the glories of Stafford House in the early Victorian years, we can turn to the pages of Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Lothair*, where the mansion is named Crecy House: "one of the half-dozen stately structures that our capital boasts of... an edifice not unworthy of Vicenza in its best days, though on a far more extensive style than any pile that city boasts." Marie also attended her employers during their stays at the principal family seat at Trentham, in Staffordshire, which Disraeli has described in the same novel under the slightly altered name Brentham: "It would be difficult to find a fairer scene than Brentham offered, especially in the lustrous effulgence of a glorious English summer. It was an Italian palace of freestone; vast, ornate, and in scrupulous condition; its spacious and graceful chambers filled with treasures of art, and rising itself from statued and stately terraces. At their foot spread a garden domain of considerable extent, bright with flowers, dim with covert of rare shrubs, and musical with fountains."

Donald Nicoll recalls aristocratic gossip that Marie was selected by the Sutherlands for "all benevolent missions to the impoverished of her sex" in the neighborhood of the family mansions. Writing in the late nineteenth century with a memory
of the O'Connor murder intervening, Nicoll added: "So well concealed was the cruel nature of the tigress, and so purring and soothing were the tones of her voice, aided also by brilliant eyes, expressing pity as powerfully as they could anger, that ... the graceful and winning manner of the distributor of gifts almost appeared to make the poor believe they were not the persons most obliged by the transaction."

Somewhere along the way Marie Manning met Patrick O'Connor. About twenty years her senior, O'Connor was born in Clonkelly, in County Tipperary, in about 1798. Huish, whose novel follows O'Connor's career in great detail—in fact, in greater detail than his knowledge can possibly have justified—reports that Patrick's father was a respectable farmer who rented fifty acres from a proprietor of considerable lands in the south of Tipperary. Following the same anticlerical bent he had shown in recounting Marie's upbringing, Huish reports that Patrick's parents destined him at an early age for the church "before it was ascertained that Patrick had in himself the slightest inclination to be enrolled in the rather numerous fraternity of the Irish priesthood." As it turned out, Patrick had not the least aptitude for the profession chosen for him but early gave signs of "the general depravity of his character." He fell in love with sixteen-year-old Mary O'Connell, which was in itself forgivable since at her tender age she had already developed, Huish tells us, "one of those full, voluptuous figures, which are so often seen amongst the peasantry of Ireland" and, like her young countrywomen, could not be persuaded that the celibacy that priests professed "is not a decided fraud and imposition." But Patrick did not tackle the impressionable Mary fairly; instead he accomplished an easy seduction with the aid of some powerful drug he obtained from a local widow who dispensed herbs and remedies for all sorts of ailments including passion.

Huish suggests that Mary O'Connell died as a result of her dishonor, and that suspicion of O'Connor's role in the tragedy was the first cause of his eventual disqualification from ordination. He was also accused of participating in a rebellious prank in which a policeman was waylaid and disarmed. But Huish
 portrait of Patrick O'Connor, from Huish's *The Progress of Crime*. 
cited a more serious allegation against him: according to the novelist, there was a rumor implicating Patrick in the death of a tithe collector, O'Shaughnessy, whose body was found one day by the roadside riddled with bullets. Huish purports to place little faith in this rumor, and in light of the ease with which he customarily accepts, and invents, the wildest fantasies, we have no reason to set Patrick O'Connor down as a murderer. As events will show, there are quite enough other reasons to dislike him.

Huish reports that by this point Patrick had become persona non grata with his entire family and, no doubt to their great relief, left for London to seek his fortune. We are told that Patrick was given a small measure of just punishment for the seduction of Mary O'Connell when a gang of London thieves robbed him as he lay unconscious under the influence of an English equivalent of the Mickey Finn he had administered to Mary back home. Sources more reliable than Huish place the arrival of O'Connor in London in early 1832.

Despite what Huish tells us of the irritation of the O'Connor family with their prodigal son, Patrick came armed with a letter of introduction from his brother, a priest of a prosperous parish near Thurles in Tipperary, to an influential Irish barrister occupying chambers in the Temple, the district housing two of London's Inns of Court. The lawyer, who was a good friend of Father O'Connor, received Patrick kindly and asked him what sort of position he was looking for. O'Connor's answer is surprising if Huish's account of his character has any truth to it—he said he would like to enter the police. The lawyer gave Patrick a letter of introduction to Commissioner Richard Mayne of Scotland Yard. It appears that the letter was never delivered, for Patrick soon changed his mind; he found that it would be degrading for him to become a "thief-taker."

Besides, it had not taken Patrick long to decide which side of the law was better suited to his talents. About six weeks after his first introduction to the lawyer in the Temple, he paid another visit. Much to his host's surprise, he produced a fifty-pound note and asked him to take care of it for him. The lawyer
accepted the note and, knowing that Patrick had been without funds when he came from Ireland, asked where the money had come from. Patrick, who had already displayed his fatal candor about his financial affairs, replied that he had received 15 pounds from his mother by mail and had quickly built it into 50 pounds by dealing in smuggled tobacco and cigars. The barrister had no reason to disbelieve the story, and knowing that Patrick was applying for a position in the customs service, he remarked drily that Patrick’s practical knowledge of smuggling should, if known, prove a great point in his favor. Meanwhile, the trade in contraband goods prospered, and by the end of the year Patrick had deposited with the obliging lawyer in the Temple at least 184 pounds, of which 100 pounds was invested at Patrick’s request.

In the meantime, O’Connor, ever one to hedge his bets, thought the time had come to supplement his illegal income with regular employment. In the winter of 1832–33 Patrick was given a customs post in the port of London, that of a “tidewaiter.” The tidewaiter waited for incoming ships and boarded them to assure compliance with customs regulations.

Hardly had he begun his new work than, like a pendulum, his thoughts swung back to crooked schemes. He had a “lawyer’s letter” sent to the barrister who had served as his depositary, demanding payment of the full sum of 184 pounds. The barrister had in fact returned 84 pounds to O’Connor, but, believing he was dealing with an honest smuggler, had not demanded a receipt. The matter might have gone to trial except that O’Connor tripped himself with his habit of dishonorable dealings with the female sex. He had made a proposal of marriage to his depositary’s laundress on learning that she not only was a widow with a pension of 26 pounds but earned about 100 pounds a year as laundress to several lawyers in the Temple. Patrick, talkative as ever about his money matters, made the mistake of confiding in her about his withdrawal of 84 pounds from her employer. Whether this evidence of dishonesty shocked her or whether Patrick had also tried his old trick with the seduction drug we do not know, but the wooing
went off the tracks and the laundress reported Patrick's confession to the barrister. His solicitor passed this news along to Patrick's solicitor, and the claim was quietly dropped.

One result of Patrick's clumsy attempt at fraud was that it spurred the Temple barrister to investigate the source of O'Connor's income. He found that O'Connor had wangled an introduction to the bishop of Llandoff, a member of Parliament named Darby, and other proselytizing Protestants who financed efforts for the conversion of Catholics to the Church of England out of the coffers of the Bexley Fund. O'Connor showed great nimbleness in using both religious camps for the advancement of his career. He offered his services to the Protestant group, claiming that he was being persecuted for his religious doubts by his brother and other Catholic clergymen. His reward was not only sums of money but also (so the London journalists believed) appointment to his job as tidewaiter. Having his foot inside the door of the Customs House, Patrick then turned back to his brother and family friends for further sponsorship. It was reportedly through the efforts of Richard Lalor Shiel, whose election as Member of Parliament for Tipperary had been backed by Father O'Connor and friends of the O'Connor family, that Patrick gained a better position in the customs service. He was now a "gauger," who measured the contents of casks and other containers. Patrick may have been tempted more than once to skim off a bit of rum for his private trading, but in any event he had found a new resource for putting a little butter on the daily bread—he engaged in usury among his fellow employees.

Patrick also found his inclination to fraud hard to resist. In about 1846 a case was heard in the Thames police court charging a man named Michael Lee with attempting to obtain money from O'Connor by threats. Lee testified that he had given O'Connor five pounds to get a job for him at the docks, but that no position was obtained and O'Connor would not give him his money back. Lee threatened to expose O'Connor if the money was not returned, and Patrick put him off, saying that he did not have the money with him but would pay it if Lee called at his lodging the same evening. At the agreed hour Lee came
and repeated his threat, which was overheard by a constable whom O'Connor had stationed in an adjoining room. Lee was convicted on the constable’s evidence and given twelve months' imprisonment, and O'Connor, who reportedly had been suspended at the Customs House for similar employment frauds, was reinstated.

It is not at all clear how the paths of Marie de Roux and Patrick O'Connor first crossed. Robert Huish, "having no particular data to go on," falls short of affirming that they "were sent from Heaven as a pair to hunt each other out through all the defiles, windings and sinuosities of this very best of all possible worlds.” Hecontents himself with a conventionally romantic tale of their meeting: that Patrick was in the service of the Wentworths when they came upon Marie at the Swiss inn, and that, immediately smitten with her, he convinced Wentworth that she would be the very model of a lady's maid. Huish would have us believe that when the complicated foursome returned to Ireland, it was Patrick who first pursued Marie, but that, persistently unlucky in love, he was caught in flagrante delicto (or nearly so) by Wentworth and expelled from the household.

The journalists generally placed the first encounter of Marie and Patrick much later (in 1846) but in an equally romantic setting. They reported that the couple met on a Channel crossing to Boulogne, O'Connor having been given a two-week leave and Marie being on her way to join her mistress, Lady Blantyre, on the Continent; that one fateful evening they met in the ship's saloon, all the other passengers having retired. Marie is supposed to have been free with her name and position, for O'Connor, on his return home, was reputed to have told friends that he intended to call on Marie at Stafford House. The trouble with this delightful story is that it may be untrue. Marie, as will be seen, asserted that she had known Patrick since about 1842, long before her service to Lady Blantyre began.

We read that the road of the love affair did not run smooth. O'Connor showed friends letters from Marie that inquired bluntly: “Of what good is it to continue our correspondence? You never speak of marriage.” Of what did O'Connor speak?
Portrait of Fred Manning, from Huish’s *The Progress of Crime*. The common reversal of his initials is probably an unconscious tribute to G. F. Handel.
He said that Marie’s charming accent resembled that of Madame Celeste, a very popular actress. It was truly remarkable, he told friends, how much Madame Celeste’s pronunciation of English was like that of his darling Mauridhe Rhua, as he called Marie in an Irish pun on her name. The Irish words meant Red Mary. This was all very gallant, but his friends did not gather that Patrick had any intention of marrying.

However fictitious her shipboard romance with O’Connor may be, it was very likely train travel that led to Marie’s first acquaintance with Frederick George Manning, who was a guard on the Great Western Railway. Manning’s father had been a sergeant in the Somerset militia and resided for many years in Taunton, where he collected market tolls. He was also for some time the keeper of the “Bear,” a public house in Taunton, and was highly respected. He died about 1845, survived by his wife, Frederick, and other children.

It is reported that Lady Palk traveled frequently on the Great Western line and that it was on these travels that Marie came to know Frederick Manning. The reconstruction of their courtship is pure conjecture. Perhaps Marie had given up on the elusive Patrick O’Connor, who praised her accent but could never bring himself to pledge to live within eternal earshot of her voice. When Frederick met her, Marie’s attractions were enhanced by an aristocratic aura lent by her service to Lady Palk; and she may already have adopted the genteel black satin that was to become her trademark. Huish writes that Frederick was a hard-working young man who had conserved a legacy of at least four hundred pounds under his father’s will and had added money of his own through dealings in poultry and real estate, only to lose his state of respectability “by his fatal marriage with a female fiend.”

Marie does not seem to have rushed into the arms of the railway guard. She entered the employ of the Sutherland family and for a time was visited at Stafford House by both Manning and O’Connor. Eventually, Frederick proposed marriage and she accepted. Rumor had it that Frederick did not rely solely on personal charm in pressing his suit (and indeed, after the fact at least, Marie did not rate his charm highly) but represented
falsely that he was entitled to property worth about six hundred pounds under his mother’s will. The wedding was celebrated in style at St. James’s Church, Piccadilly. Manning now drew a will leaving his at least partly imaginary property to his “very dear and beloved wife” and appointed her coexecutor with his friend Henry Poole. Marie and all England would hear Mr. Poole’s name again.

Marie’s married life suffered a series of early surprises. The first was the arrival at Stafford House shortly after the marriage of a letter from O’Connor belatedly protesting his love and asserting (now that it was safe) that he had just been at the point of making his own proposal:

Customs, St. Katherine’s Docks
June 11, 1847

MY DEAR MRS. _________. Not knowing your real name, I have addressed this note as usual. I hope it will find you. I cannot describe to you my feelings and what I suffered since I saw you last evening. If you were to know half, you would have compassion for me, if I were the greatest enemy you ever had. I have spent a solitary and a dreary winter, and a dull and melancholy spring, in anticipation of having a jovial and pleasant autumn. I had given up going into all society, and cut the acquaintance of every friend I had, on your account, being anxious to economise and secure for ourselves the means of making us happy and comfortable the rest of our lives. I had my month’s leave of absence settled, to commence on the 6th of August, when I thought you might be returning from the continent, and hoped to get married on the 7th, leave London for Boulogne on the 8th, and there spend the honeymoon. But alas! all these arrangements are now blighted. You have all those comforts now that your heart can wish for, and I am glad of it. For poor me there is none of these consolations left, but the sad reflection of being disappointed. Ah, Maria! you have acted cruelly to me. Why not, like a true professor of what you avowed, write and say what you intended before you acted so, then, at the risk of losing my situation, I would have gone every step that man could, and got married to the only being on the face of the earth who could make me happy. And, Maria dear, if you could only read the feelings of my heart, you would not do as you did.
After this outpouring, Patrick cheered up and offered Marie and her husband a tour of the docks, including a visit to a ship from China. He concluded by hoping she would call on him as promised the next Sunday:

You may be able to give some explanation on this matter which may smooth it down a little. I wish I could acquit you of infidelity on the occasion. I hope that every happiness may accompany your proceedings, and believe me under any circumstances till death,

Yours very affectionately,

PATRICK O'CONNOR

Marie, though, was accustomed to dealing with her triangular love life, and she no doubt found an early opportunity to make matters less complicated by introducing O'Connor and Manning to each other. They shook hands but would never be friends.

The next surprise for Marie was more severe: Manning was fired by the Great Western Railway. The newspapers reported after the O'Connor murder that Manning’s dismissal was prompted by his implication (presumably with insufficient evidence for prosecution) in a series of robberies of gold bullion, in a total amount of four thousand pounds over a period of twelve months, from the train of which he was guard. We are not told the precise date on which Manning was dismissed.

The Great Western’s troubles with gold robbers and inadequate guards continued into early 1848. On 10 January a box of gold coin with a total value of fifteen hundred pounds was stolen from a day-mail between Paddington Station and Bristol. The 10:15 A.M. train had been chosen for the shipment so that the parcel could be transmitted to its destination, a firm at Taunton, by daylight. The strong box, well secured with iron clamps, was brought by a special confidential messenger to Paddington and delivered into the hands of the guard immediately before the train started. The guard placed the box in a parcel compartment next to his own post on the train, from which he could keep the treasure under observation through an
aperture in the wall of the compartment. On receiving the box, the guard said reassuringly, “All right—I’ll take care of it,” but the cautious messenger stayed on the platform until the train was in motion.

Upon the arrival of the train at Bristol, the superintendent searched for the box and found that all the gold had been removed. The box had been “dexterously cut by means of a circular saw, or some similar instrument, and the work was that of some practised hands.” It was reported that the compartment adjoining that in which the gold was deposited had been hired by six persons of fashionable appearance, whom the police now surmised might be a part of London’s “swell mob.” However, the case was not solved. Still, the Times reporter could not resist dropping a suspicion about the guard: “The forcing open of the box whilst under the charge of the company’s servant could not have been anticipated, it being an operation attended with difficulty and much noise.” This guard, whom the Times supposed to be incredibly hard of hearing, may have been Manning, but this conclusion is far from clear. First, the robberies with which Manning was reportedly linked were of bullion, but the booty of the January 1848 robbery, though first described as bullion, was in a later report said to be coin. Also, Manning may well have been out of the railway service in 1847, since he soon turned up in a new position, that of keeper with his wife of the White Hart Inn at Taunton. Most important, there is another likely candidate for the role of the guard of the coin shipment—Henry Poole, a close friend of Manning’s who, as we have seen, was named coexecutor in Manning’s will.

Poole was soon to win an undisputed niche in the history of English train robberies—by daring mail thefts from both the up- and down-trains on the Great Western line on the same night of 1 January 1849.

The up-train left Plymouth for London at 6:35 P.M. On the arrival of the train at Bristol shortly before midnight, the guard went to the mail tender immediately at the rear of the post-office car in order to deliver the Bristol bags and was astonished to find that all the bags had been cut open or disturbed. When the mutilated bags were examined at the London Post Office in
St. Martin’s-le-Grand, it was found that not only had registered letters and bankers’ parcels been stolen but in many cases bills listing the valuable mail were also missing so that it was impossible to determine the full scope of the theft. While officials were still pondering these baffling discoveries on the afternoon of 2 January, the news reached London that a similar robbery had been perpetrated on the down-mail that had left London on the same evening of 1 January at 8:55 P.M., and that two suspected robbers had been arrested on the train. The suspects, who were eventually tried and convicted for the robbery of the down-train, were Henry Poole and Edward Nightingale, who had boarded the train at Bristol. On leaving Bristol, the train consisted of two second-class carriages next to the engine tender, then the “travelling post office” followed by the mail tender, and next the first-class carriage. The mail robbery was discovered after the down-train reached Bridgewater; some of the bags in the tender were found to have been opened and rifled, seals were torn off, strings untied, and different strings used to retie some of the parcels. The Bristol-Bridgewater segment of the run was the most convenient stretch for robbery attempts since it took two hours. It occurred to Barrett, the railway guard, that although it might be dangerous for a first-class passenger to get to the mail tender while the train was moving, it would be almost impossible to get there from the second-class carriages, which were much farther away and were separated from the post office car by a gap of five feet. He therefore ordered a search of the first-class car, and Poole and Nightingale were found in a compartment with blinds drawn and in possession of a variety of incriminating objects: two crape masks, a piece of candle, a pocket hook that could be used to grapple a carriage roof, and a pair of false mustaches. After the prisoners were removed at Exeter to be searched, their compartment was gone over more carefully, and fourteen pieces of stolen mail were found bundled in a handkerchief under Poole’s seat. The parcels contained six rings, ring mountings, a watchcase, and other articles. The police theorized that the robbers had stowed the proceeds of their up-train robbery somewhere at Bristol and then, after a stop-
over of only an hour and a half, coolly bought tickets at Bristol Station for the down-train to pull off a repeat performance. Their counsel, Mr. Cockburn, in his unsuccessful closing argument to the jury, described the agility and courage that would have been required to accomplish the robbery: "... it was alleged that when the train was proceeding at a velocity of from 20 to 50 miles an hour these men had got out of the window of their own carriage, had then passed the windows of three compartments, and then had got upon the buffers of the two carriages, had proceeded from one carriage to another, and, having only the shelving roof of the carriage to hold on by, they had only the ledge of the panel on which to step for six feet three inches. Why a cat could not have done it."

Poole was a former guard of the Great Western and had worked on the mail trains. He had been discharged, one witness stated, about eight or nine months before the mail robberies, which would put the date of his firing in April or May of 1848. Therefore, he was still in service at the time of the gold coin robbery in January of that year, and just could have been the negligent guard of whom the Times complained in that case, or the guard's confederate.

The haul of Poole and Nightingale from the robbery of the down-mail seems puny, but their theft from the up-train may have been more impressive. One report valued the contents of one of the missing registered letters at four thousand pounds, and none of the lost mail had apparently been recovered by the time of the robbers' trial. Poole's criminal career must have been extraordinarily lucrative, because the auction of his property, ordered by his friends in February 1849, included furniture described by the Exeter Gazette as "fit for the mansion of any nobleman... magnificent mahogany and rosewood sideboards, chiffoniers, bedsteads, splendid feather beds, Brussels and Turkey carpets, etc."

It is likely that Poole and Manning had shared the secrets of earlier robberies, but their connection was first referred to by the press in the accounts of the mail thefts. On 18 January 1849 the London Times quoted a piece of startling news from Trewman's Flying Post to the effect that the plan of the robbery of the
down-train had been known to the authorities for some four or five months before its commission. The detail of the plot, which was said to have been communicated first to two highly respectable persons in Taunton known to the *Flying Post*, was so accurate as to give the name of one of the prisoners, the description of the disguise, and the manner in which the robbery was to be accomplished. The parties who received the communication immediately reported to the railway authorities, and the *Flying Post* expressed the hope that it might still lead to “the capture of as formidable a gang of ruffians as ever infested any community.” The paper stated that the two persons who contacted the authorities were Mr. Eales White, proprietor of a brewery, and Mr. James Dyer, a surgeon. The reporter identified the source of their information as “the wife of one of the supposed accomplices in this and many other ‘railway schemes.’”

The *Taunton Courier* had fresh comments and news to offer on the hometown robbery plot. The *Courier* confirmed the accuracy of the *Flying Post*’s story but proceeded to raise a question as to whether the railway directors to whom the robbery plan was communicated in great detail were not subject to censure or perhaps even legal redress for not having immediately commenced an investigation to determine the accuracy of the information. In partial defense of the directors, the *Courier* expanded on the disclosure that the original source of the communication was the wife of one of the accomplices: “It should be known, and is not among the incidents of the disclosures narrated in the above statement, that the communication was made by the wife of the man said to be implicated in the robbery while in a paroxysm of anger arising from the ill-usage she had experienced. He had, consistently with his accustomed brutality, turned her out of his house, and it was while consulting those to whom she had appealed for advice that the various and long-continued enormities of her husband had been disclosed.”

It is known that Inspector Charles Field and Detective Sergeant Langley, who were dispatched from London to investigate the mail robbery, interrogated the Mannings about the
case, and later newspaper reports make it certain that the "accomplice's wife" who revealed the details of the criminal plans to White and Dyer was Marie. Robert Huish, in his novel, explicitly identifies Marie as the woman who gave away the secrets of the robbery conspiracy. He states that Langley and Field "satisfied themselves, beyond any possible doubt, that the robberies were concocted at the White Hart Inn" as long as three months before the actual perpetration of the crimes, but that "the confederates were at that time foiled in carrying out their objective by Mrs. Manning, who it appears had a violent quarrel with her husband, and at that time, from a mere spirit of revenge, had communicated the intended robbery." Huish attributed the Mannings' disharmony to mutual infidelities. A "certain meddling, officious gossip" supposedly dropped some "oblique hints" about Fred's conduct with certain ladies of Taunton. Marie, according to Huish, had been far from oblique in her own love life. She took off without warning for London and was met with a warm embrace by O'Connor at the station. They lived together as Mr. and Mr. Johnson at Queen Street, Bermondsey; neighbors, who, according to Huish, were fascinated with the new tenants, daily clocked O'Connor out of the apartment at 9:00 A.M. and back at 4:00 P.M. and concluded from these hours that the employee of Her Majesty's Customs Service must work at a public house.

Marie returned to Fred Manning at Taunton but ran away again, Huish reports, this time to parts unknown. The Times published a melodramatic account of one of Marie's flights and its prelude. The couple's mutual jealousies often ended in blows, and on one occasion "the wife was seen in pursuit of her husband with a large dirk knife." Then one night Marie left by mail train, having, Fred complained, robbed him of money, plate, and other valuables to the extent of three or four hundred pounds. It is not surprising that marital scuffling behind the bar and Marie's night raid on the inn's capital caused the business to founder, and the creditors closed in.

When Marie returned she found that Manning had abandoned the inn but ultimately tracked him down, in Huish's words, at "an obscure lodging in a quarter of the town at a
considerable distance from the White Hart.” He cannot have been delighted to see her.

Therefore, two facts stood quite plain about the Mannings in early 1849: Fred Manning very likely had criminal connections, and the Mannings’ marriage was in trouble.