

New News

1639	First printing press in English North America established in Cambridge, Massachusetts
1690	First newspaper published in North America (quickly suppressed by government authorities)
1730s–1750s	Benjamin Franklin publishes <i>Poor Richard</i> almanacs in Philadelphia
1776	Thomas Paine's pamphlet <i>Common Sense</i> rallies colonists in the American Revolution
1801	<i>New York Post</i> is founded by Alexander Hamilton
1833	First penny paper, <i>New York Sun</i> , begins publication
1835	<i>New York Herald</i> is launched to rival the <i>Sun</i>
1840s	Samuel Morse's telegraph transforms journalism by making instant communication possible
1851	<i>New York Times</i> begins publication
1858	Transatlantic cable links Europe and America
1880s	Photography becomes widespread in newspaper journalism

Introduction

By the time of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the people who called themselves Americans were among the most literate on earth. The reason for that was largely religious; the English colonies of North America were overwhelmingly Protestant, and Protestants – especially the Puritans of colonial New England – placed special emphasis on the need for individuals to experience the word of God for themselves. To be sure, the level of literacy and the amount of reading that actually took place varied by race, gender, and region (among other variables). But it's not an accident that one of the most important of the founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, became rich and famous as the publisher of reference books known as almanacs and featuring his famous alter-ego, Poor Richard.

The United States achieved *political* independence through victory in the American Revolution. Revolutions of other kinds, notably technological, economic, and cultural ones, took a bit longer to come. But, when they did come, they hit the young nation with uncommon force and transformed it from an agricultural and mercantile society into an industrial one.

Nowhere was this transformation more evident than in the publishing business. Up until this point printing presses were just that: devices with which an individual pushed ink onto paper. With the advent of the cylindrical machines, in which paper rolled off presses powered by steam, it became possible to run a much larger volume at a much lower cost. Publishers could now sell newspapers, books, and other forms of print at a fraction of their former price.

This is why the nation's relatively high literacy rates proved so important. The fact that so many Americans could read – and the fact that the United States was a large market with growing cities and a rapidly expanding transportation infrastructure – made it possible to turn the printed word into something it had never really been before: a true mass medium.

Mass publishing, in turn, dramatically changed the *way* people read. Until the early nineteenth century most reading was *intensive*, which is to say that readers tended to know a few books really well. The self-educated Abraham Lincoln, for example, was deeply knowledgeable about the Bible and Shakespeare, but he read little else beyond that – mostly what he needed for his career as a lawyer. But, from about the 1830s on,

reading became increasingly *extensive*, which is to say that readers absorbed lots of different kinds of writing. Extensive reading was generally perceived to be less demanding and more fun, which is why it was sometimes condemned. But it also became the dominant mode of reading in modern life. Most people today are extensive readers, not intensive ones.

A new class of entrepreneurs took advantage of the new extensive order and turned reading into a highly profitable form of entertainment. One such pioneer was Benjamin Day, publisher of the *New York Sun*, the first in a great wave of so-called “penny papers” to be founded in the United States. Established in 1833, Day’s *Sun* was rapidly followed by competitors like James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald* and other daily newspapers around the country. In this excerpt from her 2000 book *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America*, Isabelle Lehuu, a historian who teaches at the University of Quebec in Montreal, describes one of the great pop culture explosions of American history.

Little Sheets of News and Varieties: The Penny Wonder in New York City

Isabelle Lehuu

When the boat got under way, the deck looked like a school or reading room. The “steamer” proceeded on her quiet course down the bay, while her passengers were silently engaged with their little sheets of news and varieties. “What an improvement this upon the past,” said an elderly respectable looking gentleman near me[.] “[F]ive years ago, sir,” continued he, “such a lot of passengers would have been very differently engaged. The men in smoking, drinking, and disputing upon politics. The women in talking scandal or nonsense. These penny papers have brought great good, sir, in society. They should be encouraged.”

New York Herald, November 11, 1835

In 1835 the *New York Herald* would not miss any opportunity to trumpet the age of democratic reading – and, implicitly, its own success.

Sometimes the celebratory tone of the New York daily tended to produce a one-sided evaluation of the new reading public, as this epigraph testifies. When it described the deck of the Newark steamer as a reading room where men and women were silently engaged with their little sheets of news and varieties, the paper saw only good in the new press. It unequivocally presented reading as an enlightening activity, gender blind and performed privately, even in a public space. Such was the appearance, or at least the paper's own rhetoric. Yet a closer look at the *Herald* in its formative years reveals a different appraisal, one that sets the democratic readership at a crossroads between "dreadful pleasures," urban space, and consumer culture.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century the daily newspaper became the epitome of both a carnivalesque ritual and a market fair, when boundaries were crossed and the private made public. Its fleshly and uncanny content partook of the moment of change that swept through American print culture before the Civil War. More than any other paper, the *Herald* succeeded in weaving a coarse canvas of sensational murders, railroad accidents, and steam-boat explosions along with unlimited promotion of merchandise. The penny paper fostered the unprecedented reporting of crime news in the daily press and, by the same token, contributed to constraining criminal literature to the industrial pace of the press and market-oriented publishing. While it offered both local information and affordable pleasure, the new daily adapted earlier habits of gossip and exposure to the new social environment of the metropolis. Its gory and grotesque sheets stood on the threshold where public and private merged, where orality and print coexisted.

It all began with the first issue of the *New York Sun* on September 3, 1833. As the editor Benjamin H. Day stated, "The object of this paper is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of every one, ALL THE NEWS OF THE DAY, and at the same time afford an advantageous medium for advertising." Originally inspired by the English *Penny Magazine* published for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Day's *New York Sun* was intended to circulate among a low-income reading public.¹ It challenged the former conception of a newspaper as a political editorial by introducing tales, "Police Office" items, miscellaneous stories, and "Help Wanted" notices. Local news and city gossip outnumbered foreign news. The *Sun* eventually claimed to have instituted popular journalism in the United States and to represent the first successful mass-audience journal. To be sure, it was soon imitated by other penny papers, and, most notably, the *New York Herald* emerged as a challenging competitor.

First published on May 6, 1835, the *Herald* claimed to be “equally intended for the great masses of the community – the merchant, mechanic, working people – the private family as well as the public school – the journeyman and his employer – the clerk and his principal.”² The small four-page paper sold at a penny a day, or \$3 a year, and offered both local news and mercantile information, hoping to enlarge its audience to the best men of the country. Its aggressive editor, the Scottish immigrant James Gordon Bennett, emerged as the main leader in the antebellum revolution of newspaper publishing. Aiming at both readers and advertisers, the “penny wonder” wanted to revolutionize not only the price but also the character and the distribution methods of the American press in the Jacksonian era.³

The penny papers, also described as cash press, abandoned the subscription rates of \$10 a year that were characteristic of the earlier commercial papers. Instead, they adopted the London plan, a circulation method based on a cash-and-carry policy. The new and cheap newspapers were sold by the single copy or by the week. Carriers on regular routes collected six cents from each customer on Saturday. Thus, without any long-term obligation, the cash newspapers were affordable for a broad, democratic audience. An 1840 editorial of a weekly paper praised cheap newspapers with the following words:

“Subscribing for a newspaper” used to be something of a circumstance – quite an undertaking, requiring serious deliberation – with those who intended to pay. Those who do not pay, may order all the newspapers published without fear or forethought. Formerly if one ordered a paper, he was booked, for three months, at least, and however he might dislike it, was bound to continue that term, or make more of a muss, than the character of the affair warranted. Now, if one does not like his daily, he has only to pay the boy sixpence at the end of a week, and tell him to cease coming. There is no parade of ledgers, overhauling of receipts, or any such nonsense. It is the nimble sixpence that tells a quick story.⁴

Nonetheless, what best characterized the distribution of the new press was the distant “hallo,” the heraldlike tone of the newsboys hawking the papers throughout the city, catching passersby and occasional readers. Often condemned as “little rascals” or “street rats,” the ragged vendors of newspapers belonged to the streets as well as to the popular literature of the time. “Every calamity is so much capital to them,” remarked one critical observer, “and the more awful or startling it may be, the better for their business.”⁵ In case of few accidents, business was very dull, and



Figure 1.1 RUMORS FLYING The Great Moon Hoax. This lithograph accompanied the description of aliens in the August 28, 1835 edition of the *New York Sun*, which was part of a series the newspaper ran on the subject of life on the moon. Hoaxes of this kind were part of the freewheeling journalistic style of the penny press. Bettmann/Corbis

a dearth of news was often replaced by the newsboys' ingenuity. With few exceptions the little fellows were stigmatized by their shameful station in life as young delinquents and, at the same time, shrewd traders. However, a more uplifting perspective appeared in the sentimental stories that featured newsboys, as exemplified by Seba Smith's short story entitled "Billy Snub, the Newsboy," which was published in the 1843 edition of *The Gift* along with an engraving by Richard W. Dodson after a painting by Henry Inman. In the story, which received the loud praise of little urchins to whom the author read it, the protagonist, Billy Snub, fights the odds of poverty and domestic violence by crying papers with industry and great success.⁶ While mingling with both the virtues of hard work and the vices of the harsh and competitive newspaper business, young newsboys walked the pavement, eager to sell the latest issue. Their success was intertwined with that of the newspaper they sold. By lending their voice to the dissemination of the daily news, the young messengers

hoped for a better life. In turn, the print form itself was perceived as simply a commodity.

To be sure, the newspaper became an affordable commodity. In sharp contrast to the sixpence commercial papers, the new dailies were available to the common man for just a penny. They were believed to contribute to the enlightenment of society. Unlike the papers of the 1820s – the *Advertiser*, the *Commercial*, or the *Mercantile* – the penny papers of the 1830s and 1840s were the *Star*, the *Sun*, the *Herald*, or the *Tribune*. They crusaded for the public good against political corruption and often claimed to be nonpartisan; their moral mission was to eradicate ignorance and prejudice. They voiced the public's anxiety and perceptions of danger throughout a country apparently in prosperity. For instance, the editor James Gordon Bennett was convinced that abolitionists, Catholics, bankers, foreigners, gamblers, free blacks, and vagrants of all kinds constituted an imminent danger. The purpose of his nativist and racist paper was to reform society and expose misconduct in the metropolis, particularly acts of disorder by robbers, thieves, and paupers from Great Britain. In spite of Bennett's extremist editorials, the *Herald* reached a broad popularity, even among the black community. In a critique of how little support black writers could expect from their own class compared to the success of slave narratives among a white population, playwright William Wells Brown noted that "the *NY Herald* has more subscribers today and gets a larger support from the colored people than *Douglass' Monthly*, *The Anglo-African* and *The Pacific Appeal* put together."⁷ Indeed, the *Herald* was able to appeal to a diversified reading audience by satisfying the needs of a newly urbanized population for entertainment, gossip, and the sense of a community.

While the four-page layout of the penny papers was not significantly different from earlier newspapers, in subject matter the small dailies resembled traditional almanacs, with practical information for everyone – including romance and poems, presumably for female readers. Where earlier almanacs offered wonders, predictions, astrology, moralistic stories, and medicinal cures through a combination of texts and images, so did their nineteenth-century counterpart blend science, hoaxes, and humor.⁸ Likewise, the new press appealed to a popular reading audience, and James Gordon Bennett even commissioned woodcuts about current events in the 1830s, at a time when most dailies regarded pictures as a waste of space. The first instance was in December 1835, when reporting on the great fire of New York City, and more woodcuts came to be used

in the early 1840s to show the scene of a crime, a Fourth of July celebration, a funeral, or even a fashionable ball. By the late 1840s, however, the *Herald* followed the practice of most newspapers and put an end to its use of sensational woodcuts.⁹

Unlike the almanac, however, which primarily functioned as a calendar counting time as it passed away, the newspaper was constructed around the timing of a daily narration. Moreover, crime news, the staple of the penny papers, was characteristic not of earlier almanacs but of broadsides and pamphlets. The new journalistic genre thus had ties both to almanacs and to *occasionnels*.¹⁰ The antebellum dailies succeeded in combining the structure of time with extraordinary events. Their chronicle of isolated acts of violence or madness was paced at regular daily intervals, following the industrial regularity of the printing presses. While those events might be regarded as irrelevant to the *longue durée* of history, their publication in daily pennies inscribed them on the historical narrative of everyday life. Thus, without being any less extraordinary in its features, crime news became part of the history of commonplaces.¹¹

The variety of the newspapers' content was combined with brevity. Rather than providing a commentary, news was often made up of one sentence giving brief information on duels, murders, fires, fights, drunkards, politicians, etc. These nonreferential sentences gave the reader the freedom to construct the framework of a story. Nonetheless, the act of reading was guided by implicit textual directions for the consumption of the text. For instance, blunt information of a police report embodied the social values of good or bad. The crueler the deed, the stronger the reader's emotion.¹² The narrator could also provide explicit advice for approaching the text in the form of "reading interludes." These were either titles to give the tone or editorials to frame the reader's reception of the message.¹³ Editors of the penny press printed information with titles such as "A Most Horrible Murder," "Melancholy Suicide," "Extraordinary Tragedy," "Mysterious Murder," or "Singular Case." Capital characters at the head of an article of tiny print attracted the attention of the public, created sensation, and stressed the moral undertone. On September 10, 1835, the *Herald* gave an emotional heading – LAMENTABLE SUICIDE – to a cool account: "A very respectable woman, the mother of four children, cut her throat yesterday evening, in Spruce Street, and almost instantly died. – The act was done by a razor, while sitting on a chair near the bed side, yet not a drop of blood fell on the bed. She fell back at once and breathed her last in a few seconds. The cause is supposed to be a species of temporary insanity."¹⁴ The precise and

unemotional description, which predated photographic realism, intensified the horror of the act. Insanity was the only explanation offered to the reader. The editor also added that this was “the sixth or seventh sudden death happening this week.” A recurring pattern of violent death, neutrally reported in a pseudoscientific style, was presented as a true fact; any emotional response in the readers was provoked by the bluntness of the news. This strategy was at the core of the *Herald*’s excellence.

The story of a murder helped the *Herald* take the lead of the press in the mid-1830s, when the scabrous Robinson–Jewett case raised its circulation from 5,000 to 15,000. On April 10, 1836, Helen Jewett, a beautiful prostitute in a house of ill fame in New York City, was killed with a hatchet and her room set on fire. The wealthy, nineteen-year-old Richard P. Robinson, who had been her companion of the evening, was the alleged murderer. The *Herald* began intensive coverage of the “Most Atrocious Murder” on April 11, 1836, and was able to provide its reading audience with “new details” and “full particulars” for weeks. Bennett took the role of journalist-detective and personally visited the scene of the crime to reveal the truth to his readers. He entertained them with minute descriptions of the mutilated body of the female victim, her bedroom, her clothes and belongings. While the investigation dragged, the paper fed the expectations of the readers with the “lives” of both the victim and the suspect. Robinson was finally acquitted after a trial closely reported in the daily press. Even though the mystery was never solved, the case was much publicized and continued to generate new pamphlets and novels, including one in 1849 by George Wilkes, the editor of the *National Police Gazette*, who claimed that the story possessed deeper interest than *The Mysteries of Paris*. Yet before becoming a novel, the story of Helen Jewett belonged to police reporters, and the public craving for information steadily made the success of the *Herald*.¹⁵

The sensational murder has also received the attention of scholars of the early American press because of its class and gender categorizations. While constructing the murder mystery around Helen Jewett’s previous self-representations, the case highlighted the social concern over illicit sex in the new metropolis. The narrative of the urban underworld served a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it permitted the pornographic gaze on the female dismembered corpse, and on the other, it provided an explanation for homicide – that is, sexuality. Thus it spoke to both the public’s appetite for penny dreadfuls and its anxiety over the dangers of the promiscuous urban space.¹⁶

[...]

The *Herald's* readers remained anonymous. In contrast to an earlier press, the nineteenth-century newspaper addressed an invisible public. The democratization of print and the multiplicity of newspapers – often more than one for each city or town – resulted in the production of dailies that appealed to and divided particular segments of the reading public. Because of their popular character, the “cheap and nasty” penny papers differentiated themselves from serious reading matter, but they also competed with each other for the patronage of the poor classes of readers. At the same time, they were binding anonymous readers in new and informal associations. Hence the readers of the *New York Herald* were the metropolitan members of what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community.”¹⁷ They shared the same reading matter while being isolated in their individual activity of reading. Their daily simultaneous consumption of the sensational newspaper created an extraordinary mass ceremony, thereby confirming Hegel’s observation that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers.¹⁸

The new mode of circulation also contributed to the privatization of newspaper reading. Whereas newspaper readers formerly borrowed or shared high-priced papers, they now could take their own small copy home for a bit of copper. As the *Herald* stated in its inaugural issue, “There is not a person in the city, male or female, that may not be able to say – ‘well I have got a paper of my own which will tell me all about what’s going in the world – I’m busy now – but I’ll put it in my pocket and read it at my leisure.’”¹⁹ The result was a close intermingling of shrill sounds of newsboys and silent reading, busy public space and private stories. One rendering of that cacophony appeared under the pen of Charles Dickens, who offered a sharp critique of the New York daily press in his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Upon arriving in New York City, the main character encountered shouting newsboys: “‘Here’s this morning’s New York *Sewer!*’ cried one. ‘Here’s this morning’s New York *Stabber!* Here’s the New York *Family Spy!* Here’s the New York *Private Listener!* Here’s the New York *Peeper!* Here’s the New York *Plunderer!* Here’s the New York *Keyhole Reporter!* Here’s the New York *Rowdy Journal!* Here’s all the New York papers!’”²⁰

The continued publicizing of news was accompanied by the strikingly private character of the news. The antebellum crimes that fed the newsmongers were increasingly stories of private life, melodramatic love affairs, murders of consanguinity, cases of incestuous rape. For instance, the *Herald* began its coverage of the James Wood case on October 2, 1839, with the title “Full Particulars of the Tragical Event in

Philadelphia – Elopement of a Daughter and Her Murder by Her Father” and for three weeks gave details on the “Late Extraordinary Tragedy in Philadelphia,” “together with a correct history of all the prominent actors therein” and even a “view of the bed-room in which Miss Wood was shot by her father.”²¹ Similarly, the *Herald* sensationalized the “Horrible Outrage – Unparalleled in Criminal Annals – Capital Trial in Salem, Mass. of Moses Goodhue, for Rape, Committed Upon the Person of His Own Daughter” and, during the same month, the “Trial of Mrs. Kinney, at Boston, for the Murder of Her Husband for Administering Poison.”²² Family crimes made headlines in antebellum America. Although editorials often alluded to a political and social agenda when reporting crimes, the emphasis of antebellum crime literature was primarily on individual and singular acts of dementia, butchery, and monstrosity. The cheap newspapers of a boundless culture now offered a window onto the saga of private life.²³

The penny press personalized victims and criminals in cases that unfold like serialized fiction or drama and offered new acts every day. Criminals were perceived as “actors” in “domestic tragedies,” and the scene of the crime resembled the stage of a theater. Crime reporting even borrowed its headlines from the Shakespearean culture of its intended readers, such as “Blood, Blood, Iago.”²⁴ In the city, news was dramatic material, and Bennett took note of the parallel in an editorial: “If a Shakespeare could have taken a stroll in the morning or afternoon through the Police, does any one imagine he could not have picked up half a dozen dramas and some original character? The bee extracts from the lowliest flower – so shall we in the Police Office.”²⁵

Writing news meant telling stories, and literary scholars have noted the parallel between the genres of news and novel, between facts and fiction. In a study of the origins of the English novel, Lennard J. Davis has defined an undifferentiated matrix of news/novels in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forms of journalism, the printed ballad. Likewise, J. Paul Hunter explores what was read before the rise of the novel and stresses that features of ephemeral journalism and wonder narratives found their way into the eighteenth-century novel in England. By the late nineteenth century, the press also came to provide realistic writers with ordinary characters and everyday experiences. In particular, the city and its newspapers abounded with valuable material for novels. Realism in American literature would owe its character and its first writers – such as Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser – to the newspapers’ prose and milieu.²⁶

Even by the middle of the nineteenth century, journalists were eagerly seeking the “inside story.” Participants in highly publicized crimes became well-known personae to the urban public of antebellum America, to the extent that the New York Museum exhibited their wax figures. For instance, the case of Mary, alias Polly, Bodine, who was hanged for the murder of Emeline Houseman (the wife of Bodine’s brother) and her child, and for setting their house on fire, was so notorious that P. T. Barnum had a wax figure of her in his museum.²⁷ The popular demand for portraits and detailed information on the lives of criminals resulted from the growing urban anonymity as well as from the desire to identify the outlaws in the midst of society. Urban dwellers were isolated in the fearful crowd. The antebellum penny press – best exemplified by the successful *New York Herald* – at once combined a new level of exposure of private life with the privatization of the act of reading public print media. News items – *faits divers* – brought tales of private life to public knowledge and provided nineteenth-century readers with a printed spectacle that replaced the pillory, the execution sermon, and the criminal’s confession of earlier times.

Human-interest stories offered exposure as a substitute for human contact. As Alexis de Tocqueville mentioned in *Democracy in America*, “Newspapers increase in numbers, not according to their cheapness, but according to the more or less frequent want which a great number of men may feel for intercommunication and combination.” Thus the rise of the penny press in the 1830s was due in part to a growing urbanization that created new social and cultural needs. The French critic continued, “A newspaper, therefore, always represents an association that is composed of its habitual readers. [...] The fact that the newspaper keeps alive is a proof that at least the germ of such an association exists in the mind of its readers.”²⁸

Newspapers provided newcomers to the city with a means of communication as well as guidelines to decipher the urban environment. They represented a substitute for village gossip. They spoke to the reader in an almost intimate manner, as a member of the informal “reading association.” Readers, in turn, often sent letters to the editor, who acted as a confidant. The new cultural institution of the daily paper offered a place for dialogue. The *New York Herald* echoed the daily life of New Yorkers, and New Yorkers were reading news of the city. Even though sensational news from other cities was often reported, events concerning New York City usually took priority. In December of 1835 the conflagration of New York City occupied the front page for days. For the occasion a view

of the Merchants' Exchange as well as a map of the city were printed, to emphasize the disaster and create sensation. It was the only matter that concerned the citizens. As Bennett reported: "We have abundance of dull news from Washington, but who cared for that?"²⁹

Newspapers colored the city. They were daily messengers at all corners and representative voices on the street. But the popular word, which they returned to the street and dwellings, came from the city itself. News was no longer foreign and political, but local and ordinary. The penny press elevated these ordinary events to the level of the printed word. There was a new fascination with police reports, trivial facts from the streets and from private households. The new metropolis seemed to hide plenty of miseries and mysteries awaiting a George G. Foster or a James Dabney McCabe to bring their horrors to light.³⁰ Echoing the new urban press, Edgar Allan Poe introduced a genre of literary reportage in his *Doings of Gotham*, letters that appeared in the *Columbia Spy* between May 18 and July 6, 1844.³¹ Literary scholars have emphasized the importance of "city-mysteries" fiction and images of the antebellum period in the wave of sensational literature that began with Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* and G. M. W. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* and extended from George Lippard's *The Quaker City* and Ned Buntline's *The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans* to Herman Melville's *Pierre*.³² In comparison, the concern here is not so much the literary production as the role played by the public taste in the transformation of the literary marketplace.

Crime news reported in the *New York Herald* followed a long tradition of "execution sermons," "lives and deaths" of criminals, and "dying speeches," yet with significant differences. As scholars of colonial crime literature have shown, crimes in the seventeenth century were sins against God, and ministers played a central role in the publication of conversion narratives and "last speech" sensations.³³ Execution sermons of early America focused on the salvation of the murderer and referred more to the slope of sin leading to the crime than to the details of the crime and the crime scene. It was not until the late eighteenth century that murder narratives were secularized and the murderer personalized. The narration of the crime itself lengthened, and the criminal became a moral alien. A shift of focus occurred from judgment and conversion to the details of crime, from condemnation to recognition of the criminal. By the nineteenth century, the execution and death of the criminal became secondary to the story of his or her life. Moreover, tales of robbers and bandits gave way to tragedies of private life.³⁴

Crime news of the antebellum papers is further distinguished from the chronicle of crimes in the early republic by the rhythm with which it was delivered. The daily occurrences of crime in print created a serialized narration of urban life. Ironically, the antebellum outbreak of crime literature did not correspond to a rise in criminality. Roger Lane's study of criminal violence in Massachusetts confirms an increase in petty criminality, but a decrease in serious crime. Police forces in nineteenth-century cities concentrated more on minor, public-order offenses. Nonetheless, despite actual police statistics to the contrary, the perception of a dangerous underworld accompanied booming antebellum urbanization. The invasion of crime news in New York's cheap newspapers thus reflected not an explosion of criminality in the new metropolis, but rather the growing anxiety of Americans about urban promiscuity and their desire to draw social boundaries between "us" and "them."³⁵

In his study of nineteenth-century crime, David Ray Papke examines the forms of "reporting," "imagining," and "remembering" that shaped public perceptions of criminality. In particular, Papke argues that the *New York Sun* and the *New York Herald* competed with the slow and inefficient police and developed a politicized journalism intended to appeal to a working-class audience.³⁶ The penny papers certainly defined themselves as an alternative police force. They reported extensively on recent crimes and investigated the background of victims and suspects through serialized publication of "horrible details" and "further particulars." Even though crime reporting was considered part of a high moral crusade, the publication of crime stories in the new daily papers satisfied the nineteenth-century heirs of popular lore.³⁷ The legitimate claims to reform society through exposure of vice and infamy wherever found could hardly overshadow the public demand for titillation and the publishers' profitable capitalization upon the growing sensibility to crime.

The penny papers provided readers with bloody and bodily descriptions, which reflected the carnality that was attributed to the "dangerous" classes of the nineteenth century, including immoral women, blacks, and aliens such as Catholics. In contrast, the middle-class way of life advocated an increasing control of the body. As Richard Brodhead demonstrates by looking at the literature of the pre-Civil War decades, discipline through love displaced corporal punishment. Cultural historians have further underscored that the new humanitarian narrative of the time condemned all sorts of suffering, whether the whipping of slaves, the confinement of the insane, or the cruel treatment of animals. Yet the middle-class quest for refinement and aversion for bodily correction were

only matched by the spectacle of pain, or what Charles Dickens called “the attraction of repulsion.”³⁸ A few examples will show the centrality of the human body in popular press reporting.

The 1841 murder of Mary C. Rogers, whose bruised body was found in the Hudson River near Hoboken, New Jersey, yielded extensive news coverage by the *Herald* and other New York papers. It also resulted in the production of fictional work by Edgar Allan Poe in 1842–43 (“The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”) and by Joseph Holt Ingraham in 1844 (*The Beautiful Cigar Girl*).³⁹ Related pamphlets were subsequently published, including *A Confession of the Awful and Bloody Transactions in the Life of Charles Wallace, the Fiend-like Murderer of Miss Mary Rogers*, with a frontispiece that featured Mary Rogers being strangled by one of her beaux.⁴⁰ The young woman, who lived on Nassau Street in New York City, had disappeared on a summer Sunday. Both her violent death and her unknown whereabouts in the city created an enigma that the press sought to resolve by speculations about her romantic life, her elopement, an abortion, or even a street gang.

Undoubtedly Poe used the daily reports on the case in writing his tale. But his claims to solve the mystery of Marie Rogêt by use of reason and deduction were antithetical to the desires of newspaper readers. While Poe advocated the work of rationality to a narrow magazine audience, the mass reading public of the daily press sought strong emotions. For instance, Poe offered a refined description of the body of the victim: “About the throat were bruises and impressions of fingers. The arms were bent over on the chest and were rigid. The right hand was clenched; the left partially open.”⁴¹ In contrast, the testimony that was originally published in the *Herald* and reprinted a few days later in *Brother Jonathan*, in the form of an interview by the mayor, reported the examination of the victim’s body by a Dr. Cook of Hoboken. The question-and-answer style provided the reader with dialogues and blunt descriptions. The passage later edited by Poe appeared in the newspaper as follows: “There was an echymose mark about the size and shape of a man’s thumb on the right side of the neck, near the jugular vein, and two or three echymose marks on the left side resembling in shape a man’s finger, which led me to believe she had been throttled and partially choked by a man’s hand. Both arms were bent over on the chest; and were so tight and stiff that we had to use some force to straighten them. The right hand was clenched, and the left was partially open, but rigid.”⁴²

“Horrible details” and “authentic facts” were the trademarks of the cheap papers. In particular, the female body of a victim, an unfortunate

girl or an immoral creature – the body of the “Other,” a marginal figure alien to social order – was a popular subject, and the editors did not hesitate to provide avid readers with graphic representations. When asked about considerable excoriation on the back and shoulders of Mary Rogers, Dr. Cook gave the following statement: “I think, [this was produced] by the young girl struggling to get free, while being brutally held down on her back, to effect her violation; and therefore, that this outrage was effected while she was laid down upon some hard substance, a hard board floor, the bottom of a boat, or something similar.” The *Herald* then gave the substance – instead of more details – of Dr. Cook’s examination. The conclusion was that the victim had previously been a person of chastity and that “her person was horribly violated by more than two or three persons.”⁴³ By contrast, the lurid part of the account was censored by Poe’s pen. The fate of Marie Rogêt was indeed more polished than that of Mary C. Rogers. “The medical testimony spoke confidently of the virtuous character of the deceased. She had been subjected, it said, to brutal violence. The corpse was in such condition when found, that there could have been no difficulty in its recognition by friends.”⁴⁴

Similarly, Poe incorporated bits of the sensational press in writing “The Tell-Tale Heart.” However, even though his tale borrowed elements of the trial of Peter Robinson for the murder of banker Abraham Suydam, Poe focused on the psyche of the criminal rather than on the gruesome criminal act. In contrast, the *Herald* and subsequent pamphlet editions published a detailed account of the finding of Suydam’s body buried in the earth under the basement floor of Robinson’s house. One of the witnesses recalled how they searched the ground with hands and sticks in the area where they felt that there was a body: “I took my coat off, ran my hand down and got hold of the pantaloons, and my finger in the button hole of the left hand side; I could feel the hip; it was all wet, muddy, and slushy, toward the bottom; it was quicksand where his face lay.” After having received the directions of the coroner, they pulled the body out; the feet were rather turned up, the hole not being long enough. “I could not recognize him while he lay on his face in the court house, nor could not until his body was washed off, and his face. I then knew at once it was Mr. Suydam; don’t know where the body was washed off; I felt sick; he smelt very bad, and I had to go away to get air. The tails of his coat in the ground were thrown back over his head.” The body was then exposed at the courthouse “for a short time to the view of such persons as were desirous of seeing it.” But the execution of Robinson was “strictly private.”⁴⁵

No detail was spared for the reader of newspapers and pamphlets. While Poe underlined his distaste for excesses of popular sensationalism and advocated the use of reason and deduction, the “blood-hound” penny papers capitalized on carnal imagery and satisfied the voyeurism of the reading public. Crime news provided a spectacle to a crowd fond of hangings and executions. As the whipping post and the pillory were increasingly withdrawn from the public eye in an age of growing rationality, lurid printed matter offered a substitute.⁴⁶

Spectacles of the grotesque and the monstrous were enormously popular in antebellum America. Crowds were drawn to curiosities such as the “extraordinary sight of a still-born calf, ‘a monster,’” to be exhibited at Barnum’s American Museum, or a “black dwarf.”⁴⁷ Criminals too were considered monsters to be exhibited in public, or at least in print. For instance, the exposure of Madame Restell, the most famous abortionist in New York, included an engraving with her hands drawn as the wings of a bat.⁴⁸ The new press emphasized crude display and visibility. It revealed a cultural resistance to refinement and control of behavior, perhaps what Sigmund Freud would call “the return of the repressed.”

Writing of the human body in the daily press was transgressing the cultural order and turning the world of print inside out. The filth and miasma of the big city was literally put on the front page. The sewer contaminated the printed word and made its way into the streets, into boardinghouses and tenements, and probably even into middle-class drawing rooms. The cheap papers exposed the bodies of victims of crime or accident, producing both disgust and fascination. Antebellum readers viewed sensational news with both horror and pleasure, for the popular press represented “low” entertainment reminiscent of the carnivalesque.

The revolution that the penny papers effected in print was not only in the publication of deviance and cultural transgression, but also in the temporal framework and the new modes of distribution. Since colonial times, “last speech” broadsides and pamphlets of lurid criminal literature were distributed by peddlers only occasionally. The new press introduced the notion of repetition in time, even in the occurrence of crime. Reading crime news became a daily activity and contributed to the readers’ attempts to define their urban community. While discussing the various and singular tastes of newspaper readers, one periodical referred to “the case of the lady who was obliged to consult the celebrated Abernethy, because ‘for several mornings past she had not been able to relish her murders!’”⁴⁹ The penny papers – and the *New York Herald* better than others – attracted the

urban public to read the “top story” of the day. The sensational press introduced a new class of printed matter that represented a blend of mercantile news and traditional popular lore delivered at the regular pace of capitalist production and industrial time. The “subliterary” genre of daily crime literature stood at the threshold of serialization and the capitalist division of labor, while revealing a heritage of earlier storytelling, oral communication, sensational broadsides, and almanacs.⁵⁰

As European travelers visiting the United States had long noted, American newspapers were uninhibited in their sensational treatment of events. European daily newspapers were slower to introduce sensational news, with a lag of twenty to thirty years behind the American press. A sensation mania did not emerge in the popular London daily press until the early 1860s, after the abolition of the old newspaper tax in 1855 had enabled the *Daily Telegraph* to become the first penny daily in British history.⁵¹ Similarly, Paris witnessed the publication of its first daily, *Le Petit Journal*, sold without a subscription, in 1863.⁵² The exceptional character of the American popular press was due to the early freedom of the press in the new republic, which established the authority of the printed word, and to the growing demand for informal associations of readers in what historian Arthur Schlesinger Sr. described as “a nation of joiners.” At the same time, the cheap newspapers were increasingly distinctive, not so much in their political affiliation as in their popular and sensational character, hawked in the streets by shouting newsboys and filled with detailed crime news. They framed the mysteries of the city and its erotic violence in little sheets of news and varieties that could be had for a penny, and in so doing they commodified both the criminal literature and the metropolitan culture. Furthermore, while gratifying the public taste for murder, melodrama, and catastrophe, the penny papers paved the way to more monstrous printed matter, the so-called mammoth weeklies, and to serialized fiction and drama that imitated the daily police reports.

Notes

- 1 See the one-hundredth anniversary number of the *Sun*, September 2, 1933. See also O'Brien, *Story of the Sun*. Within two months the *Sun* had reached a circulation of 2,000; it allegedly reached 10,000 within one year and 30,000 in 1838. The newspaper became an institution. While in 1833 Ben Day served

as publisher, editor, reporter, compositor, pressman, and mailing clerk, by 1844 the *Sun* employed eight editors and reporters, twenty compositors, sixteen pressmen, twelve folders and counters, one hundred carriers, and even one London correspondent.

- 2 *Herald*, May 6, 1835.
- 3 Studies of the *Herald* are numerous. Among those particularly helpful is Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald*. On Bennett, see also Fermer, *James Gordon Bennett*, and Kluger, *The Paper*. Among older studies, Pray, *Memoirs of James Gordon Bennett*; Parton, "New York Herald"; and Hudson, *Journalism in the United States*, are still valuable. See also Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story*; Carlson, *The Man Who Made News*; Seitz, *The James Gordon Bennetts*.
- 4 "Cheap Newspapers," in *Brother Jonathan*, May 9, 1840, 2, col. 3.
- 5 Ellard, *Newsboy*, 5–10. See also Brace, *Short Sermons*, and Hogeland, *Ten Years Among the Newsboys*.
- 6 *The Gift* (1843), 58–84; Seba Smith to Messrs. Carey and Hart, March 25, 1842, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The same engraving was reused in *The Ruby* for 1850, with unsigned commentary entitled "The Newsboy"; see *The Ruby* (1850), 253–5.
- 7 William Wells Brown in *The Anglo-African*, August 8, 1863, as quoted in Sterling, *Speak Out in Thunder Tones*, 233.
- 8 On the tradition of almanacs, see Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, and, in European history, Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires*; Spufford, *Small Books*.
- 9 A prejudice against pictures in dailies continued through the 1850s and into the Civil War. Not until the 1890s did American reporting value illustrations. See Leonard, *Power of the Press*, 101–2.
- 10 The French category of *occasionnels* is described by English and American bibliographers as broadsides, pamphlets, or miscellaneous literature. For an analysis of such printed matter, see Roger Chartier, "The Hanged Woman Miraculously Saved: An *occasionnel*," in *The Culture of Print*, 59–91; on woodcut broadsheets and propaganda during the Reformation, see Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 1–13, 229–50.
- 11 Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*. On the opposition between individual and collective action, see Boltanski, Darré, and Schiltz, "La dénonciation." See also Foucault, *I, Pierre Rivière*.
- 12 As the linguist Tzvetan Todorov points out in his analysis of classical fiction, or the so-called representative texts, "Only by subjecting the text to a particular type of reading do we construct, from our reading, an imaginary universe." Diverse accounts of the same text describe "not the universe of the book itself, but this universe as it is transformed by the psyche of each individual reader." See Todorov, "Reading as Construction," 67, 72, 76.

- 13 The concept of "reading interludes" is from Prince, "Notes on the Text as Reader," 230.
- 14 *Herald*, September 10, 1835.
- 15 Crouthamel, "James Gordon Bennett" and *Bennett's New York Herald*, 28–31. Nineteenth-century newspapers used indifferently both names, Helen and Ellen, while scholars of the popular media have mostly used Ellen. Patricia Cline Cohen has restored the preference of the victim herself, that is, Helen. See her careful analysis of the gender character of the case in "Helen Jewett Murder" and "Mystery of Helen Jewett." The objectivity of the penny press is questioned in Tucher, *Froth and Scum*, 21–96.
- 16 The Robinson–Jewett case is analyzed as an eroticized murder narrative of the antebellum period in Cohen, "Mystery of Helen Jewett."
- 17 The concept is from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37–40. On earlier journalism, see Clark and Wetherell, "Measure of Maturity," and Bailyn and Hench, *The Press*.
- 18 As quoted by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 39. See also Eisenstein, "Some Conjectures."
- 19 *Herald*, May 6, 1835, as quoted in Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald*, 22.
- 20 As quoted in Mott, *American Journalism*, 311.
- 21 *Herald*, October 2–3, 21–2, 24–6, 1839.
- 22 *Ibid.*, December 4–5, 23–6, 1840.
- 23 For a comparative approach to nineteenth-century murders of consanguinity in France, see Guillaies, *La chair de l'autre*, and Ariès and Duby, *History of Private Life*, vol. 4, *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot.
- 24 *Morning Herald*, January 15, 1840, 2. For the centrality of Shakespeare in antebellum culture, see Levine, "William Shakespeare" and *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.
- 25 *Herald*, August 31, 1835.
- 26 Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories." Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions*, 42–70; Hunter, *Before Novels*, esp. chaps. 7 and 8.
- 27 Havens, *Diary of a Little Girl*, 47. See also McDade, *Annals of Murder*, 33. The case of Polly Bodine is discussed in the *Herald*, January 1–11, 21, June 27, 28, 1844, with numerous woodcuts, and in the *National Police Gazette*. Two pamphlets were published, one in Philadelphia in 1844 and the other in New York in 1846.
- 28 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:121.
- 29 *Herald*, December 18–19, 1835.
- 30 Foster, *New York by Gas-Light*; McCabe, *Secrets of the Great City*. See also Browne, *Great Metropolis*. Analyses of urban descriptions in nineteenth-century fiction can be found in Blumin, "Explaining the New Metropolis"; Siegel, *Image of the American City*; Janis Stout, *Sodoms in Eden*; Spann, *New Metropolis*.

- 31 Poe, *Doings of Gotham*. See also Jacobs, *Poe*, and Linda Patterson Miller, "Poe on the Beat."
- 32 Sue, *Mysteries of Paris* (1843); Reynolds, *Mysteries of London* (1845); Lippard, *Quaker City* (1845); Buntline, *Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans* (1851); Melville, *Pierre*. Reynolds proposes a different interpretation of this sensational literature in *Beneath the American Renaissance*. On Lippard, see Denning, *Mechanic Accents*. On Buntline, see Buckley, "To the Opera House."
- 33 See in particular Bosco, "Lectures at the Pillory," and Williams, "Puritans and Pirates," "Behold a Tragic Scene," "Rogues, Rascals and Scoundrels," and "Doctor, Preacher, Soldier, Thief." See also Daniel Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, "In Defense of the Gallows," and "A Fellowship of Thieves."
- 34 Crime literature of the eighteenth century included rogue narratives, which were still reprinted during the antebellum period; see Williams, "Rogues, Rascals, and Scoundrels." On the "cult of horror" in late-eighteenth-century murder narratives, see Halttunen, "Early American Murder Narratives" and "Humanitarianism." Lane, "Urbanization and Criminal Violence." See also his *Policing the City* and *Violent Death in the City*. Several scholars have analyzed criminal history in relation to the growing control and institutionalization of the police in nineteenth-century American cities. See Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America*; David Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underground*; Wilbur Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*; Richardson, *New York Police*; Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order*. A provocative account of a sensational murder case is offered in Kasserman's *Fall River Outrage*.
- 35 Papke, *Framing the Criminal*.
- 36 On the political implications of crime reporting, see Leonard, *Power of the Press*, esp. 137–65.
- 37 See Brodhead, "Sparing the Rod"; Halttunen, "Humanitarianism"; Laqueur, "Bodies, Details." Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" was first published in Snowden's *Ladies' Companion* for November and December 1842 and February 1843 (18: 15–20, 93–9, 162–7). Ingraham's *The Beautiful Cigar Girl* appeared in 1844. Also, the spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis used the case of Mary Rogers in the description of the corpse of Mary Ruciel, or Molly Ruciel, in his *Tale of a Physician* (1869). On Poe's uses of the sensational press, see Walsh, *Poe the Detective*; Wimsatt, "Poe and the Mystery of Mary Rogers"; Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, esp. 225–48; and David B. Davis, *Homicide in American Fiction*, esp. 262–5. On Ingraham, see Denning, *Mechanic Accents*. Srebnick makes the argument that while exposing the destroyed body of the female victim, the daily newspapers invented the Mary Rogers tragedy; see her "Death of Mary Rogers."

- 38 Details reappeared in the various versions of the murder mystery of Mary Rogers. In Charles Wallace's confession, a "curious satin cord" replaced what the *Herald* had described as the "fine lace trimming" around the neck of the victim. See *A Confession of the Awful and Bloody Transactions in the Life of Charles Wallace, the Fiend-Like Murderer of Miss Mary Rogers* (New Orleans: E. E. Barclay, 1851), engraving caption and page 9.
- 39 Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," in *Collected Works*, 3:730.
- 40 "Examination of Dr. Cook: Excerpt from 'The Hoboken Tragedy': Murder of Miss Mary C. Rogers," *Herald*, August 17, 1841; reprinted in *Brother Jonathan*, August 21, 1841.
- 41 The case of Mary C. Rogers was discussed in the *Herald*, August 4, 9–14, 16–21, September 7, 17, 21, 24, 28, 1841. The September 17, 1841, issue featured a woodcut representing Mary Rogers's house.
- 42 Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," in *Collected Works*, 3:730.
- 43 From *Trial, Confession, and Execution of Peter Robinson*, April 16, 1841. The *Herald* first mentioned the case in the December 10 and December 14, 1840, issues: "Another Mysterious Disappearance of a Banker" and "Search for a Banker." It later had an article on the trial and imprisonment of Robinson almost every day from March 18 to April 17, 1841, including "His Approaching Execution," "Life and Confession," "Last 24 Hours," and "Last Moments." The pamphlet form of "The Life and Confessions, and Execution of Peter Robinson" was announced in the April 19, 1841, issue. Other pamphlets include *Trial, Confession, and Execution of Robert M'Conaghy* (1841) and *A True Account of the Murder of Abraham Suydam* (1841). See also *Murder Did Pay*, 182. Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" was first published in *The United States Saturday Post* (Philadelphia), July 1842. On Poe's use of the Robinson case, see Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 232, 586n.
- 44 On the withdrawal of executions, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. See also Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*.
- 45 *Herald*, January 10, 1844, December 10, 1840. On the popularity of Barnum's museum, see Harris, *Humbug*.
- 46 The same cut appeared in the *National Police Gazette*, March 13, 1847, and in the pamphlet form, *Wonderful Trial of Caroline Lohman, Alias Restell* (1847). See also Browder, *Wickedest Woman in New York*, and Keller, *Scandalous Lady*.
- 47 *New World*, March 20, 1841, 190.
- 48 On the new literary production, see Feltes, *Modes of Production*.
- 49 Altick, *Deadly Encounters*, 3–10.
- 50 Palmer, *Des petits journaux*; Seguin, *Nouvelles à sensation* and *Les canards illustrés*; Jean Watelet, "La presse illustrée," in Chartier and Martin, *Histoire de l'édition*, 3:329–41; Thiesse, *Le roman du quotidien*.

Consider the Source

1 As Isabelle Lehuu makes clear, one of the most striking qualities of the penny press was its sensationalism: crime, scandal, and gossip were its lifeblood. Later journalistic standards would place far more emphasis on accuracy in reporting; for many Americans in the nineteenth century, however, guessing whether a story was true was half the fun. (This was the insight that made the great impresario P. T. Barnum, who produced some of the greatest entertainment spectacles of the nineteenth century, a wealthy man.) One of the best examples of penny sensationalism was the so-called Great Moon Hoax of 1835, in which the *New York Sun* ran a series of stories over six days detailing new scientific discoveries made possible by a powerful new telescope. In this excerpt from the Friday, August 28, 1835 edition of the *Sun*, readers learned about the humanoid creatures observed on the moon and of the debates over whether this information should be made public. Consider, as you read, how the writer tries to make his description sound real and what he reveals about nineteenth-century readers' conceptions of themselves.

Excerpt from "Great Astronomical Discoveries
Recently Made," from the *Sun*
(Friday, August 28, 1835)

They averaged four feet in height, were covered, except on the face, with short and glossy copper-colored hair, and had wings composed of a thin membrane, without hair, lying snugly upon their backs, from the top of their shoulders to the calves of their legs. The face, which was of a yellowish flesh color, was a slight improvement upon that of the large orang outang, being more open and intelligent in its expression, and having a much greater expansion of forehead. The mouth, however, was very prominent, though somewhat relieved by a thick beard upon the lower jaw, and by lips far more human than those of any species of simia genus. In general symmetry of body and limbs they were infinitely superior to the orang outang;

so much so, that, but for their long wings, Lieut. Drummond said they would look as well on a parade ground as some of the old cockney militia! The hair on the head was a darker color than that of the body, closely curled, but apparently not woolly, and arranged in two curious semicircles over the temples of the forehead. Their feet could only be seen as they were alternately lifted in walking; but, from what we could see of them in so transient a view, they appeared thin, and very protuberant at the heel.

Whilst passing across the canvas, and whenever we afterwards saw them, these creatures were evidently engaged in conversation; their gesticulation, more particularly the varied action of their hands and arms, appeared impassioned and emphatic. We hence inferred that they were rational beings, and although not perhaps of so high an order as others which we discovered the next month on the shores of the Bay of Rainbows, they were capable of producing works of art and contrivance. The next view we obtained of them was still more favorable. It was on the borders of a little lake, or expanded stream, which we then for the first time perceived running down the valley to a large lake, and having on its eastern margin a small wood. Some of these creatures had crossed this water and were lying like spread eagles on the skirts of the wood. We could then perceive that they possessed wings of great expansion, and were similar in structure to this of the bat, being a semi-transparent membrane expanded in curvilinear divisions by means of straight radii, united at the back by the dorsal integuments. But what astonished us very much was the circumstance of this membrane being continued, from the shoulders to the legs, united all the way down, though gradually decreasing in width. The wings seemed completely under the command of volition, for those of the creatures whom we saw bathing in the water, spread them instantly to their full width, waved them as ducks do theirs to shake off the water, and then as instantly closed them again in a compact form. Our further observation of the habits of these creatures, who were of both sexes, led to results so very remarkable, that I prefer they should first be laid before the public in Dr. Herschel's own work, where I have reason to know they are fully and faithfully stated, however incredulously they may be received [...]

We have, of course, faithfully obeyed Dr. Grant's private injunction to omit those highly curious passages in his correspondence which he wished us to suppress, although we do not perceive the force of the reason assigned for it. It is true, the omitted paragraphs contain facts which would be wholly incredible to readers who do not carefully examine the principles and capacity of the instrument with which these marvellous discoveries

have been made; but so will nearly all those which he has kindly permitted us to publish; and it was for this reason we considered the explicit description which we have given of the telescope so important a preliminary. From these, however, and other prohibited passages, which will be published by Dr. Herschel, with the certificates of the civil and military authorities of the colony, and of several Episcopal, Wesleyan, and other ministers, who, in the month of March last, were permitted, under the stipulation of temporary secrecy, to visit the laboratory, and become eye-witnesses of the wonders which they were requested to attest, we are confident his forthcoming volumes will be at once the most sublime in science, and the most intense in general interest, that ever issued from the press.

- 2 What are some of the ways in which the new penny press departed from its journalistic forebears? How were newspapers being sold, produced, and read differently?
- 3 In what ways are the media of our time similar to, and different from, those of the penny press? How does the nature of television and of the Internet affect the ways stories are told and circulate?
- 4 What uses, beyond entertainment, did the penny press serve? Did it inform readers? In what sense? Did penny papers serve useful psychological purposes?

Suggested Further Reading

Given the intensifying specialization of modern times, one has to go pretty far back for general surveys of journalism history. Important examples include Frank Luther Mott, *A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690–1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1940) and Mott's *A History of American Magazines*, Vol. 1: 1741–1850 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938). Recent surveys of newspapers include Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of Newspapers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999). Schudson also has some good information and analysis on the emergence of the penny papers in *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

