CHAPTER NINETEEN

Marie and Mademoiselle Hortense

Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments . . . she seems to go about like a very neat She-Wolf imperfectly tamed.

—Bleak House

As 1849 waned the newspapers continued to publish reports of the aftermath of the Manning case, and reverberations of the events and personalities that give their case its special character were still heard.

A controversy was created in the columns of the Times by the report that in the last hours of the Mannings the Sacrament had been administered to them by Chaplain Rowe. A reader identifying himself as a “Northumberland Rector” wrote that he would not have been so “painfully struck” by this occurrence had the criminals been professing members of the Church of Rome and the rites been administered by the “Romish priest,” who “gives absolution in such cases as a matter of course.” But in the Protestant church, he asserted, the rite was administered “as a means of grace to those only who draw near to it in a spirit of Christian repentance, faith and charity,” and the “Rector” was tempted to ask Rowe how Mrs. Manning in particular could meet this prerequisite, having attempted suicide shortly before her execution and persisting in her denial of guilt. Chaplain Rowe responded, writing that, far from having suggested the propriety of their receiving Holy Communion, he had discouraged the desire the prisoners had expressed to receive it and did not comply with it until he had emphasized every exhortation in the Communion service, particularly the warning of the danger of receiving Communion unworthily. As for Mrs. Manning, he added, she had never admitted the atheistic
sentiments ascribed to her by her husband but “was always anxious to receive spiritual instruction.” The religious dispute was rounded out by a letter from a Catholic priest who stated that in the Catholic church as well, Holy Communion was never given except after previous confession and absolution, and that absolution was not given without sufficient evidence of penitential sorrow. He maintained that any Catholic priest would have regarded the administration of Holy Communion to persons in the state in which the Mannings were described to have been as “an act of the most fearful sacrilege.”

In an editorial of 17 November 1849, the Illustrated London News took note of the queen’s proclamation naming the previous Thursday as a day of thanksgiving for the recession of the cholera epidemic, but urged Parliament to remedy the growing evils of large towns and cities, and notably London, which “buries its dead in its bosom—pollutes its tidal river, till it is unfit to drink—deprives the larger portion of its population of air, light, and water—and suffers accumulations of nameless filth to poison the atmosphere for miles around.” In March 1850 Punch hailed the issuance of a report that recommended the end of London burials and the establishment of a vast cemetery in the countryside.

Marie Manning did not receive the same support from her aristocratic employers as the Swiss valet Courvoisier had been rendered by his; Lady Julia Lockwood and Mr. Fector, M.P., whom Courvoisier had served, appeared as character witnesses at his trial. In December 1849 readers learned of an event that might help explain why the Duchess of Sutherland had not responded to Marie’s pleas for assistance. She and the duke were busy making preparations for the celebration at Trentham of the coming of age of their eldest son, the Marquis of Stafford, on 19 December; the festivities were pictured in the Illustrated London News in the following month. But the Sutherland family may not only have been distracted by this great celebration; they had no recent experience with dealing with a murder within the household circle. The family’s last successful application for a reprieve had been made in behalf of a
Sutherland ancestor who was implicated in the assassination of Piers Gaveston in 1312.

In late December 1849 it was reported that the Secretary of State had, upon the recommendation of the Commissioners of Police, granted rewards to the members of the police who had been active in the detection and conviction of the Mannings, ranging from fifteen pounds for Inspector Field to five pounds each for Constables Barnes and Burton. In the following year Inspector Field received further celebrity as Inspector "Wield" and then under his own name in Charles Dickens's series on London detectives in *Household Words*, and his looks and mannerisms were immortalized: "Inspector Wield is a middle-aged man of a portly presence, with a large, moist, knowing eye, a husky voice, and a habit of emphasizing his conversation by the aid of a corpulent fore-finger, which is constantly in juxta-position with his eyes or nose."

The news item about the police rewards made on Commissioner Mayne’s recommendation did not give the public more than a slight hint that Mayne’s administrative involvement in the Manning case was far from being ended by the execution of the criminals. An examination of the Scotland Yard dossier leaves one with admiration for Mayne’s patience and care as an administrator and also with wonder that, trapped as he was in a bureaucratic maze, he was ever able to get about with his police work. The police rewards themselves came under attack in February 1850 when the Home Secretary complained about their "duplication" by later rewards made by the Solicitor of the Treasury for work and expenses of the police in connection with the court proceedings against the Mannings; the Home Secretary ultimately relented with a warning to Mayne that in the future all recommendations to the government for police rewards were to be made at the same time. Commissioner Mayne was also required to process and substantiate numerous claims of private parties for a share in the government’s posted rewards for information leading to the Mannings’ arrest. A particularly ticklish situation was presented by the Heulin brothers of Jersey; both filed a claim but George, who had
located Manning at Prospect Cottage, thought that the full reward should come to him. Mayne was also bogged down in reviewing the expense reports of Superintendent Moxey and his fellow officers of the Edinburgh police force. Moxey found to his chagrin that English thrift was more than a match for the more famous Scottish variety, and his requested per diem of three guineas became the subject of voluminous correspondence among Scotland Yard, the Treasury and the Home Office. In addition, Mayne had to referee claims of compensation for damage allegedly caused by the police investigation; he authorized a payment of six pounds, ten shillings to Mr. Coleman for the repair of 3 Minver Place and rejected the claim of the furniture dealer Bainbridge based on the assertion that, due to emotional distress caused by police questioning, his wife had given premature birth to a baby boy who had subsequently died.

But the principal housekeeping headache of Scotland Yard was the disposition of the Mannings’ property and the application of the proceeds to the unpaid balance of the costs of their defense. Marie’s French securities brought a little over fifty-one pounds, and the only other assets were clothing, jewelry, and household goods. In a report of 4 February 1850 to the Commissioners of the Treasury, the Solicitor, George Maule, recommended the sale of this property by the police at the best possible price but in a way that would “prevent the doing this by means which might be used in order to enhance the price at the sale beyond its real value at the expense of the public morals.” Mr. Maule’s proposal, which was approved by the Treasury and passed on to Mayne, meant simply that the Mannings’ property was to be sold under strict anonymity so as to avoid souvenir fever. The police accepted their task with their customary diligence. All names were cut from the clothing. When Superintendent Haynes stored the Manning property at a warehouse pending delivery to the auctioneer, he followed the example of his former quarry, Marie Manning, by making the deposit under an assumed name, “Mr. Wilson, London.” The auctioneers, Messrs. Debenham & Storr’s, King Street, Covent Garden, were cautioned, at Mayne’s orders, that “the names of
the persons [the property] belonged to should not transpire, which they have promised shall not be made known.”

The sale, which was carried out on Friday, 8 March 1850, was advertised in the auction catalogue merely as

Fifth Day’s Sale
or
Valuable Forfeited Property
and Other Effects.

The auction netted about fifty-one pounds. One of the biggest prices was five pounds, two shillings, sixpence which brought the happy bidder a gold Geneva hunting watch, a gold chain, two split rings, seal, and key. For eight shillings someone acquired Marie Manning’s library, which consisted of the Biblical Keepsake; Cook’s Letter Writer (which must have been useful to Marie, busy correspondent that she was); Nugent’s French Dictionary; Souvenirs Historiques; the Psalms of David; and Sacred Poetry. For some reason the auctioneer, while observing its promise of secrecy, printed one item of clothing in italics: “A rich black satin dress.” It went for one pound, eight shillings to a purchaser who had not yet learned of the reputed demise of black satin.

The Mannings’ hangman was back in the news in March 1850. *Punch* gleefully reported that he had been summoned to court for refusing to assist in the support of his mother. Calcraft pleaded poverty. He testified that his regular Newgate salary was only one guinea, but *Punch* pointed out that he had not mentioned his income from country hangings and was also moonlighting as a shoemaker. The account of Calcraft’s hearing stated that “the court was inconveniently crowded by persons, amongst whom were a number of well-dressed women, anxious to obtain a sight of the defendant.” This tidbit caused *Punch* to call Marie Manning to mind: “By the way, a certain late patient of Mr. Calcraft’s was remarkable for dressing well. Perhaps the well-dressed women gloating on him at Worship Street reminded him of her. Possibly it is not in externals alone that the ladies who could revel in such contemplation resembled Maria Manning.”
The fame of the Mannings was by no means limited to the street peddlers of Homicide Fair, for in 1849 and the years that followed they seemed to be on every tongue in the literary world as well. Jane Carlyle, who had extended her sympathy to John Forster because of the postponement of the execution, could not rid herself of her obsession with the case. Writing to Helen Welsh in November 1849, Jane revealed the full extent to which she had become a fan: “Have you taken much interest in these ‘interesting but ferocious’ beings the Mannings—the General Public has talked of little else here—and even now that they are got well hanged out of the road ‘additional particulars’ are turning up daily.” Jane added that she would send along pictures of the Mannings and noted that “Maria has a strange likeness (never tell it)—Lady Ashburton!” Undoubtedly she had discussed the case with her acerbic husband, Thomas Carlyle, and even he could not fail to share her fascination with Marie Manning, in whom he saw (or perhaps ironically professed to see) the unrealized potentiality of heroism: “A Mrs. Manning ‘dying game,’ alas, is not that the foiled potentiality of a kind of heroine too? Not a heroic Judith, not a mother of the Gracchi now, but a hideous murderess, fit to be the mother of hyenas! To such extent can potentialities be foiled.”

From afar in Venice the young Effie Ruskin, wife of the art critic John Ruskin, revealed in her correspondence that the Mannings had become a passion of the entire family. In a letter of 27 November she thanked her mother for telling her about the Mannings. “We were all much interested,” she wrote, “and had not heard of them since we read in the last Papers.” John’s father had previously sent them the Mannings’ prison correspondence. Effie’s letter to her father on 18 December showed that the case was still very much on her mind. She thought that the news about the administration of the Sacrament to Mrs. Manning was “horrible,” but showing the traditional snobbery of a tourist, she still managed to prefer Marie to the local residents: “... she is only one woman in a century and the Italians here appear to me to be too degraded & ignorant to be so clever or so knowing as she.”

The case had even become a household word in the circle of
Queen Victoria and her advisors. On 8 October 1850 Lord Palmerston wrote to the queen to comment on an instance of uncharacteristically rude treatment of a visiting foreign dignitary—the attack on Hungarian General Haynau by draymen during his visit to an English brewery. Haynau had earned a bad reputation in the recent Hungarian war for ordering the flogging of women, and Palmerston compared the public hatred of the general to the revulsion evoked by the Mannings:

“But General Haynau was looked upon as a great moral criminal; and the feeling in regard to him was of the same nature as that which was manifested towards Tawell and the Mannings, with this only difference, that General Haynau’s bad deeds were committed upon a far larger scale, and upon a far larger number of victims.”

The name of the Mannings left a faint trace in the second novel of Wilkie Collins, *Basil*, begun in 1850. When the son of a forger in that novel decides to assume an alias to conceal his relationship with the criminal, Collins has him take the name “Mannion,” a distorted version of the Manning name. It was certain that Charles Dickens had not forgotten the name. At the end of 1850, remembering all the quarrels that had arisen as a result of his letters to the *Times*, he wrote that he had come to think of Manning as “a most unpromising name.” And yet both the Mannings remained in Dickens’s thoughts. Neither of them had aroused any of his sympathy, and he had no doubt of their guilt. He did not give the slightest credence to their protestations of innocence or their reported expressions of confidence that they would be acquitted or reprieved. Indeed, several years after the Manning execution, in his essay “The Demeanour of Murderers,” Dickens propounded the theory that the same self-possession, coolness, and equanimity that make it possible for the murderer to kill also enabled him to proclaim his innocence and safety to the very end. It was for that reason, Dickens commented, that he was little impressed by Mr. Manning’s observation that “when all the nonsense was over, and the thing wound up, he had an idea of establishing himself in the West Indies.” But as with all his contemporaries, Dickens seemed to remember Marie as the principal villain. Her image
was clearly fixed in his imagination when he turned to his masterpiece *Bleak House*, which began to appear in 1852. At Chesney Wold, Lincolnshire, the home of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Dickens introduced with ominous emphasis Mademoiselle Hortense, Lady Dedlock's French maid:

My Lady's maid is a Frenchwoman of two-and-thirty, from somewhere in the southern country about Avignon and Marseilles—a large-eyed brown woman with black hair; who would be handsome, but for a certain feline mouth, and general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager, and the skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her anatomy; and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head, which could be pleasantly dispensed with—especially when she is in an ill humour and near knives.

Hortense's fine clothes conceal only thinly her wolfish instincts: “Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments, these objections so express themselves, that she seems to go about like a very neat She-Wolf imperfectly tamed.”

One peculiarly disagreeable trait soon detaches itself from this portrait of Hortense: she is forever watching, and her eyes are everywhere. When Lady Dedlock is having her hair undressed and looks in the mirror she sees “a pair of black eyes curiously observing her.” And when the community of Chesney Wold gathers for services in the little church in the estate park, Hortense's relentless eyes sweep over the congregation: “One face, and not an agreeable one, though it was handsome, seemed maliciously watchful... of every one and everything there. It was a Frenchwoman's.” Hortense's persistent spying begins to appear more dangerous when Dickens shows her also to be proud, imperious, and violent. When Lady Dedlock demonstrates a preference for her pretty young maid Rose, Hortense cools her passionate resentment by walking off barefoot through the rain-soaked grass. At least the park keeper thought, as he saw her depart, she hoped to cool herself down, but his wife had another explanation of the attraction of the wet grass: “Or unless she fancies it’s blood.... She’d as soon walk through that as anything else, I think, when her own’s up!”
The keeper's wife had the sharper vision, for Hortense was setting out on a trail of blood. Discharged from Lady Dedlock's service, Hortense nurses a grudge against her former employer. Dickens drops a clever hint that the scorned maid may turn to violence, when the proprietor of a shabby London shooting gallery, Mr. George, in discussing his mixed clientele, confides: "I have had French women come, before now, and show themselves dabs at pistol-shooting." Soon Hortense finds a human target, in fact two. Her criminal plot has its roots and its camouflage in Lady Dedlock's scandalous past. For though she is now the haughty reigning beauty of high society, Lady Dedlock had a dreadful Victorian secret: before she was married to Sir Leicester she carried on a love affair with a young army officer, Captain Hawdon, and gave birth to a daughter. Sir Leicester's solicitor, Tulkinghorn, gets wind of the secret, and on one fatal occasion enlists Hortense's help in his investigations. It was very dangerous to employ Hortense, as both Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock were to learn. Rebuffed by Tulkinghorn in her demands to be paid more money for her brief part in his dark inquiries and for her silence, and still enraged over her dismissal by Lady Dedlock, Hortense shoots the lawyer through the heart, throws the murder weapon into the Thames, and sends letters to Sir Leicester charging his wife with the crime.

Dickens's contemporaries had no difficulty recognizing Marie Manning as the inspiration for the murderous Mademoiselle Hortense. Sheriff Donald Nicoll, who recalled that Dickens had attended the Mannings' trial, quoted Percy Fitzgerald, an early biographer of Dickens, as stating that "Maria Manning's broken English, her impatient gestures, and her volubility are... imitated in the novel 'Bleak House' with marvellous exactness." If Fitzgerald is right, then in the characteristic speech patterns of Hortense, her use of French words only slightly Anglicized and her literal adaptations of French phrases, her trouble with word endings, her rolled r's, and her energetic sentences delivered with fists clenched, Dickens may have given us the best record we have of Marie's voice and gestures: "'Discharge, too!' cries Mademoiselle, furiously, 'by her Ladyship! Eh, my faith, a
pretty Ladyship! Why, I r-r-r-ruin my character by remaining with a Ladyship so infame!"

Pitted against Hortense is a Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Bucket. The lavishly detailed description of Bucket, "fat forefinger" and all, proclaimed his original to be Inspector Field, one of the real-life pursuers of Marie Manning. Bucket's appealing personal traits are an eloquent memorial of Dickens's admiration and affection for Field. The fictional detective is genial, friendly, charismatic, talkative, even confidential, but he is all those things only to the extent that he wants to be and he never forgets his mission. More often than not Bucket puts his irresistible charm to the service of a deadly purpose. When he drops in at the musical instruments shop of the Bagnets, he orders a cello for a friend and stays on to celebrate Mrs. Bagnet's birthday, drinking to her health, praising the Bagnets' children, and keeping time to their eldest's performance on the fife; but when he leaves the jolly party, the inspector arrests the Bagnets' birthday guest. It would be an understatement to acknowledge that Bucket is not a man strongly moved by a love of justice. In fact, it is often hard to be certain whether he is serving the public or Sir Leicester Dedlock, and he is capable of the use of bribery and threats to bar the gates of the community to a poor sick boy who knows too much of Lady Dedlock's secret. Still, there are some occasions when he shows a genuine sympathy for victims of poverty, humiliation, or grief. Above all, Dickens emphasizes the professionalism of Bucket that typified the methodical competence of Field and the newly organized Scotland Yard. Self-controlled, unobtrusive, and a master of disguise, Bucket observes quietly and comes and goes as if invisible. He recognizes every criminal and policeman he meets on the street, and he makes himself known to them by the slightest of gestures. But beyond sheer competence there is one essential power in Inspector Bucket that makes it impossible for his prey to elude him: he is dogged and unrelenting to a degree that sets him apart from other men. Dickens wrote of him: "Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day."
"There she is!" Cries Jo.

Mlle Hortense Impersonating Lady Dedlock; illustration to Bleak House by Frederick Barnard.
MR. BUCKET IN LADY DEDLOCK'S BOUDOIR.

Inspector Bucket investigating; illustration to *Bleak House* by Frederick Barnard.
Inspector Bucket's "Fat Forefinger"; illustration to *Bleak House* by Frederick Barnard.
Many of the plot devices, scenes, and themes of *Bleak House* raise echoes of the Manning case and its setting. By choosing the pistol as Hortense's weapon, Dickens may have reflected his acceptance of Fred Manning's final version of his wife's murder role, and the watery burial of the weapon recalls Scotland Yard's frustrating search for the Manning gun. The clothing of Mademoiselle Hortense, like the genteel attire of Marie Manning, plays a central role: Lady Dedlock disguises herself in Hortense's dress when she goes on a nocturnal expedition to learn about her dead lover, Captain Hawdon. (There is no mention of the fabric favored by Hortense, though, and the only black satin referred to by Dickens is in the waistcoat of her victim, Tulkinghorn.) The inquest on Hawdon's death is conducted in a public house that is just as undignified a setting as the tavern at the Leather Market. "The Coroner frequents more public-houses than any man alive," Dickens wrote of the inquest in *Bleak House*. "The smell of sawdust, beer, tobacco-smoke, and spirits is inseparable in his vocation from death in its most awful shapes." And the penny-a-liners who left a record of sensational criminal cases such as the murder of O'Connor are in attendance at the *Bleak House* inquest, "two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons... the public chroniclers of such inquiries, by the line." But the inquest scene would remind Dickens's readers of many deaths as well as O'Connor's; what unmistakably evokes the Bermondsey case is the fact that the inquest and all the court proceedings of *Bleak House* are overshadowed by contagion and wholesale death due to poverty and social neglect. Although in the novel smallpox is on the rampage rather than cholera, Tom-all-Alone's, the fever-stricken slum described by Dickens, resembles Bermondsey in 1849: "for months and months, the people 'have been down by dozens,' and have been carried out, dead and dying 'like sheep with the rot.'... It is a fine steaming night to turn the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial grounds to account, and give the Registrar of Deaths some extra business."

*Bleak House* was not greeted as an instant classic and received at best mixed reviews. *Bentley's Miscellany*, for example, com-
plained of the novel's "almost entire absence of humour" and the domination of "the grotesque and the contemptible." The *Athenaeum* had quite a different criticism; it seemed to feel a sense of deprivation in Dickens's failure to include scenes of the trial and execution of the murderess: "we can dispense with the excitement of the trial of Mademoiselle Hortense, the murderess, and the horrors of her execution,—but such events there must have been;—and to have overlooked them so completely as Mr. Dickens has done in winding up his story, is an arbitrary exercise of his art." These omissions, however, cannot have been mere accidents. Perhaps Dickens felt that no trial scenes even his pen could create would outdo the drama of Marie Manning's speech from the dock. As for his overlooking "the horrors of [Hortense's] execution," the *Athenaeum* should have remembered that Dickens had consistently treated descriptions of execution with great restraint in his earlier novels. He now had a stronger reason for silence; affected as powerfully as he had been by the mob of Horsemonger Lane, he had recorded his reactions for all time in the columns of the *London Times* and on this theme he simply had no more to say.*

*It is possible that the Manning case is also reflected in the quicklime burial in Dickens's final work, *Edwin Drood*. 