

What were Penny Dreadfuls and Shilling Shockers?

Read the following extract:

In the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain, developments in printing and an increased literacy rate amongst the general population encouraged the production of publications aimed at a wide range of people, many of whom had little money to spend on reading material and limited reading skills. Thus arose the market for the penny dreadfuls. Penny dreadfuls were magazines published on inexpensive paper with fairly simple but exciting stories crammed together with often crude, vivid visuals seen at the time as being just as important as the written material. In 1873, Hotten's *Slang Dictionary* defined them as "those penny publications which depend more upon sensationalism than upon merit, artistic or literary, for success."

...

Despite the narrative's standard "good vs. evil" dichotomy, critics argued that the dreadfuls glorified the subversion of cultural conventions by seducing working-class youths toward crime, debauchery, or simply an unproductive, immoral lifestyle. ... However, just as Dracula cannot enter any home uninvited, the middle-class interest that Shaftesbury acknowledges reveals that the dreadfuls responded to instabilities in the foundation of the Victorian image of moral rectitude. Needs and desires felt by members of the middle-class were not being addressed by the literature and art sanctioned by the dominant moral voice, and so these people turned to the dreadfuls for pleasurable fulfillment. And we, as readers, can turn to characters such as the Blue Dwarf, Starlight Nell, Spring Heel'd Jack, and Tyburn Dick to gain a better understanding of the diverse needs and desires of the Victorians themselves.

From: <http://www.ryerson.ca/~denisoff/dreadful-defined.html>

What were Penny Dreadfuls and Shilling Shockers?

Answer the following questions as fully as you can. Your responses will help you understand the reasons for the Victorian obsession with horror and gothic literature.

What were the main reasons behind the development of the 'Penny Dreadful' industry?	
What (or who) was the intended market for the 'Dreadfuls'?	
What were some of the common themes of the 'Dreadfuls'?	
What were some of the dangers of young people accessing the 'Dreadfuls' thought to be?	
Some critics saw the books as inappropriate; why then were they so popular?	
As you study your Victorian text note down any similarities you see between it and the 'Dreadfuls'.	