

Everyone's Watching: True Crime [B2]

L'attrazione per il mondo criminale è atavica e connaturata all'essere umano. Andiamo a rintracciarne le origini e analizziamo i motivi che spiegano il trionfo del genere d'intrattenimento più oscuro, secondo le forme in cui si presenta.



For a surprising number of people, [a typical evening in](#) might involve [gruesome](#) killings, violent [kidnappings](#), extreme [cults](#) and cold-blooded acts of [embezzlement](#)... That's right, true crime is [all the rage](#). The genre represents an expansive section of mainstream nightly viewing: it is prominent on streaming channels such as Netflix, and ubiquitous on YouTube. But evidence of the dark side of human nature was not invented for cyberspace: [legacy media](#), books and podcasts have been [crawling with](#) macabre stories of crime, [deceit](#) and [doom](#) for a while now, inherited from an era when stories based on real horrible events were told in the form of oral ballads.

THE POPULAR PRESS

It was, in fact, the parallel development of both the criminal justice system and the [printing press](#) in the 16th century that acted as a catalyst for the birth of true crime and its popularisation. In its early days, the literature of the genre interpreted violence through a [narrow](#) religious code, [aiming](#) to use real-life stories of murder and [sin](#) as [cautionary tales](#). The moral [shortcomings](#) of the [culprits](#) were presented as direct causes of their crimes and [punishments](#).

EXECUTION SERMONS

A very specific form of the early true crime genre was execution sermons. Particularly popular amongst Puritans, 16th- and 17th-century [zealots](#) who wished to purge the Protestant church of anything not strictly found in the Bible, these cautionary speeches were delivered to the audience before executions so that they would learn every detail of the circumstances which led to the condemned person's [fate](#). The Salem [Witch Trials](#), a series of prosecutions of [alleged](#) witches in late-17th century Massachusetts, are an [infamous](#) example of this practice.

PENNY DREADFULS

Throughout the 1800s, the genre was nurtured by a boom in detective stories and the so-called '[penny dreadfuls](#)': cheap mass-produced serial literature that sensationalised stories of actual crimes. They found an audience among the increa[singly](#) [literate](#) working classes who could [afford](#) the penny they cost.

ADRENALINE RUSH

So, why are we still attracted to true stories of horrible crimes today? There are many theories, some based on psychology and some on morality. From lawyers and criminology experts to true-crime authors and amateur internet detectives, the genre brings together those [caught up](#) in a survivalist

[adrenaline rush](#), but also those searching for order and justice in a chaotic world.

TRUE CRIME HITS

The non-fiction book most widely recognised for shaping today's true crime genre is Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Ever [since](#) the release of the book in 1966, there have been numerous examples of the genre which have enjoyed widespread popularity, including Errol Morris' documentary *The Thin Blue Line* (1995-1996), which examined the murder of a Texas police officer, as well as podcast *Serial*, a [blueprint](#) for the sophisticated true crime podcasting scene which actually helped repair a wrongful conviction . International documentary film-makers have long been interested in true crime stories: successful productions include French docuseries *The Staircase* (2004), American series *Making a Murderer* (2015-2016), and *The People v. O. J. Simpson* (2016), based on Jeffrey Toobin's 1997 book. *Rachel Monroe: Beyond Macabre Fun*

Glossary

- **sin** = peccato
- **Witch Trials** = processi alle streghe
- **afford** = permettersi
- **a typical evening in** = una serata in casa
- **kidnappings** = rapimenti
- **aiming** = mirare
- **caught up** = coinvolti, catturati
- **all the rage** = di gran moda
- **crawling with** = pieni zeppi di
- **cautionary tales** = parabole di vita
- **punishments** = castighi
- **zealots** = fanatici
- **alleged** = presunte
- **penny dreadfuls** = romanzi d'appendice (lett. orrori per un penny)
- **adrenaline rush** = scarica di adrenalina
- **deceit** = menzogna, inganno
- **blueprint** = modello
- **shortcomings** = difetti
- **fate** = sorte, destino
- **cults** = sette, culti
- **embezzlement** = appropriazione indebita, fraudolenta
- **legacy media** = media tradizionali
- **infamous** = famigerato
- **doom** = rovina, morte
- **printing press** = stampa
- **culprits** = colpevoli
- **literate** = istruite
- **gruesome** = orripilanti
- **narrow** = stretto