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Print's Run
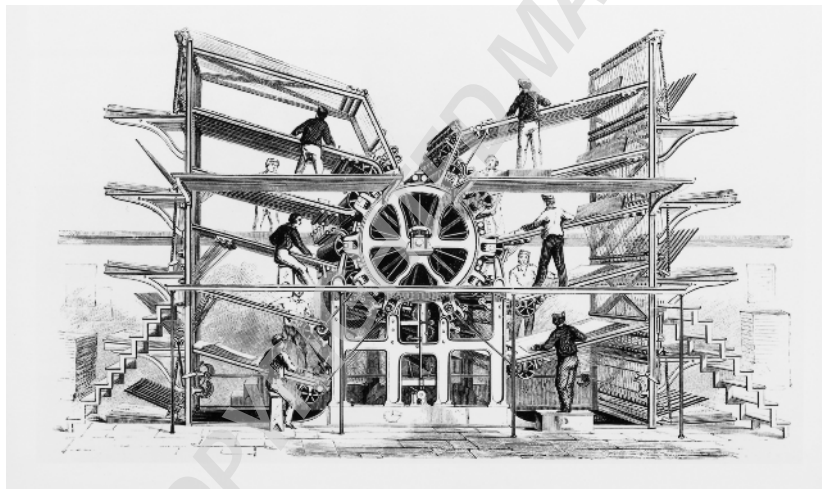## *Publishing as Popular Culture*

Figure 1.1 PRESSING MATTERS   A cylindrical printing press from the mid-nineteenth century. A major advance from the hand-operated presses that only allowed one document to be produced at a time, cylindrical presses dramatically accelerated the pace and reach of the publishing business, establishing print as the dominant medium of popular culture in the United States. (© Stapleton Collection/Corbis)

Overview

READING? For fun? Seriously?

It's not exactly that you hate reading (not *all* reading, anyway). For a student, reading is a fact of life. But, notwithstanding the occasional *Harry Potter* novel or *ESPN* story, most of the reading you do – other than facebook or text messaging, which doesn't really count here – is a means to an end: good grade, good degree, good job. Not typically something you do for kicks.

You may be interested to know that, in this regard, you're like the overwhelming majority of the human beings who have ever lived. Most – the ones who actually *could* read, as mass literacy is a modern invention – didn't read for fun, either. They, too, typically saw reading as a means to an end, and in a great many cases it was largely a matter of education in some form or another. (Originally, what we think of as books were actually scrolls; they were gradually replaced by the codex – handwritten pages bound on one side – which only began to disperse widely with the advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century.) But there was a specific historical moment, in the early nineteenth century, when reading suddenly *did* become something you would do for fun. There are a number of technological, economic, and cultural reasons for that, which I'll get to shortly. But the important thing to make clear at the outset is that the arrival of reading as an entertainment activity was a transformative moment in the history of the mass media – in an important sense, it marked the *beginning* of the history of the mass media – and one whose reverberations continue to this very day.

You can thank God for that. I mean this literally: I've mentioned technology, economics, and culture as important factors in the rise of reading, but in a Western-civilization context, and more specifically in an American context, religion was crucial. For much of recorded history – which is to say history that could be read, as opposed to committed to memory and spoken – the written word served a variety of purposes, among them law, finance, and art. But religion is at the top of the list.

In any event, reading for most of humankind was a practice of the elite. Indeed, in many cases you weren't *allowed* to read unless you were a member of the elite. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, didn't want just anybody reading the Bible, because someone might get what the clergy regarded as the wrong idea. For about 1500 years, the primary everyday interpreter of Christianity was the priest, who stood between – which is to say mediated between – Christ on the altar and his people in the pews. The priest read the word of God, as it was recorded in the Gospels and other sacred scripture, and explained what it meant.

The Catholic Church was always a hierarchically managed institution, and at the top of the chain was the Lord's presiding representative on earth, the pope, who was the final arbiter of scriptural authority. But when Martin Luther nailed those famous 95 theses on that church door in 1517, kick-starting the Reformation, the pope ceased to be reader-in-chief of the Western world. Now, suddenly, a series of Protestant churches competed for followers, organizing themselves in ways that ranged from networks of bishops to self-contained congregations. In such an environment, individual worshippers experiencing the word of God for themselves became a new possibility – and, in many cases, a new imperative. Such a quest was greatly aided by technological innovations in publishing, among them the ability to recombine letters on a metal plate, a technique known as moveable type, pioneered by the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg in the half-century before 1500.

In the intensity of their rebellion from the Catholic Church, these new Protestant sects varied widely. Some, like the Church of England (which became the Episcopalian Church in the United States), were content to largely follow traditional practices. Others, like the people we have come to know as Puritans, made more fundamental demands on their followers, among them the expectation that they would teach their children to read so that those children could forge their own relationship with God. Whether they were looking for economic opportunities, seeking to escape religious oppression, or simply trying to find a home they could call their own, many of these people – most from the British Isles,

but some from other parts of Europe – made their way to English North America and founded colonies which, unlike French Canada or Spanish Latin America, were largely Protestant.

The religious emphasis on reading in North America made much of this territory, particularly New England, one of the most literate places on the face of the earth a century before the American Revolution. The first printing press was established at Harvard College in 1638. They didn't have indoor plumbing. But they did have prayer books.

So reading was primarily about God. But it wasn't *solely* about God. It was also about making money, planting crops, and baking bread. Annual publications called almanacs (which are still published every year) were among the first places where one could find information about such things. Almanacs were effective from a market point of view because, while the information they contained, like seasonal weather forecasts, was reasonably current, they could also be sold for a while before going out of date. So they made sense economically from a publishing standpoint as well as from a reading standpoint.

The all-time genius of the almanac business was a fellow named Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was born in Boston in 1706 and, as a child, worked for his older brother James, who was in the printing business, and in fact founded one of the first newspapers in America. James Franklin got in trouble around the time he began running a series of articles in his paper criticizing the Boston authorities, among them pieces that were submitted anonymously by someone who wrote as an old woman under the name of Silence Dogood (which was a play on the titles of books by the famous Puritan minister Cotton Mather). What nobody, not even James himself, realized was that Silence Dogood was not, in fact, an old woman. He was an adolescent boy named Benjamin Franklin. In the furor that followed, young Ben decided he'd better leave town – fast. He went to the rapidly growing city of Philadelphia, on its way to becoming the largest in North America.

Franklin would later take on a few other projects in his long life, among them working as a world-famous scientist, diplomat, and

revolutionary with a hand in the creation of documents like the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. But his *job*, one that made him rich enough to do all those other things in his spare time, was in the printing business, and he had a particularly clever idea when it came to publishing almanacs. For *his* almanacs, Franklin created a fictional character – he dubbed him ''Poor Richard'' – who became a kind of mascot whose wit and wisdom would pepper the books and create a distinctive brand. (Pithy lines like ''There are no gains without pains,'' ''Lost time is never found again,'' and ''Great spenders, poor lenders'' are among Poor Richard's greatest hits.) *Poor Richard's Almanac*, issued annually between 1732 and 1758, was hugely successful, and a widely reprinted collection of Poor Richard's sayings, *The Way to Wealth*, is among the most famous works of popular culture of all time.

Poor Richard could be funny, but his humor always had a point, and that point usually had a moral tinge (ironically, Franklin, long associated with the maxim ''early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,'' was a notoriously late sleeper). When it came to the lingering power of religion in public life, the rules of the game tended to get bent more than broken. Insofar as there was secular writing to be found in North America in the decades preceding and following the American Revolution, it was still mostly for elite consumption. Newspapers, for example, were relatively expensive and had to be paid for in advance by subscription. They were typically aimed at high-end merchants with some kind of stake in the shipping business. Books were increasingly available, but they too were costly and typically also had to be paid for in advance by subscription (another one of Franklin's innovations was the first lending library in North America).

The American Revolution, in which Benjamin Franklin played such a large role, was a military, political, and diplomatic struggle, but it was also a communications battle. Great Britain, of course, had developed a print-media culture before its colonies did, but by the mid-eighteenth century those colonies were catching up rapidly. A rich discourse of political pamphlets, written by men with names like Adams and Jefferson, fed the argument on both sides in the

years leading up to 1776 as well as the years following. The pivotal document, by all accounts, was Thomas Paine's legendary manifesto *Common Sense*, published in January of that year. Paine, who came to the colonies in 1774 from England with a letter of introduction from Franklin, proved crucially important in crystallizing a belief that the issue was no longer colonists having their rights as British subjects protected, but rather that it was time to move on and found a new nation. Paine's passionate polemic, and the intensity with which it was embraced, illustrates the way in which politics is a matter of winning minds as well as hearts.

But even after American independence was secured, the nation's culture remained literally and figuratively imported, and thus all the more pricey. The United States may have achieved its political independence in 1776, but in many respects, among them cultural, it remained a British colony for decades afterward. ''In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?'' asked the Reverend Sydney Smith, founder of the highbrow *Edinborough Review*, in 1820. It was a rhetorical question.

But even as Smith posed his sneering query, the United States was on the brink of a transformation. An important element in this transformation was technological; the early decades of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the young nation. Nowhere was this more evident than in the publishing industry. 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 now 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.

Which is why the nation's relatively high literacy rates proved so important. The fact that so many Americans could already read for religious reasons – and the fact that the United States was a large market with a shared language, 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, created the prospect for a dramatic change in 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 read little else beyond that which 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. (We tend to be more intensive when it comes to things like listening to music, though technologies like digital downloads have broadened our palates.)

A new class of entrepreneurs was able to take advantage of the new extensive order and turn 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. Founded in 1833, and rapidly followed by competitors like New York's *Herald* (1835), *Tribune* (1841), and *Times* (1851), as well as other daily newspapers around the country, the *Sun* specialized in running sensational stories that ranged from murder trials to an elaborate 1844 hoax of ''Moon Men'' landing in South Africa that actually prompted Yale University to send researchers to investigate. The penny papers were sold by the then-new methodology of the ''London Plan,'' which replaced paid subscription by having publishers sell batches of papers to so-called newsboys, who in turn sold them on the street to readers.

By the mid-nineteenth century, US cities were blanketed with newsprint that was passed from hand to hand. These papers varied in size; most were large ''broadsheets,'' and for a brief period in the 1840s so-called ''mammoth'' papers were poster-sized publications

that could be read by more than one person at a time. Until the advent of photography later in the century, newspapers were illustrated with woodcuts. The primary source of revenue in the business was advertising, not sales. That's pretty much been true ever since.

The penny press was part of a larger reorganization of American politics. The middle of the nineteenth century was a democratic era in more than one sense. Ordinary people became part of the electoral process on a new scale as voters and citizens, and even those who were excluded, among them women and African Americans, could find a voice in the public sphere, particularly in journalistic venues like *Freedom's Journal*, a New York paper founded by free black men in 1827. Many newspapers embraced the avowedly egalitarian values of the Democratic Party generally and the presidency of Andrew Jackson in particular (though there were exceptions, like Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, which reflected the views of the opposition Whig Party). Democracy was not always pretty. Celebrations of freedom for some rested on a belief in the necessity of enslaving others; in many states, teaching slaves to read was banned. Mass opinion also often involved all manner of mockery of women, immigrants, or anyone who held unconventional views. This is one reason why respectable opinion often tried to avoid popular journalism, if not control it. Both proved impossible.

News and politics, in any case, were not the only kinds of writing that flourished in this golden age of print as popular culture. Gift books, forerunners of today's coffee-table books in their emphasis on arresting images and writing meant more for browsing than sustained reading, became common by the 1840s. So were women's magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book*, whose line illustrations of women in the latest couture – the term ''fashion plate,'' used to describe someone who looks great in the latest clothes, lingers to this day – made it the *Vogue* of its time. Some of the images in *Godey's Lady's Book* were printed with colored ink, using a process known as lithography, which was also quite common in the creation of cheap, colorful prints published by firms like Currier & Ives. Such prints became fixtures of middle-class homes.

But *Godey's* was more than just a fashion magazine. Under the editorship of Sarah Josepha Hale, who had a distinguished literary career before taking over as editor, it became a leading voice on education, morals, and the role of women in US society. It also became a showcase venue for major writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, as well as for women writers who otherwise might lack an outlet for their work, whether in the form of essays or short stories.

Indeed, this was an era when fiction – and the novel in particular – came into its own as a commercial mass medium. Historians typically date the literary form of the novel back to the work of Spaniard Miguel Cervantes in his seventeenth-century work *Don Quixote* (1605–1615), though such writing can really be said to have come into its own in eighteenth-century England in the work of writers like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson. In the nineteenth century, British novelists Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens enjoyed tremendous popularity in America, the diffusion of their work at least partially attributable to the fact that the US government did not observe international copyright until 1891, and thus most publishers did not have to pay for the right to sell their work.

Then as now, novelists typically had their work appear in the form of hardcover books. Then as now, too, other print formats proliferated, among them rag-paper pamphlets known as "chapbooks" that were common as early as the seventeenth century. One of the more effective ways of building an audience for fiction in particular was publishing it in serial form in newspapers and magazines; Dickens is the best example of a writer who became internationally famous by having his work appear in installments on a weekly or monthly basis. By the mid-nineteenth century there was a whole journalistic genre of so-called storypapers, which looked like newspapers but were dominated by the fiction of multiple writers. Around the time of the Civil War, another new format, the dime novel, made its debut. As its name suggests, a dime novel was an inexpensive work in a paperback format that had particular appeal for the young

(especially boys). Dime novels would remain popular for the rest of the century until gradually replaced by ''the pulps,'' magazines named for the cheap paper on which they were printed.

The emergence of a broad publishing infrastructure in the United States made authorship possible as a professional career. The first American writers to make something approximating a living from their fiction were Washington Irving (now best known for his tales of Rip Van Winkle and the Headless Horseman) and James Fenimore Cooper, whose five ''Leatherstocking'' (1826–1841) novels about frontiersman Natty Bumppo was the *Star Wars* of its day. (One of those books, *Last of the Mohicans*, has repeatedly been made into successful movies.) While many of the writers of this period that are now studied in college courses, like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, never became rich from their work, they did achieve some degree of fame and lived much of their lives plausibly believing their writing could allow them financial security, even if it didn't actually do so.

Actually, the most financially successful, and even influential, writers of the mid-nineteenth century were women. Though the names Maria Cummins, Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, and Susan Warner are known today mostly to feminist literary historians, they were bona fide celebrities of their time on the basis of their writing, as was the tart-tongued newspaper columnist Fanny Fern. Hawthorne famously wrote with jealousy of the ''damned female scribblers'' whose fame he never matched; Melville's attempt to explore the sentimental style of such writers, *Pierre* (1852), was a critical and commercial disaster that effectively ended his career as a novelist. (Generally not a good idea to try and write a bestseller about incest.)

The most famous novel of this era – and still one of the greatest publishing phenomena of all time – was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The daughter, sister, and wife of church ministers, Stowe was a little-known short-story writer in 1851, when her saga of a good-hearted slave began appearing in monthly installments in *The National Era*, one of a number of antislavery newspapers published in the northern United States. Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in response to the Fugitive Slave Act, an 1850

law requiring Northerners to return escaped slaves to their owners. Though *Uncle Tom's Cabin* purveyed a clear political message, it also captured the nation's imagination through its vivid characters, many of whom became household names for the next 100 years: Little Eva, the angelic child whose death scene was the ultimate tearjerker in American fiction; Augustus St. Clare, the Southern intellectual who recognizes that slavery is wrong but fails to oppose it; Simon Legree, the Northern-born slave trader, whose very name became a synonym for heartless evil; and, above all, the patient, benevolent black Uncle Tom, whose life stands as an indictment of the slave system. While the novel has been subject to varying, and at times conflicting, interpretations in the century and a half since its publication, its success illustrates the power of fiction to dramatize public issues, as well as to offer a venue for people and ideas that would otherwise be neglected or silenced. Abraham Lincoln could only have been half joking when, at a White House reception during the Civil War, he reputedly greeted Stowe as ''the little woman who made this great war.''

While the Civil War's impact on the publishing industry was not direct, it was nevertheless important and lasting. Certainly the war created a demand for regular news updates in the form of ''extras,'' or additional editions, that kept newspaper readers apprised of the outcome of battles in between regular issues. Perhaps the most important dimension of the war's influence was in the realm of photography, though its effect was not immediate because of the technical barriers involved in the rapid reproduction of images. Important milestones in the advent of photography date back to the 1820s in France, but it wasn't until two decades later that a process developed by French chemist L.J.M. Daguerre led to images known as daguerreotypes. When Englishman William Henry Fox developed a method for making such images reproducible, this led to a vibrant culture of *cartes de visites*, business-card-sized photographs people made of themselves to distribute among friends and family, something particularly common for soldiers to distribute to loved ones before going off to war. Photography also received a major boost in the work of people like Matthew Brady, who exhibited

images from the battlefield at his Washington, DC gallery during the war.

Photography became a common feature of journalism in the 1880s with the development of the halftone process, which involves using black-and-white dots of varying size and intensity to create images. (The modern pixel, arranged in dots per inch, is a direct heir of the halftone process.) This newfound ability to present vivid pictures on a daily basis injected fresh energy into the penny press, which flourished under the direction of a new generation of editors like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, famed for his role in whipping up public sentiment to provoke the Spanish–American War in 1898. (''You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war,'' he famously told a photographer who reported back that he didn't see much that would justify one.) Such ''yellow journalism'' was both roundly condemned and eagerly read. The term appears to refer to a comic strip called ''The Yellow Kid'' that was popular at the turn of the century and which ran in Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers. Comic strips, often part of considerably fatter Sunday newspapers, became a feature of turn-of-the-century life, their color lithography giving a festive air to what remained a largely black-and-white medium.

Newspapers also evolved in response to other changes in everyday life. The arrival of ever growing numbers of immigrants led to the growth of a vibrant foreign-language press in many cities, typified by the success of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, which remains alive and well to this day. Newspapers were also important instruments of activism for labor unions and African Americans; the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* were influential, and effectively national, black publications.

In addition to responding to these demographic developments, newspaper publishers adapted to changes in the urban landscape such as the emergence of subways and streetcars. To make papers easier to read, another format, known as the tabloid, rose to prominence, in large measure because it could be managed while strapholding on a subway or sitting on a train. Tabloids retained the same emphasis on sensation and corruption as the *New York Sun* had

a century before (as indeed they do today). But they were sleeker and more visually appealing than the old broadsheet or mammoth papers.

By 1900, however, print culture faced challenges from new media – film and radio – that posed a threat to their dominance. In the short term, neither could compete very effectively, because both required a series of technological and cultural refinements before they could become mass media. Radio, for instance, was originally developed for nautical and commercial applications; film was little more than an arcade novelty until projection became a possibility and a whole host of legal and technical issues were worked out. By the 1920s, however, both were on track to become sources of news as well as entertainment. After a series of experimental approaches, radio adopted an advertiser-supported model in the United States comparable to that of print (which was different from Great Britain, where the government controlled airwaves and content). Movies, by contrast, were consumer-supported, but, like penny papers and dime novels, were priced low enough so that working-class people could afford to see them on a virtually daily basis. Radio broadcasts eventually became significant sources of information, as did newsreels – brief documentaries on current events – which became part of a typical movie-going experience in the first half of the twentieth century.

Print hardly disappeared. Indeed, in certain respects it acquired a prestige that it previously lacked. For example, magazine publishers responded to the challenge of up-to-the-minute radio broadcasting by developing newsweeklies like *Time* and *Life* that took a more reflective and analytic approach, both visually and in terms of their writing. Novels, which had been at least vaguely disreputable for much of the nineteenth century, were now widely seen as vehicles for the highest forms of artistic expression. Young men and women strived to become novelists the way later generations hoped to be rock stars or video-game designers. While few achieved the wealth and glamour of an F. Scott Fitzgerald or Ernest Hemingway, a life that was somehow bound up in the written word attracted the talent and loyalty of generations of young people.

At the same time, a countercurrent also emerged in the form of an array of pulps with an air of disrepute surrounding them – precisely the thing many of their adherents loved about them. They were a fixture of the publishing scene from the late nineteenth into the mid-twentieth centuries, featuring science fiction, detective stories, horror, and other kinds of genre fiction.

Other varieties in this ''low-class'' – a term which carried economic and/or social connotations – tier of publications included (illustration-driven) comic books and (photography-driven) pornography. A more reputable tier, though barely so, was gossip or celebrity magazines; there were also attempts to confer a sense of prestige on some of these publications, as with publisher Hugh Hefner's successful launch of *Playboy* as a sex-oriented lifestyle magazine in the 1950s. Yet another very popular, but widely disdained – when not ignored – genre was religious publishing, which proliferated in multiple subgenres. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the apocalyptic ''Left Behind'' series of twelve novels by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye sold tens of millions of copies.

Meanwhile, new formats continued to emerge to meet evolving conditions. One of the more important innovations of the twentieth century was the modern rack-sized paperback, which generated a new wave in the democratization of literature. Publishers like Simon & Schuster and Random House, founded between the World Wars, produced cheap books, both new and classics, which could be sent to soldiers overseas during World War II, where at one point they were consuming 250,000 a month. When those soldiers came home, the GI Bill of 1944 paid for their college educations, which in turn stimulated a significant new demand for books. By the 1970s, the trade paperback, a hybrid between the rack-sized paperback and traditional hardcover with a price in between the two, had become common. By this point, it was a well-established cultural convention that a book would be issued in hardcover first, to be followed a year later in paperback. This model would also be adopted in other media, like home-video versions of Hollywood movies, in the 1980s, another way in which print influenced other media. It's also worth

noting that home video, like music recorded on compact discs, was packaged in ways that resembled books – yet one more illustration of how books continued to shape popular culture.

The *social* environment in which print has been read has also been one of change over time. Back in the day when reading was a largely elite activity, it was typically conducted in secluded environments: the monastery, the office, the private library. To some extent, reading was a social event in the family circle, as reading to children, very often by women, was widespread and celebrated both as an enlightening activity and as one that built familial bonds. But the penny press made reading a truly *public* ritual; perusing and discussing the contents of books and newspapers in places like coffee houses became a new – and, to some, dispiriting – fact of life. (Workers in factories would sometimes chip in to hire someone to read to them as they labored.) Well into the nineteenth century, bookselling was a slow, expensive proposition; even a writer as popular as Mark Twain sold his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) by subscription, which required buyers to pay in advance. But, over time, books became an increasingly inexpensive and available commodity, and bookstores themselves became important cultural institutions. Until the 1980s, they were largely the domain of small entrepreneurs, or independents, who ran their own stores. But the advent of large chains like Barnes & Noble increasingly displaced these independents, because they offered both better amenities (like baked goods) and the wider selection and discount prices made possible by economies of scale.

For a while, it seemed like chain bookstores, which also sold magazines, would swallow everything in their path. But they have increasingly become dinosaurs themselves, and a number have gone out of business. That's because an entirely new, electronic mode of expression, namely the Internet, revolutionized the publishing business more than any development of the last two centuries. (For more on the impact of the Internet on print culture, see Chapter 7.)

For the moment, you should note two important components of the Internet's impact on the publishing business. The first concerns the movement of information. The birth of Internet retailing,

typified by the explosive growth of Amazon.com, founded in 1995, has fundamentally changed the way books (and other merchandise) are sold. In effect, online commerce took two of the biggest advantages of the chains, selection and price, and took both to an entirely new level, so much so that consumers were willing to defer gratification by getting their goods by mail. Meanwhile Web sites, which quickly absorbed traditional print media like newspapers and magazines, also became an important venue for adding or updating ''content'' – a word that became newly important in an era when information could morph and jump across media. Today news and entertainment organizations like CNN or *Rolling Stone* maintain active sites that have become an increasingly important part of their overall operations.

But the Internet has also become more than an important means of information *delivery*. It is now also an important *source* of content. Words like ''Web site'' and ''blog'' scarcely existed when you were born, but are now considered commonplace venues for the written word. Much of the content one finds at such sites resembles earlier forms of print culture, but nevertheless has distinctive accents or conventions. The blog post, for example, might resemble a diary entry, a review, or even an essay. But elements like interactivity, the frequency with which it can be updated, and the ease with which individuals can create as well as read them are unique to this time.

The first decade of the twenty-first century also witnessed one of the more stunning developments of human history: the moment when the very word ''book'' ceased solely to be a physical object and instead became a metaphor for an electronic file. The potential for e-books was recognized long before they became widespread, and it took a while for culture to catch up with technology (it's taking longer still for the economics of e-book publishing to make much sense, as pricing and availability still vary widely). But the obvious utility of e-books is now too strong to be ignored, even for those who might want to disregard them – and as a book lover myself, I will report more than a few pangs of fear and regret at the prospect of physical books' disappearance.

Amid all this change, at a pace that rivals – but does not necessarily exceed – that of two centuries ago, a fact that may seem more obvious to you than it does to your teachers must also be noted: relatively speaking, print is a lot less important than it used to be. I would not be shocked to learn that you've read a book for fun recently, or that your gaze has recently crossed a newspaper. I *would* be shocked to learn that this was your primary form of entertainment. Audio and (especially) video are the two main axes of communication in the modern world. Practically speaking, it might be hard to drive a car to the beach, order a pizza, or install software on your desktop without the ability to read. But you could still be a well-informed citizen without reading, by relying on radio, television, and Internet streaming. (Well, maybe not *well* informed. But *adequately* informed. Fortunately, you are still reading.)

And yet, in a very important sense, print remains of decisive importance, and in all kinds of ways. Most other forms of popular culture, from television shows to video games, would be impossible without good writing. Print remains an extremely important source of content in other media; without the free programming provided by authors discussing their work on talk shows or Web sites, for example, lots of news organizations would probably go out of business. And a great many of the most beloved movies of our time began their lives as books. Such wizardry is hardly limited to Harry Potter.

So yes: reading really does remain a way to have fun. Seriously.

Questions to consider

1. How did religion shape the emergence of print culture in the Western world?
2. What factors promoted literacy in British colonial America and the young United States?
3. What are some of the forms published words have taken in the last 200 years? What marketplace or cultural factors made some

of these forms particularly appealing at a given moment or to a given audience?

4. Describe the role of print as an influence on other media. What is its place in the landscape of contemporary popular culture?

5. What do you see as the effects of e-books on print culture? How, if at all, do they – or reading devices like tablets – affect the way you read?

Genre Study

Terrifying pleasures: Horror

Figure 1.2   MONSTER SUCCESS   Celebrated horror actor Lon Chaney Jr. in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942). First imagined by British writer Mary Shelley in her 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, the character became a fixture across media in the horror genre over the ensuing two centuries. (*The Ghost of Frankenstein*, 1942, Lon Chaney Jr., director Erle C. Kenton. © Photos 12/Alamy)

Go figure: some people just like to be scared.

Strictly speaking, this is something you *can't* figure: a desire to be scared is irrational. Fear is an emotion of anticipated harm; harm by definition is a negative outcome one wants to avoid. But approaching the appeal of horror – a media genre that stretches across print, radio, film, music, television, and gaming – as a rational matter misses the point. For hundreds of years, horror has been cherished precisely because it *is* irrational and deals with situations that are

outside the realm of ordinary life. By imaginatively immersing themselves in the unfamiliar – or in seeing the familiar in a new, darker light – horror fans satisfy an urge for novelty, confront fears that might otherwise be difficult to articulate, or affirm the (relatively safe) choices they've made.

Besides, it's only a book/movie/show/video game. The nightmares go away (eventually).

Though horror is not a genre one typically associates with reason, it makes a fair amount of sense to consider its emergence against such a backdrop. That's because its origins date from a specific historical moment – the late eighteenth century – and a specific intellectual movement: the Enlightenment. Horror happened as a reaction to the Enlightenment. So you can't really understand the former unless you have at least an idea of the latter.

Of course, the Enlightenment was itself a reaction. The preceding era in the Western world was one of superstition, conflict, and violence, much of it stemming from the Reformation, which pitted the old-line Catholic Church against a series of Protestant challengers, struggles that in many cases took on nationalistic dimensions. But after a century of almost continuous warfare, a growing number of people began to wonder if people killing each other in the name of Jesus Christ really made all that much sense. Such questions took on new relevance, even urgency, as an emerging scientific revolution unlocked secrets of the universe that had heretofore seemed unknowable. Logic, science, reason: is there anything we *can't* figure out eventually? A large number of thinkers from Voltaire in France to Thomas Jefferson in America believed the answer was no.

But even at the height of the Enlightenment, there were doubters. And that doubt took multiple forms. Some worried that an excessive emphasis on order and logic would simply take the beauty out of life. Among the first to act on this concern were a group of eighteenth-century architects who looked back to an earlier time when faith inspired the gorgeous cathedrals of the medieval era. This movement, which came to be known as Gothic, remained important, not only because the style it spawned continued to influence builders impatient with the aesthetics, or lack thereof, in

the Industrial Revolution (whose governing ideas can also be traced back to the Enlightenment), but also because the term "Gothic" would come into wide use in a variety of subcultural movements that challenged Enlightenment thinkers. (The Goths, by the way, were barbarian invaders of the Roman Empire – "barbarian" being a term which Romans applied to anyone they considered less civilized than themselves. Which is to say just about everyone. Until their conversion to Christianity, the Goths were also pagans, which is to say they had beliefs that others found repellent or frightening – precisely what appeals to adherents of contemporary Goth culture, with its strong emphasis on dark fashion and music.)

Other critics of the Enlightenment believed its followers were both arrogant and naïve in their belief that the world was a reasonable place. In his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, considered by many historians the first major work of Gothic literature, Horace Walpole describes an aristocratic family haunted by prophecies of doom, helmets falling from the sky, and painted portraits that can walk. But the most important work in the founding of horror, in terms of both its popularity at the time and its vast subsequent influence, is Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. A signature document of Romanticism, the cultural movement that followed the Enlightenment, *Frankenstein* is a cautionary tale about a scientist, confident he understands the secret of life itself, who should have been careful about what he wished for. (Frankenstein, by the way, is the name of the creator of the monster, not the monster itself, which never actually gets a name.)

Gothic fiction was relatively easy to imagine in Europe, a place where decaying castles and monasteries, decadent old family lines, and lingering suspicion over the power of the Catholic Church – all fixtures of the genre – were common. Such features were a little more difficult to situate in the infant United States, where they could not be taken for granted. But that didn't stop some writers from trying. The most successful in this era was Charles Brockden Brown, who in novels like *Wieland* (1798), *Arthur Mervyn* (1793), and *Edgar Huntly* (1799) described murder, disease, and events that appeared to have supernatural origin. The tale that really put American horror on

the map, though, was Washington Irving's 1820 short story ''The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,'' with its unforgettable figure of Headless Horseman, who would go on to have a durable life in popular culture (most recently in the 1999 Tim Burton film *Sleepy Hollow*, starring Johnny Depp). Brown and Irving were gentleman writers who probably had a bigger following in Europe than they did in their native United States. But in the 1830s and 1840s a new generation of writers, among them George Lippard and Edgar Allan Poe, were making money, and making waves, by telling scary stories to an increasingly eager public. (See profile of Poe in this chapter.)

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Gothic fiction had established itself as a discrete branch of literature, and began to branch into specific subgenres. In a famous 1826 essay, English writer and Gothic pioneer Ann Radcliffe made a useful distinction between *terror*, which she defined as that which focused on anticipatory dread of bad things, and *horror*, which was more about their discovery or realization. One can also see an emerging divide between stories whose action is explained by supernatural events, like *The Exorcist*, a 1971 novel and 1973 movie that focused on demonic possession, and stories such as *The Silence of the Lambs* and its prequels/sequels (1986–2006), whose principal character, the brilliantly diabolical Hannibal Lecter, is terrifying in the sheer clarity with which he pursues his cannibalism. There is also overlap between the Gothic and other genres like science fiction; the 1938 Orson Welles radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* – which began as an 1898 Jules Verne novel and was resurrected most recently in 2005 as a Steven Spielberg movie – combined futurism and fear into a compelling hybrid (see Chapter 4).

In the minds of many observers, the late Victorian era was the golden age of Gothic literature. Stories like Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Irishman Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) became enduring classics and the basis of countless adaptations in other media. (*Dracula* in particular was important for injecting the folkloric figure of the vampire into pop culture, and establishing the Eastern European region of Transylvania as ground zero of horror tales.) One reason for the vitality of the genre was

new currents in psychology – these were the years Sigmund Freud was laying the foundations for psychoanalysis – that emphasized the role of unconscious and forbidden impulses that lurked beneath the surface of polite society. These currents would be picked up and carried forward by American writers such as H.P. Lovecraft, who followed in the Poe tradition of writing cheap fiction in so-called pulp magazines, which thrived in the first half of the century.

By this point, though, the locus of the genre had begun shifting from print to new media, particularly radio and film. Crucially, however, these and later media relied heavily on print antecedents for their source material. Indeed, the great horror impresario of our time, novelist Stephen King, whose critical reputation has risen steadily in recent decades, has been a one-man industry across media platforms (see ''Document Study / *Carrie*: Princess of blood, King of horror''). At the same time, a distinctly cinematic approach to the genre took shape, and film remains the dominant medium of horror. When one considers some of the landmark horror movies of the last century – F.W. Murnau's adaptation of *Dracula* in *Nosferatu* (1922); Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960); Brian DePalma's film version of King's *Carrie* (1976) – it's easy to see that their power derives from their sense of visual spectacle (one reason why horror movies tend to be scarier in a movie theater than on home video). The iconic image of Janet Leigh's character being stabbed in a shower in *Psycho*, or the blood-drenched Sissy Spacek about to wreak havoc on her high-school classmates in *Carrie*, has long since become part of our collective memory. Sometimes, the fear such movies evoke can be all the more striking in the way they make the innocuous suddenly seem dreadful, as when Hitchcock shows us innocent-looking birds going collectively berserk in *The Birds* (1963). Other times, it's a matter of shockingly subverting our expectations for what a movie is supposed to do, as when he kills off the character we're led to believe is the protagonist early on in *Psycho*. In many cases the power of horror is augmented when almost unbearable suspense is broken by (uneasy) humor, a tactic Jack Nicholson executes brilliantly in playing a demonically possessed psychopath in Stanley Kubrick's film version of King's *The Shining* (1980),

remembered today for the ironic signature line of the axe-wielding Nicholson singing ''come out come out wherever you are!''

One of the more striking creative frictions in horror is that its power rests on the unknown, and yet the most cherished classics of the genre have often been recurring series that make the supernatural seem almost routine. The most important and beloved example of this phenomenon is the horror episodes that were a core component of *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964), a television series created, produced, and often written by Rod Serling, who also appeared as a master of ceremonies to deliver monologues at the beginnings and ends of episodes. *The Twilight Zone* did not have recurring characters or fixed settings, but cohered around Serling's unique sensibility, which fused creepy occurrences and pointed moral messages in single-episode segments. This ''anthology'' approach was quite popular in radio and television. It was harder to make shows with a regular cast of monstrous characters, as familiarity is usually the antidote to fear. Indeed, two of the more successful situation comedies in TV history, *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family*, which ran simultaneously between 1964 and 1966, were based on this ironic premise.

In recent years, however, there has been an effort to create horror franchises with a recurrent cast, setting, and situations, notably in the subgenre of vampire stories, which have undergone a remarkable renaissance in the twenty-first century. The queen of the modern vampire tale is Anne Rice, whose ''Vampire Chronicles'' date back to her hugely successful 1976 novel *Interview with a Vampire*, which was made into a blockbuster movie starring heartthrobs Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt in 1994. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), which featured Sarah Michelle Gellar as the title character, focused on a young woman dedicated to preventing chaos in the ironically named town of Sunnydale, California. In 2008, the cable television network Home Box Office followed up the success of *The Sopranos* (1999–2007), a series about the not-quite oxymoron of everyday gangster life, by launching *True Blood* (2008–), a show about modern-day vampires in small-town Louisiana, based on the novels of Charlaine Harris. Among other things, the series functions as an allegory of gay

rights; certainly vampire stories – and the overlapping subgenre of werewolf stories – have long functioned as surrogate means for exploring sexuality (werewolves also surface in *True Blood*). This is also true for another vampire saga, *Twilight*, which began with a quartet of novels by Stephanie Meyer (2005–2008) and continued as a movie franchise (2008–2012). But while *True Blood* works as a surrogate means of promoting gay identity, *Twilight* is more a parable of abstinence, as the vampire Edward Cullen (no relation – that I know of) struggles to restrain his bloodlust for his beloved, Isabella Swan. *Twilight* too has a werewolf dimension in the third character of the love triangle, Jacob Black.

Horror, meanwhile, continues to thrive in other media. ''Goth,'' subgenre of heavy-metal rock that emerged in the 1980s in bands like The Damned and The Cure, continues to have adherents. The Goth look has also become perennial in youth fashion. And horror video games are among the most widely played, complete with an active online community. Ghosts remain alive in machines.

I'm afraid horror is here to stay. Are you relieved?

Questions to consider

1. What are some of the reasons people like to be scared?
2. Explain how the genre of horror emerged from the Enlightenment.
3. How did the migration of horror to other media change its impact?
4. How do you account for the recent popularity of vampire culture, from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*?

Document Study

The ravenous imagination of Edgar Allan Poe

Figure 1.3   MOURNING BIRD   Illustration of Edgar Allen Poe's grave, featuring the ominous creature from his celebrated 1845 poem ''The Raven.'' Poe had one of the most fertile imaginations in the history of popular culture, and his celebrated poem eventually became the inspiration for a National Football League team. (© Illustration Works/Alamy)

Imagine, if you will, a not wholly implausible scenario: a Pop Culture Hall of Fame, modeled on those for professional sports (or the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland). Each year, experts would vote on new inductees who would be judged on the basis of a large and lasting body of work. But, as with other halls of fame, there would also be charter members for this one, a set of people

who formed the core membership at the very outset. One of those people would surely be Edgar Allan Poe. I'd put a bust of him right out in the lobby. With a big black raven sitting on his shoulder.

Poe was a bona fide celebrity in his own time. He wasn't exactly Lady Gaga famous; he was more like Amy Winehouse famous: a name many people would recognize, some would know and admire (even if they knew there was something vaguely scandalous about him, partly involving addiction), and a few would follow with devotion and intensity. What makes Poe so special – really so important – is the breadth and depth of his impact in the century and a half following his death. His influence can be traced in an extraordinarily wide range of literary directions, among them the poems of Charles Baudelaire, the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the short stories of Flannery O'Connor. But even more than as a literary figure, Poe looms large as a founding father of popular culture, a writer who helped lay the foundations for a series of genres across media, among them detective stories, science fiction, and, our focus here, horror.

In some respects, his life was a horror show in its own right. Born Edgar Poe in Boston in 1809, his father abandoned his family, which included an older brother and younger sister, when he was an infant. When Poe's mother died the following year, he was essentially an orphan. He did have the good fortune of becoming the foster child of John and Frances Allan of Richmond, Virginia, who raised him as their own (hence his name Edgar *Allan* Poe). But, despite the fact that the Allans educated Poe well – his schools included the University of Virginia and West Point – he had a falling-out with his surrogate father that led to him being disinherited from what would have been a large fortune. Poe struggled financially for his entire adult life. He also endured tragedy when his wife – who was actually his cousin, and 13 years old when he married her – died of tuberculosis as a young woman (the theme of lost love is particularly prominent in his poetry). Perhaps not coincidentally, Poe struggled with alcoholism, a problem that probably contributed, directly or indirectly, to his death under never entirely explained circumstances in 1849 at the tragically young age of 40.

It didn't help matters any that Poe was determined to support himself as a writer, a precarious business in any era. He held – and lost – a series of writing and editing positions at a number of prominent magazines of the early nineteenth century, moving between Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York over the course of his career. Though he boosted circulation for the periodicals for which he worked, he never held a job for more than a couple of years. At the time of his death he was planning to launch a magazine of his own in Philadelphia.

In literary terms, Poe was a sprinter, not a long-distance runner: many of his tales run to fewer than 10 pages. He published books of short stories and poems, and his only novel, a seafaring tale called *The Narrative of Gordon Pym* (1838), was also brief. But Poe packed a tremendous punch. One of his most famous characters, an elegant Parisian of simple – and nocturnal – tastes, C. Auguste Dupin, appeared in a mere three stories, among them Poe's masterpieces ''The Murders at the Rue Morgue'' (1841) and ''The Purloined Letter'' (1844), which laid the foundations for the modern detective story. (Each year the Mystery Writers of America hand out awards for achievement in their field known as ''Edgars.'') Poe's work was also important in the origins of modern science fiction; his 1835 story ''The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall'' tells the tale of a trip to the moon using a balloon and special technology that allows him to create breathable air from the vacuum of space.

Poe made his greatest impact as a writer of Gothic fiction. ''The Fall of the House of Usher'' (1839) is a masterpiece of gloomy atmosphere; ''The Masque of Red Death'' (1845) is a classic of feverish foreboding that has been alluded to many times by subsequent writers, among them Stephen King. Poe is particularly celebrated as a writer ahead of his time in the depth of his psychological insight. In ''The Tell-Tale Heart'' and ''The Black Cat'' (both 1843), he gives us unreliable narrators driven by guilt, insanity, or some combination of the two who confess to horrible crimes. A critic of science and the feel-good mentality of transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Poe crafted tales that were pointedly ambiguous

about supernatural forces that may lurk below the veneer of placid everyday life.

During his lifetime, Poe was best known for his poem ''The Raven,'' which turned him into a household name. You may find this a little surprising: today poetry (with the possible exception of hip-hop lyrics) is not really considered popular culture. But in the nineteenth century, poems were widely published, recited, memorized, and even parodied, and for no poem was this more true than ''The Raven.'' From the time of its appearance in a New York newspaper in 1845, the poem became an inescapable presence. Like gangsta rap or Harry Potter in our time, it's something you know about whether you want to or not.

Part of the reason is that it's so catchy. ''The Raven'' is like a song that you get into your head and find yourself singing without even realizing it. Here's how it begins:

> Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
> Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore –
> While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
> As some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
> '''tis some visitor,'' I muttered, ''tapping at my chamber door –
> Only this and nothing more.''

Poe sets the scene with economy: a melancholy scholar is struggling to stay awake while poring over books (sound familiar?). But his sadness is more than casual: he is mourning the death of his true love, Lenore, and had vainly hoped his studies would afford him distraction from his sorrow. Now, however, someone appears to be knocking on the door of his apartment. Someone – or some thing. But when the narrator opens that door, there's no one there: darkness and ''nothing more.'' Wait: could it be that in the December gloom he heard the name ''Lenore''? Apparently not. He closes the door.

But then our scholar hears tapping at his window. So he opens the shutter – and in flies a raven, which lands on a pale marble statue of Pallas, also known as Athena, the Greek god of wisdom.

Is this a coincidence? At first the scholar is amused, and he begins talking to the big black bird, asking its name. He's a bit startled when the bird replies in a single word that constitutes its entire vocabulary – and the last word in every subsequent stanza of the poem: ''Nevermore.''

Funny name: Nevermore. The scholar guesses that the Raven was trained to say this by a missing master. Initially glad for the company, he speculates aloud that the bird will soon leave him, just as Lenore has. But the Raven responds to this suggestion by parroting its trademark expression. Sitting down, the narrator begins to ponder the Raven and its disconcertingly fiery eyes. As he sinks deeper into brooding, he senses spirits lurking in the room, and asks the fowl to provide some reassurance and relief from his grief over Lenore. Not a great question: you can guess what the bird says. Indeed, one way of reading the poem is as an illustration of self-sabotage: why on earth would a person ask a one-trick bird whether he and Lenore will be reunited in heaven when he knows what the answer will inevitably be? And what does he think that bird will say when he insists that it fly away? He's got to be crazy.

But that doesn't explain everything. For there *is* something creepy about the way the bird flew in, and the way it just sits there as the poem ends:

> And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
> On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
> And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming
> And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
> And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
> > Shall be lifted – nevermore!

It's not clear from the way the poem ends whether the narrator has literally killed himself, or whether it's simply his soul that he imagines floating, but not rising, off the floor. Either way, the raven – and the uncertainty as well as possible malice it represents – remains to haunt the rest of us.

''The Raven'' has had an afterlife in popular culture that has been nothing less than phenomenal. It has appeared, directly or by

allusion, in countless books, movies, and television shows straight into the twenty-first century. Among the references you might recognize are those to ''the Nevermore Tree'' in *The Vile Village* (2001), the seventh volume of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*; a 1990 episode of *The Simpsons* in which James Earl Jones (of Darth Vader fame) recites the poem; and the Seattle-based heavy-metal band Nevermore.

There's one more reference that's worth mentioning, and one that brings us back to our sports analogy. In 1995, the owner of Cleveland Browns National Football franchise, Art Modell, moved his team to Baltimore. The city's hometown newspaper, the *Sun*, which dates back to Poe's day – Poe is buried in Baltimore – conducted a poll to determine the team's new name. The winner, as you probably guessed, was the Ravens, whose colors are purple and black (the team wear black pants as well as jerseys on special occasions). Over 150 years after the poem was first published, ''The Raven'' had yet another new lease on life. Not even black cats have this many.

Questions to consider

1. How would you describe Edgar Allan Poe's place in American culture? With whom might you compare him in contemporary popular culture?
2. Poe is known for straddling across many pop-culture genres, like the detective story, science fiction, and horror. What qualities mark these genres? Do they have anything in common?
3. What do you think is actually happening in ''The Raven?'' Do you see it as a psychological tale, a supernatural tale, or something else altogether?

Document Study

Carrie*: Princess of blood, King of horror*

Figure 1.4 *CARRIED* AWAY One of many paperback editions of Stephen King's 1974 novel *Carrie*, which was also made into a highly successful 1976 movie. There was a feminist subtext to the story that helped propel the horror genre into the twenty-first century. (© CBW/Alamy)

When Stephen King was in college at the University of Maine in the late 1960s, he had a summer job as a janitor at his old high school. King was intrigued by the girls' locker room, in particular by two metal boxes on the walls, which he learned contained tampons. He filed the image away in what was already a vivid imagination.

By this point, King had already been writing stories for many years. They were, to be sure, amateur efforts; he had placed a couple in fanzines. But he worked steadily on them even as he held a series of other jobs after he finished college, among them at a laundry, where he routinely handled dirty (and bloody) linen. It was there that a scenario began to take shape: of an unpopular girl belatedly

and unexpectedly experiencing her first menstrual period in a locker room, and her alarm that she was bleeding to death provoking scorn among classmates, who pelt her with tampons ("Plug it up! Plug it up!" they chant). King filed *that* image away – along with some information he had gleaned about telekinesis, a reputed ability to mentally move physical objects, one often attributed to children – until he began his first real job as a high-school English teacher, whereupon he finally tried to turn it into a short story.

And whereupon he threw it away. King wasn't sure he liked his characters, especially a protagonist he based on two high-school classmates of his own who were both outsiders and who both died young. He also realized that the piece had to be a good deal longer than a short story if it was going to work, making it difficult to sell. He also felt out of his comfort zone. "I had landed on Planet Female," he mused in his lively 2000 book *On Writing*. "One sortie into the girls' locker room at Brunswick High School years before wasn't much help in navigating there." It was King's wife, Tabitha, herself a novelist, who fished King's manuscript out of the trash. She coaxed him through the nuances of girl culture, even as King left plenty of narrative room for "those pictures of cheerleaders who had somehow forgotten to put on their underpants," which would appeal to a male audience.

He also tapped a vein of universal dread. "Nobody was really surprised when it happened, not really, not on the subconscious level where savage things grow," reads a sentence on the first page. We don't know at the outset what "it" is, but we're drawn to find out even as we know it can't be good. Such skillful language, combined with an uncanny gift for storytelling, allowed King to sell the manuscript for what became a short novel – simply called *Carrie* – which was published in 1974. The book launched one of the great careers in American literary history, and one of the great characters of the horror genre.

Though one can't make such a case with any precision, the fact that the main character in King's debut novel happens to be a female seems at least fitting, if not culturally determined. The early 1970s were the golden age of what historians call "Second Wave"

feminism (the first, early in the twentieth century, culminated in the 19th amendment to the Constitution, which gave women the vote). Second Wave feminism is often typically associated with workplace and family issues, along with those surrounding reproductive rights. But in its broadest formulations, feminism has always been an imaginative construct, too, involving the effort to engage aspects of women's lives that were ignored or disparaged in terms of their propriety as a matter of public discourse. An important measure of this movement was the degree to which it affected men; one of the great anthems of rock music in this period, for example, was Tom Petty's classic song ''American Girl'' (1976), which attributed some of the same longings and restlessness that had long been considered male prerogatives to females as well. Though it's a slight stretch to consider King a feminist writer, the success of *Carrie* can plausibly be attributed to the way he rode the zeitgeist even as he was situated squarely within the genre of horror fiction. In this regard, it's striking that the most important, and gendered, trope in the novel is blood: the menstrual blood of the opening scene is bookended by the menstrual blood of another at the end of the novel; in between are a series of other references to blood of other kinds, notably in the climax of the story.

Carrie is a somewhat unusual tale within the horror genre in other ways as well. King narrates the novel in documentary fashion, constructing it from a series of excerpts from fake newspaper, memoir, and scholarly accounts, all of which were ''published'' years after *Carrie* itself was, giving the story a slight futuristic overlay. It's also striking that the title character is, for most of the story, a victim.

The novel opens with the title character, Carrie White, in the scenario King had imagined years before. In the pages that follow, she suffers at the hands of multiple antagonists – not only vicious classmates, but also an inept principal and a fundamentalist Christian mother whose severely puritanical notions of sin and sexuality lead her to lock Carrie in a closet with a macabre crucifix at the slightest hint of independence. It's not that her community is devoid of goodwill; after thoughtless behavior early in the story, Carrie's gym

teacher tries to help her and punish those who abused her, and her classmate, Sue Snell, arranges for her boyfriend to take Carrie as his date to the prom. But their efforts are finally fruitless in the face of the malignant Chris Hargensen, who retaliates for getting barred from the prom by hatching a scheme with her boyfriend to humiliate Carrie at the very moment of her triumph.

What no one – except, gradually, Carrie herself – realizes is that she is endowed with telekinetic powers that express themselves in moments of high anxiety. For a while it seems like the bizarre rain of stones on her house (or the blowing of a bulb in the locker room, or the toppling of the principal's ashtray) are isolated phenomena. But Carrie comes to understand and direct her submerged anger. When finally confronted by the unremitting hatred of Chris and her allies, she lashes out in cataclysmic fashion. The literal and figurative explosions that follow represent both satisfying comeuppance and dismaying tragedy, one of a number of ambiguities in the novel that are confusing, but which also give the tale its haunting power.

Like much popular fiction of its time, *Carrie* made its real impact not upon publication in hardcover, but rather when it appeared the following year in a paperback edition. The paperback rights for the novel sold for $400,000, a sum King found staggering, but would soon seem paltry for a man who became one of the most prolific and successful writers of modern times. By the early 1990s, there were 90 million copies of his books in print. Many subsequent King novels – *The Shining* (1977), *The Stand* (1978), and *Misery* (1987) – are widely regarded as classics. King has also been an innovator in the way he presents his work; he published his 1996 novel *The Green Mile* in six serialized paperback installments, and was among the first writers to experiment with e-book fiction, some of which he issued for free. For most of his career King was not considered a serious literary figure, in large measure because genre fiction of all kinds was considered less serious than more self-consciously artistic novels. But that has begun to change in recent years, as narrative craft (as opposed to, say, complex language) has received more critical recognition.

King has also become a one-man cottage industry in Hollywood, where his work is routinely adapted for movies and television.

But perhaps no screen version of his work has the charm (if that's the right word) of the 1976 film version of *Carrie*. It was the breakthrough commercial film for the noted Hollywood director Brian DePalma, who brought a highly stylized (and famously gruesome) sensibility to the project. *Carrie* was also notable for the breadth of its acting talent, which included veterans like Piper Laurie and Betty Buckley as well as newer faces, among them John Travolta as Chris Hargensen's boyfriend and Sissy Spacek as Carrie. Unusually for a horror film, Laurie and Spacek were each nominated for Academy Awards on the strength of their mother–daughter performances. The movie still routinely makes various best-of lists.

    Carrie has also been the subject of multiple remakes. Most of these have been flops, among them a 1988 Broadway musical (there was an off-Broadway revival in 2012), a 1999 sequel (*The Rage: Carrie 2*), and a 2002 made-for-television movie. A 2013 film version, starring Chloe Grace Moretz and directed by Kimberly Peirce, took advantage of new technology to give the movie a more spectacular climax that reflected the novel better than DePalma wanted to and/or could 37 years earlier.

    But the heart of *Carrie* remains a tormented teenage girl. As long as we have those, the story will have a certain resonance.

Questions to consider

1. How did Stephen King's experiences shape his abilities as a storyteller? What were the limits of those experiences? How did he overcome them?
2. Do you think *Carrie* is a feminist story? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the most important elements in the making of a successful novel? Memorable characters? A good storyline? Vivid language? Do any of these count more than others?
4. What is it about *Carrie* that has proven so resonant across multiple generations? How would you compare it with other horror stories you know?

Further Reading

The scope of print culture is so vast that it's almost never discussed, as it has been in this chapter, in terms of the medium as a whole. Typically people who write, research, and read about publishing choose a particular form of print: journalism (segmented in terms of newspapers, magazines, online publications, and so on), fiction (of various genres), and then non-fiction by subject. Given the intensifying specialization of modern times, one has to go pretty far back for general surveys even within a particular genre. 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). On books, see James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

For more recent surveys, see John Tebbel's distillation of his multi-volume history of book publishing, *Between Covers: The Rise and Transformation of Book Publishing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Tebbel is also the author of *The Magazine in America, 1741–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). 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). For a very good analysis of print culture in a specific historical moment, see Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

One important angle of approach to print shifts the subject away from the producers to consumers. A pivotal figure here was Raymond Williams. See *The Long Revolution* (1961; Cardigan: Parthian Press, 2012). See also Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Penguin, 1997). Two anthologies are of note: Cathy Davidson's *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1989), and the more general *History of Reading in the West*, edited by Gulielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). On the future of print and reading, see Dennis Baron, *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

On the genre of horror, see David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (1993; New York: Faber & Faber 2001), and Wheeler Winston Dixon, *A History of Horror* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010). See also the anthology *The Philosophy of Horror*, edited by Richard Fahy (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010).

Edgar Allan Poe's work has been widely anthologized, and much is available online. He has also been the subject of numerous biographical studies. For a brief point of departure, see Peter Ackroyd's *Poe: A Life Cut Short* (New York: Doubleday, 2009). Stephen King's 1974 novel *Carrie* is available in multiple editions, the most recent of which was published by Anchor Books in 2011. See also King's combination of advice and autobiography in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, now in its second edition (2000; New York: Scribner, 2010).