CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Homicide Fair Revisited

... it has been, from first to last, a pernicious instance and encouragement of the demoralising practice of trading in Death.

—Charles Dickens, from Household Words, 27 November 1852

The first volume of Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor, which originally appeared in 1851, provides firsthand evidence that the Manning case was big business for the thriving street trade in tales, ballads, and souvenirs of crime. Mayhew's book gives a lively description of the techniques of the street sellers of "literature" who vied with the costermongers for the ears of the passerby. The sales were pushed by a class of fast-talking street orators appropriately known as " patterers."
The "running" or "flying" patterer roved the streets of London with his stock of crime papers, crying "murder," "horrible," or "barbarous" but keeping the details to himself. If his paper related to a well-known case such as that of the Mannings, he would also shout the names of the criminals quite distinctly. His literary wares included the broadside (or broadsheet), a single sheet describing a crime, trial, execution, "last dying speech," or (if the seller was really lucky) the "full confession" of the culprit. Sometimes his offering would include a "book," a pamphlet whose length was strictly limited to eight pages.

The running patterer who specialized in crime also sported the title of "crime hunter" or "death hunter" and was a severe critic of the commercial possibilities of the current cases. One of these specialists confided to Mayhew that the Bermondsey case had its shortcomings. First of all, he thought that the numerous court hearings had defused the crime's sensational appeal: "We
might have done very well, indeed, out of the Mannings, but there was too many examinations for it to be any great account to us.” He had unfortunately spent much of his recent time in the country, where trade in the Mannings was less brisk than in the metropolis. “I’ve been away with the Mannings in the country ever since. I’ve been through Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Suffolk, along with George Frederick Manning and his wife—travelled from 800 to 1,000 miles with ‘em, but I could have done much better if I had stopped in London.” What had put the biggest dent in the patterer’s profit, however, was Mrs. Manning’s inconsiderate refusal to confess: “Every day I was anxiously looking for a confession from Mrs. Manning. All I wanted was for her to clear her conscience before she left this here whale of tears (that’s what I always calls it in the patter), and when I read in the papers . . . her last words on the brink of heternity . . . , I guv her up entirely—had completely done with her. In course the public looks to us for the last words of all monsters in human form, and as for Mrs. Manning’s, they were not worth the printing.” However, the enterprising death hunter was not without remedy if the season’s crop of crime was disappointing. He simply sold stories of concocted murders and fictitious robberies, which the trade called “cocks.”

Other street salesmen remained in one place (at least until hustled along by the police). These “standing patterers” attempted to call attention to their papers (or more often pamphlets) by means of a board with colored pictures on it, illustrating the contents of what they had for sale, or by gathering a crowd around them through horrible descriptions of their merchandise. The street artists chose striking colors—scarlet, light blue, and orange (not yellow which “ain’t a good candlelight colour”)—and left nothing to the imagination. The paintings were in watercolor rubbed with gum resin to guard against the rain. Mayhew writes that the board used to advertise literature on the Mannings was among the most elaborate, consisting of many compartments showing the circumstances of the murder, the discovery of the body, the trial, and other scenes. A standing patterer told Mayhew that the public (par-
particularly out of town) greatly admired the picture of Mrs. Manning, beautifully "dressed for dinner" in black satin with "a low front," firing a pistol at O'Connor, while Manning, in shirt sleeves, looked on in evident alarm. The patterer commented:

The people said, "O look at him a-washing hisself; he's a doing it so natt'ral and ain't a-thinking he's a-going to be murdered. But was he really so ugly as that? Lor! such a beautiful woman to have to do with him." You see, sir, O'Connor weren't flattered, and perhaps Mrs. Manning was. I have heard the same sort of remarks both in town and country. I patters hard on the woman such times, as I points them out on my board in murders or any crimes. I says: "When there's mischief a woman's always the first. Look at Mrs. Manning there on that werry board—the work of one of the first artists in London—it's a faithful likeness, taken from life at one of her examinations, look at her. She fires the pistol, as you can see, and her husband was her tool."

Popular street artists were commissioned to paint a board for a fee ranging from three shillings to three shillings sixpence, depending on the extent of the pictured details. Sometimes, in the case of a surefire case like the Mannings', the artist would work on speculation. There was no great risk for any entrepre­neurs in the Mannings' case, since we are told by Mayhew that broadsheets on the case sold two and a half million copies. One broadsheet shows the Mannings hanging like marionettes above the crowd at Horsemonger Lane and exhorts the reader in crude verses: "They pity all who see us suffer, man and wife on the fatal tree: for years to come will be remembered the Mannings' deeds in Bermondsey." Another broadsheet published in Carlisle briefly described the execution and appended a poem contrasting Marie's wickedness with her husband's "contrition for his guilty deeds." Woodcuts of the Mannings and their victim also moved briskly, and so headlong was the scramble for the marketplace that one "likeness" of O'Connor, as Mayhew detected from the presence of a fur collar and an order with its insignia round the neck, was in fact a doctored portrait "of the sovereign in whose service O'Connor was once an excise-officer—King William IV." The balladeers also seized upon the Mannings as a popular theme for their lyrics. One
example, "Life of the Mannings," appears in John Ashton's *Modern Street Ballads* (London 1888). There is quite a bit of poetic license in the piece, and sometimes plain inaccuracy; Marie becomes a Swede, and O'Connor is forced into the traditional role of the sincere lover. Despite these carping comments, the following poem was a best-seller of 1849:

**LIFE OF THE MANNINGS.**

EXECUTED AT HORSEMONGER LANE GAOL ON TUESDAY, 13 NOV., 1849.

See the scaffold it is mounted,
And the doomed ones do appear,
Seemingly borne wan with sorrow,
Grief and anguish, pain and care.
They cried, the moment is approaching,
When we, together, must leave this life,
And no one has the least compassion
On Frederick Manning and his wife.

Maria Manning came from Sweden,
Brought up respectably, we hear,
And Frederick Manning came from Taunton,
In the county of Somersetshire.
Maria lived with noble ladies,
In ease and splendour and delight,
But on one sad and fatal morning,
She was made Frederick Manning's wife.

She first was courted by O'Connor,
Who was a lover most sincere,
He was possessed with wealth and riches,
And loved Maria Roux most dear.
But she preferred her present husband.
As it appeared, and with delight,
Slighted sore Patrick O'Connor,
And was made Frederick Manning's wife.

And when O'Connor knew the story,
Down his cheeks rolled floods of tears,
He beat his breast and wept in sorrow,
Wring his hands and tore his hair;
Maria, dear, how could you leave me?
Wretched you have made my life,
Tell me why you did deceive me,
For to be Fred Manning's wife?

At length they all were reconciled,
And met together night and day,
Maria, by O'Connor's riches,
Dressed in splendour fine and gay.
Though married, yet she corresponded.
With O'Connor, all was right,
And oft he went to see Maria,
Frederick Manning's lawful wife.

At length they plann'd their friend to murder,
And for his company did crave,
The dreadful weapons they prepared,
And in the kitchen dug his grave.
And, as they fondly did caress him,
They slew him—what a dreadful sight,
First they mangled, after robbed him,
Frederick Manning and his wife.

They absconded but were apprehended,
And for the cruel deed were tried,
When placed at the Bar of Newgate,
They both the crime strongly denied.
At length the Jury them convicted,
And doomed them for to leave this life,
The Judge pronounced the awful sentence,
On Frederick Manning, and his wife.

Return, he said, to whence they brought you,
From thence unto the fatal tree,
And there together be suspended,
Where multitudes your fate may see.
Your hours, recollect, are numbered,
You betrayed a friend, and took his life,
For such there's not one spark of pity,
For Frederick Manning and his wife.

See what numbers are approaching,
To Horse Monger's fatal tree,
Full of blooming health and vigour,
What a dreadful sight to see.
Old and young, pray take a warning,
Females, lead a virtuous life,
Think upon that fatal morning,
Frederick Manning and his wife.

A wide audience was also assured for stenographic accounts of the trial garnished with portraits and memoirs of the murderers and their victim. In the issue of the *Illustrated London News* that appeared on 20 October 1849, a week before the trial, W. M. Clark advertised that in the next few days he would publish at a price of sixpence *The Trial of Manning and his Wife*. He “begged to say” that he had “engaged Eminent Short-hand Writers, from whom he will receive every particular of the above Trial.” The product rolled off the presses on schedule and was offered for sale on 29 October. When a competitive report of the trial published by George Vickers was released, it bore on its back cover a notice that Robert Huish’s *Memoirs of Marie Manning* was now appearing in three penny installments. The crime merchants had moved with breathtaking speed.

The case also became the theme of a religious tract by Reverend Erskine Neale entitled *The Track of The Murderer Marked Out By an Invisible Hand: Reflections Suggested By the Case of The Mannings*. Reverend Neale found the hand of providence at work in the apprehension of the Mannings through apparent trifles: the failure of the Edinburgh brokers to destroy the note of Marie’s local address, and Fred’s excessive brandy purchases in Jersey.

The Manning case does not seem to have been adapted for the stage with the same sensational success won by some of the earlier nineteenth-century murders such as the Red Barn Murder or the case of Thurtell and Hunt. The Thurtell play, called *The Gamblers; or, The Murderers at the Desolate Cottage*, opened six weeks before the trial, and a carriage billed as the “identical chaise” used in the murder rolled nightly across the stage until Thurtell’s lawyer obtained an injunction against further performances. None of such promotional ingenuity marks the theatrical history of the Mannings, but at least the memory of the case could be drawn on at the box office a
decade later. On 5 March 1860 the Britannia Theatre or Saloon, in High Street Hoxton, offered *Marie de Roux; or, The Progress of Crime*, an anonymously written drama that was presumably based on Robert Huish’s novel.

The Mannings also were sold on the street as toys, a rude imitation of an ingenious device known as the Thaumascop ("wonderscope"). On a broadsheet were printed black marks that at first glance did not appear to define any object, but on closer examination the outlines of a face, and sometimes a figure, could be made out. When the white or black portion of the paper was cut away, what remained, when a light source was properly brought to bear, threw a huge shadow on the wall that could be increased or diminished by moving the light. During the same winter shadow figures of the Mannings were offered for sale with those of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, the Princess Royal, and the Prince of Wales. Even the potters of the Sutherlands’ Staffordshire did not neglect the case. For the mantelpieces of Victorian homes they produced a nine-inch figurine of Mrs. Manning as a “baby-faced” murderess, and a companion image of her jowly husband. Perhaps *Punch* was not indulging in excessive satire when it suggested that the ultimate product of Homicide Fair would be “murder-dolls,” little images of the popular criminals of the day. “It is to be expected,” *Punch* wrote, “that the smaller fry will take delight in having, as puppets to amuse their play hours, the miniature representations of those atrocious monsters in whom their parents take an interest.”

*Punch’s* real target was the life-sized “murder dolls” that the adults adored, the “waxen horrors” of Madame Tussaud’s museum. In 1849 and 1850 *Punch* conducted an unrelenting campaign against Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors as one of the most contaminating sources of “murder mania” in London. Fred Manning shared *Punch’s* view; at the conclusion of his last meeting with his brother and sister he said to prison Governor Keene when they were leaving: “Mr. Keene, I have to ask you one great favour—that you will not, for the sake of my family, allow any one to take a cast of my head, to be exhibited at Madame Tussaud’s.” But no powers on earth could keep
Photograph of Marie Manning. Courtesy Madame Tussaud's Archive, London.
Photograph of Fred Manning. By permission of the Dickens House.
Staffordshire figure of Mr. Manning. By permission of the Dickens House.
Staffordshire figure of Mrs. Manning. By permission of the Dickens House.
models of the Mannings out of the Chamber of Horrors. Their waxen figures "taken from life at the trials" were displayed to the public at Madame Tussaud's on 13 November, the day of the execution, and they were joined by a plaster cast of O'Connor, and a plan of the back kitchen of Minver Place. Other figures sprouted elsewhere; on 24 November a Manchester waxwork museum respectfully announced that it had added to its collection "correct likenesses" of the Mannings.

But Fred's worry had focused on the display of a cast of his head. Were his wishes going to be honored? The Observer had hoped so and had speculated that the casts that were taken after the hangings were intended for phrenological study. Another newspaper confirmed this speculation, reporting that "the phrenological development of the heads is said to agree in a very remarkable manner with the character of the convicts as at present known," and that a synopsis of the study would be published. But Marie's head, at least, did not escape the fate her husband had feared for himself. Her death mask was prepared by Joseph Tussaud, Madame Tussaud's son, and was exhibited at the Chamber of Horrors between 1891 and 1894.

Punch sent its representative to view the Manning wax figures when they were added to Madame Tussaud's collection. The exhibit was described in a bitterly worded article, "The Mannings at Home." Madame Tussaud, who was still alive and well and taking tickets at the door, is described as the "artistic continuation of Mr. Calcraft," the "wax witch" who takes up the hangman's work when he is done and beautifies it. Punch reported that it had "witnessed the crowd that—prompt to Madame Tussaud's card of invitation, that, like a blotch of blood, stands filthily out from the columns of the papers—gathered in Baker Street, to see Maria Manning and George Manning, in wax at home." Sardonic praise was lavished on Marie's wax image: "Maria Manning, as done in wax, is really a chef d'oeuvre. Dear thing! she would be a treasure as a lady's-maid at a hundred a-year, with all the cast dresses. Never did assassination look so amiable—so like a quality to be introduced to the bosom of families... She only wanted a lamb to be quite a duck... if the rue be wanting, the black satin gown is
unexceptionable. There she stands in silk attire, a beauteous thing, to be daily rained upon by a shower of sixpences.” And *Punch* also found Fred to be greatly improved in appearance, having “the look of a very clean undertaker, a little above his business.”

All this exploitation of the Manning case was bound to furnish a tempting subject for satire, and *Punch* had shown the way. Before the year 1849 was over, the Manning madness was wildly caricatured by the author and dramatist R. H. Horne in his pamphlet *Murder-Heroes and The Diseased Drama of Their Crime, Trial, Sentence, & Execution*. The cover contained an illustration of a gallows over the caption “One of our Oldest Institutions” and promised the following revelations:

All they said and did
How they were dressed,
What they ate and drank,
How polite and grateful they were,
And with what sort of step they
ASCENDED THE SCAFFOLD

Horne’s spoof tells the imaginary narrative of the murder hero Gottlieb Einhalter, a little old man who shoots people all over Europe through a pistol barrel concealed in his wooden leg. When arrested he confesses that he “had devoted all his energies to rectify the evils of over population so clearly displayed in the Divine book . . . of the great English Malthus!” Petted and lionized, Einhalter achieves his greatest sensation on the verge of his execution; attempting to shoot his sweetheart through his pistol-leg, he blows himself up and deprives the French Academy of his “finely-developed cranium.” *Bentley’s Miscellany* referred to Horne’s work as “a timely satire upon the recent epidemic communicated to the people by the trial and execution of the Mannings.”