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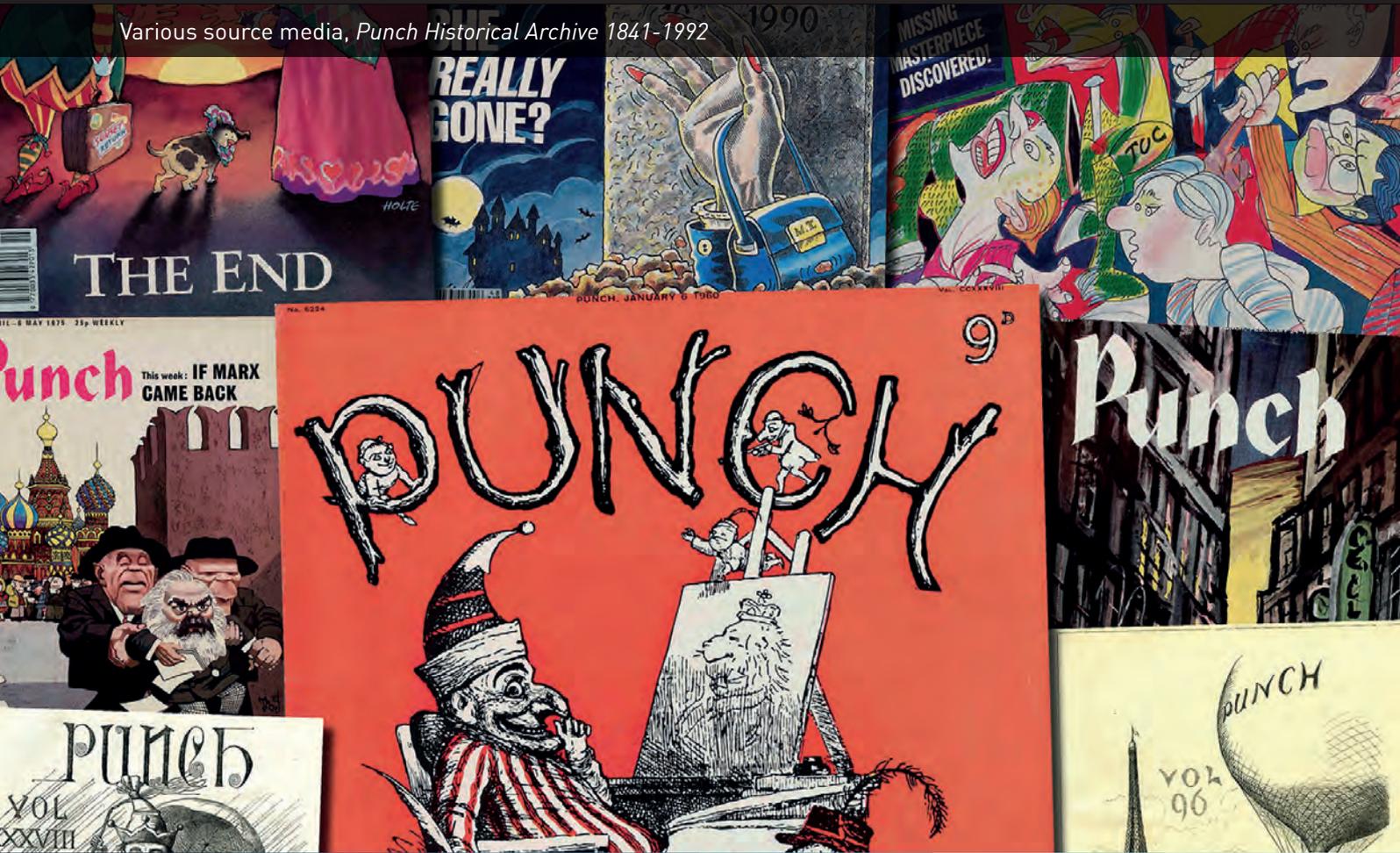
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# Punch, the Law and Literature Case Study: Trial and Execution of Maria and Frederick Manning (1849)

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Various source media, Punch Historical Archive 1841-1992



## Introduction

The invocation of humour often speaks to cultural anxieties or social concerns. As such, *Punch* consistently provides a counterpoint to and commentary on the popular press. Its satire is a useful lens through which to view a variety of subjects, including the law, literature and historical events.

Case in point: *Punch* published a fascinating array of material related to the 1849 murder trial and execution of Maria and Frederick Manning. The crime generated a significant amount of press coverage, inspired the character of Hortense in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53) [1], and served as a touchstone for works of sensation and detective fiction [2]. The following case study of the Mannings viewed through the lens of *Punch* illustrates how the *Punch Historical Archive* can be used to explore legal cases or events.

## Approaching the study of the Manning's Trial

Before the Cengage *Punch Historical Archive*, researching a subject like representations of the Mannings in *Punch* often entailed a page-by-page review of issues from a year or range of years. Such an approach is feasible in connection with the Manning case because the murder was committed in August 1849 and the couple were executed on 13 November 1849. With the *Punch Historical Archive* it is still possible to do a page-by-page review based on a date or date range by using the "Browse by Date" option. However, in most cases it is easier to focus one's efforts by conducting basic or advanced searches.

When researching a subject like representations of the Mannings in *Punch*, it is helpful to be able to recognise the similarities and differences between satirical representations and those in other newspapers and periodicals. For example, one may want to begin by examining representations of the murderers in digitised and non-digitised newspapers and periodicals published between August and December 1849, before turning to the pages of *Punch* from the same time period. Starting with one newspaper, such as *The Times*, can help identify search terms. For example, *The Times* describes the Mannings' crime as the "Bermondsey murder" or the "Bermondsey horror." A search of Gale Historical Newspapers or the Gale *19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals* database for "murder" and "Bermondsey" between 1 August 1849 and 1 January 1850, returns articles from a variety of publications; while a search for "Manning" and "murder" restricted to the same date range returns far fewer results. Investigating each publication's target audience, price, circulation, periodicity, size, format and, in some cases, political affiliation, will aid in interpreting its content. A good place to start looking for this information is the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* or the publication descriptions provided in databases like Gale's newspapers archives or the *19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals* databases. [3]

## Representations of the Trial

A basic search for "Manning," "Mannings," or "Maria Manning" in the *Punch Historical Archive* returns numerous direct references to the case, including a 1 December 1849 piece by William Makepeace Thackeray [4] entitled "The Proper Time for Public Executions" (1 December 1849: 214). Thackeray, who was critical of

the glamorisation of crime and criminals in Newgate fiction, uses the piece to satirise the way the press sensationalised and profited from public executions [5]. Nine years earlier, on 6 July 1840, Thackeray witnessed and wrote about the execution of another notorious murderer, Courvoisier [6]. Thackeray's essay, "Going to See a Man Hanged," appeared in the August 1840 issue of Fraser's Magazine (1830-82), a politically-progressive monthly miscellany [7]. In it he describes feeling "ashamed and degraded at the brutal curiosity which took me to that brutal sight." [8] In addition, he refers to his fellow-novelist "Boz," Charles Dickens, who was also at the Courvoisier execution. [9] Scholars disagree about whether Thackeray wanted capital punishment abolished or merely obscured from public view, but it seems his thinking may have changed [10]. As did that of Dickens. After the Mannings were hung, Dickens wrote a letter to the editor of The Times in which he criticised the mob he witnessed at the execution. Dickens's letter, accessible in Gale Historical Newspapers databases, calls not for the end of capital punishment, but for it to be hidden "within the prison walls." [11] Thackeray's "The Proper Time for Public Executions" opposes Dickens's call to end the spectacle of public executions by having a group of newspaper proprietors ask Parliament to legislate that future executions be held on Saturdays to increase the number of witnesses and thereby deter criminality. Of course, the proprietors' plan also ensures that the newspapers will profit from wider public interest and increased sales. Thackeray criticises the intrusive newsgathering tactics and greed hiding behind the newspapers' claims of promoting justice, education and the public interest. Thus, Thackeray bolsters Dickens's call for executions to take place away from the public gaze. A cartoon on the same page called "An Eligible

Investment" (1 December 1849: 214), which advertises a house "conveniently overlooking the county gaol," echoes Thackeray's criticism of those who seek to make money from public executions. The illustration criticises the profiteering property owners around the Horsemonger Lane Gaol who rented space to spectators at the Mannings' execution. The resonance between the two pieces shows the importance of using the "View Page" option after retrieving an article because there may be valuable other content on the same page.

The same basic search terms reveal *Punch's* fascinating conflation of the Manning murder, women as spectators, and women's fashions, which is also found in other periodicals and newspapers. The 28 September 1849 Douglas Jerrold piece "Horrid Murder in Baker Street" (29 September 1849: 123) is a comic indictment of Madame Tussaud's that highlights anxieties about young women's interest in sensational crimes. Another overt reference to the Mannings appears in Jerrold's "Old Bailey Ladies" (3 November 1849: 181) in which a young woman writes to her friend about the fashions she saw while attending the trial. "Old Bailey Ladies" echoes the press' fixation with Maria Manning's black veil and dress as well as the number of women spectators at the trial. A similar piece by Tom Taylor, "Fashions for Old Bailey Ladies" (10 November 1849: 186), is accompanied by a cartoon showing women (and a few men) in true-crime-inspired garb. *Punch's* persistent focus on women, spectacle and fashion suggests a fear that criminality will spread among women as quickly as the latest bonnet or dress style. Twenty years later, Maria Manning is mentioned in another piece about women's

fashions, "The Elasticity of Young Ladies" (18 September 1849: 113), indicating that the case and its associated anxieties persisted in the popular imagination. The aforementioned examples suggest other possible lines of inquiry: "Madame Tussaud's," "Old Bailey Ladies," or women's clothing and accessories, such as bonnets and veils.

Searches can lead to interesting, unanticipated results. For example, a search for references to "veil" limited to the period between 1 January 1849 and 31 December 1850 returns the poem "Murder-Worship" (17 November 1849: 201), a post-execution verse that simultaneously criticises and fuels the public's interest in sensational crime. It indicts the press for participating in the process of drawing "[t]he veil off from their hidden histories," yet its publication takes for granted that readers will be interested in crime-related journalism. The poem unites low and high culture by elevating a base, popular subject to the level of literary art in the context of a middle-class satirical periodical.

### Reviewing surrounding content

Because references to an event, figure, or criminal case are not always overt, text-based searches still should be accompanied by a review of content in the same issue as well as surrounding issues. The "View Page" and "Browse Issue" options allow one to locate pieces in which the search terms (e.g., the criminals' names) are not mentioned. For example, the Mannings are not referred to in "Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849 No. 39: Appearance of Ye Crymynal Court During an 'Interestyng' Tryal for Murder" (8

December 1849: 234) from Richard Doyle. The "Manners and Customs" cartoons raise popular, middle-class pursuits to the level of pseudo-medieval historical customs. The series suggests that the public's voyeuristic fascination with crime is the equivalent of other popular pastimes, such as shopping (Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849 No. 23: A Prospect of a Fashyorable Haberdasher. Hys Shope) (18 August 1849: 72), going to the zoo (Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849 No. 35: A Prospect of Ye Zoological Societie. Its Gardens. Feedyng Ye Beasts) (10 November 1849: 192), or attending a performance by Jenny Lind (Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849 No. 9: Ye Publicke. Its Excitement on Ye Appearance of Miss Lind) (12 May 1849: 196). Instalment No. 39 also contains echoes of the aforementioned pieces on women's fashions. Bonnet-wearing women use opera glasses to get a better view of the veiled Maria Manning in the dock. In a comment on the role played by the press, the illustration includes a smirking, wiggled figure near the centre looking at *The Times* rather than the defendants. Voyeurism by the press is the same as voyeurism by direct surveillance.

The public's fascination with crime is also the theme of "Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849 No. 27: Madame Tussaud Her Wax Werkes Ye Chamber of Horrors!!" (15 September 1849: 112), which depicts another voyeuristic, mixed-gender crowd at Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. There are certainly more bonnets than top hats on the figures at the centre of the image, highlighting women's centrality to the macabre spectacle. The women's and girls' expressions range from curious and quizzical to content and admiring as they gaze at the wax line-up of

criminals. Only a minority, primarily girls and boys, show any evidence of distaste or apprehension about the popular pastime.

Paying attention to context can unearth interesting connections both within a periodical and between a number of periodicals. Once in the "Browse Issue" mode, the "Next Issue" and "Previous Issue" options allow for easy scanning of surrounding issues. For example, selecting "Previous Issue" after locating Doyle's courtroom illustration uncovers another image that does not mention the Mannings' names: John Leech's depiction of the jubilant, leering crowd outside the gaol where the Mannings were executed. "The Great Moral Lesson at Horsemonger Lane Gaol, Nov. 13" [24 November 1849: 210] depicts the mob that Dickens criticised in his 14 November 1849 letter to *The Times*. Dickens had invited friends, including Leech, to watch the execution from a rented rooftop across from the jail [12]. On the page beneath Doyle's illustration is Percival Leigh's "The Lesson of the Scaffold; or the Ruffian's Holiday," a boisterous recounting of the execution in verse from the perspective of someone in the crowd. Dickens's letter, which can be accessed in Gale Historical Newspapers database, is important for interpreting Leech's illustration, Leigh's verse, and Thackeray's "The Proper Time for Public Executions." It also suggests other possible avenues of inquiry unrelated to the Mannings, such as the representation of Dickens in *Punch* or the author's network of relationships with *Punch's* contributors.

### Suggested Search Terms

Those interested in using the *Punch Historical Archive* to explore themes related to famous murders or historical crimes may want to search for the following:

- "Madame Tussaud's" or "chamber of horrors"
- "Old Bailey" or "Newgate" or "Newgate Calendar"
- "Crippen" or "Dr Crippen" or "Ethel le Neve"
- "Tichborne" or "Tichborne case" or "Claimant"
- "Whitechapel + murder" or "Jack the Ripper" or "Whitechapel + police"
- "Courvoisier"

## NOTES

[1] *Bleak House* was published by Bradbury & Evans in 1s. monthly installments between March 1852 and September 1853.

[2] The crime is referred to in volume 1, chapter 18 of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*: "What do we know of the mysteries that may hang about the houses we enter? If I were to go tomorrow into that common- place, plebeian, eight-roomed house in which Maria Manning and her husband murdered their guest, I should have no awful prescience of that bygone horror. Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs, terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes, and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done." Mary Elizabeth Braddon. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Edited by Natalie M. Houston. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview, 2003. 170.

[3] *Dictionary for Nineteenth-Century Journalism*. Edited by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor. Gent: Academia Press, 2009.

[4] Author identities were determined using the "Punch Contributor Ledgers" database

[5] Lyn Pykett comments that "Newgate fiction was subjected to satirical comment and imitation by Punch, and it also spawned full-length parodies, most notably Thackeray's *Catherine: A Story*, serialized in 1839-40 in *Fraser's Magazine*, a periodical which played a leading role in both naming and attacking the Newgate novel." Lyn Pykett, "The Newgate Novel and Sensation Fiction, 1830-1868." In *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* edited by Martin Priestman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 19-39, at 21.

[6] Francois Benjamin Courvoisier murdered his employer, Lord William Russell, in his sleep on 6 May 1840, and tried to make it look like a robbery. His trial took place four years after defence council were first allowed to address the jury on their client's behalf. The case filled the press after it became known that Courvoisier had confessed his guilt to his lawyer during the course of the trial, but the lawyer did nothing and continued his representation. Punch refers to Courvoisier in a number of pieces, including: [Gilbert A'Beckett.] "The Privilege of Counsel." *Punch Historical Archive* [London, England] 20 July 1844: 42. *Punch Historical Archive*. Web. 23 Jan 2015; "Madame Tussaud's." *Punch Historical Archive* [London, England] 5 Sept. 1841: 96. *Punch Historical Archive*. Web. 23 Jan. 2015; and [Douglas Jerrold.] "Horrid Murder in Baker Street." *Punch Historical Archive* [London, England] 29 Sept. 1849: 123. *Punch Historical Archive*. Web. 23 Jan. 2015.

[7] W.M.T. "Going to See a Man Hanged." *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* [London, England] Aug. 1840: 150-58. ProQuest British Periodicals. Web. 23 Jan. 2015.

[8] W.M.T. "Going to See a Man Hanged." *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* [London, England] Aug. 1840: 150-58, at 158. ProQuest British Periodicals. Web. 23 Jan. 2015.

[9] According to Albert Borowitz, Dickens and Thackeray "saw each other in the crowd but neither could catch the other's eye." Albert Borowitz, *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin: The Bermondsey Horror*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1981. 258. In the "Going to See a Man Hanged Essay," Thackeray is actually critical of Dickens's portrayal of Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, writing "Boz, who knows life well, knows that his Miss Nancy is the most unreal fantastical personage possible; no more like a thief's mistress, than one of Gessner's shepherdesses resembles a real country wench. He dare not tell the truth concerning such ladies." Thackeray, "Going to See a Man Hanged." *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* [London, England] Aug. 1840: 150- 58, at 154-55. ProQuest British Periodicals. Web. 23 Jan. 2015. Thackeray and Dickens famously had a falling out in 1858.

[10] Deborah A. Thomas, "Thackeray, Capital Punishment, and the Demise of Jos Sedley." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005): 1-20. JSTOR. Web. 23 Jan. 2014.

[11] Charles Dickens. "To the Editor of the Times." *The Times* [London, England] 14 Nov. 1849: 4.

[12] Albert Borowitz discusses the relationship between Dickens's letter and Leech's cartoon in his *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin*. Albert Borowitz, *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin: The Bermondsey Horror*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1981. 260-64.

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