

AMERICAN SENSATIONS



"SENSATION CULTURE"--NARRATIVES OF SCANDAL, TRANSGRESSION, CRIMINALITY, AND IRRATIONALITY--BEGAN IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND HAS BEEN A KEY PART OF MASS CULTURE EVER SINCE. WE WILL READ PAST AND PRESENT GENRES LIKE THE GOTHIC, DETECTIVE FICTION, THE "SENSATION NOVEL," PENNY DREADFULS, AND PULP FICTION.

ENGL 495AS (Mondays, 11:30-12:45 pm)

This course will show that "sensation culture"-- narratives of scandal, transgression, criminality, and irrationality--began in the 19th century and has been a key part of mass culture ever since. We will focus on U.S. literature but consider its influences from a transatlantic perspective and adaptation of sensation fiction in popular culture. Students may read past and present works from genres like the gothic, detective fiction, the "sensation novel", and others, as well as excerpts from cheap texts like penny dreadfuls, dime novels, and pulp fiction. We will be particularly interested in the forgotten, marginalized, or unacknowledged authors of sensation fiction whose works influenced popular culture today, from Pauline Hopkins' Wakanda-like sci-fi and Cherokee John Rollin Ridge's gorey dime novel to Louisa May Alcott's double literary life as a thriller author (pseudonym "A.M Barnard").