‘Yes or No’, Photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron, 1865, at the V&A
Victorian Sensation usually relates to a genre of literature that shocked and scandalised its readers in the period 1859, with the publication of Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, to 1880. Sensation literature is often described as melodramatic with plots involving bigamy, adultery, poison and compelling aristocratic villains. Other famous sensation novels like *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *East Lynne* were swiftly adapted for the theatre where they proved ever popular. This module will examine these three novels to discover what made them so sensational to Victorian readers.

As well as Sensation Literature, the Victorians were witness to other sensations and these also will be discussed in class. We have the sensational science of Charles Darwin, and the sensational photography of Julia Margaret Cameron while the paintings of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood outraged the art world. The poet of the age was Alfred Lord Tennyson and while he may have not caused a sensation Arthur Hallam called him the poet of sensation, as his poetry appealed to all the human senses. All these new aspects of Victorian modernity coalesce in the ‘Age of Sensation.’

We will be looking at mainly British literature, but we will turn to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to see how issues such as the abolition of slavery have a place in melodrama.

Course aims:

- To familiarise you with some key texts of mid- to late-Victorian science and the genre of popular scientific writing in the Victorian period
- To encourage debate about the structures and principles of the nineteenth-century physiology of the senses and Victorian psychology
- To provide you with a broad historical context in which to situate your responses to the Victorian sensation novel
- To provide you with a broad historical context in which to situate their responses to Pre- Raphaelite and other Victorian paintings housed at the Tate Britain
- To familiarise you with a number of nineteenth-century melodramatic adaptations
- To equip you imaginatively to reconstruct the spectacle of the Victorian stage

Materials

While many of the texts are to be found on the Internet, it would be best to obtain copies of the following. There are various copies:

In order of study:

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859)

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862)


Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (1861)

Charles Dickens: *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (1844)

Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870)

Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* (1871)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851)

**Assessment:**

**Scene Recreation:** 1x1500 word scene recreation from a sensation novel for stage OR a close reading of a scene (either novel or drama) OR a close reading of a Pre-Raphaelite painting. (20%)

**Essay:** 1x 4000 word essay (80%)

**To Visit:**

Students should visit the following:

The Tate Britain for their Pre-Raphaelite paintings (free)

The Julia Margaret Cameron Exhibition at the V&A on until 21st February (admission charge)

Julia Margaret Cameron at the Science Museum until 28th March (free)
Schedule

Week 1

Sensational Introduction


Hermann von Helmholtz, ‘On The Recent Progress of the Theory of Vision’ (c. 1868) http://www.archive.org/stream/popularlectures02atkigoog#page/n216/mode/2up

Essay starts p.197

Hermann von Helmholtz, ‘On the Relation of Optics to Painting’ (c. 1865) http://www.archive.org/stream/popularlectures00helmrich#page/72/mode/2up Essay starts p.73.

Week 2

Poets of Sensation

Lord Alfred Tennyson, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830)

‘The Lady of Shallot’ (1830/1842)

‘Ulysses’ (1833)

Robert Browning, ‘My Last Duchess’ (1842)

‘Porphyria’s Lover’ (1842)

‘Love Among the Ruins’ (1855)

‘Caliban upon Setebos’ (1864)


Week 3

Sensational Science

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species* (1859), Chapters IV (Natural Selection); Chapter V (Laws of Variation); Chapter XIV (Recapitulation and Conclusion)
Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871); Chapters I-VII

Edward Bulwer Lytton, *A Strange Story* (1862); Found at: [http://www.archive.org/stream/strangestory01lytt#page/n0/mode/2up](http://www.archive.org/stream/strangestory01lytt#page/n0/mode/2up)

Volume I, Chapters XXXI and XXXII
Volume II, Chapters XLIII to XLIX

Week 4

**Other Origins of Sensation**

Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White* (1859)

E. S. Dallas, *The Gay Science* (1866); *Volume I, Chapter VI (On Imagination): Volume I, Chapter VII (The Hidden Soul): Volume I, Chapter VIII (The Play of Thought)*

Found at [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=X78NAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=gay+science&hl=en&ei=n5okTfGlEcqIhQeByqmKAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CD8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=X78NAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=gay+science&hl=en&ei=n5okTfGlEcqIhQeByqmKAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CD8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Week 5

**Sensation/ Melodrama**

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862)


An American edition of the same play can be found at: [http://www.archive.org/stream/ladyaudleyssecret00hazl#page/n1/mode/2up](http://www.archive.org/stream/ladyaudleyssecret00hazl#page/n1/mode/2up)

William E. Suter, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, a drama in two acts, adapted from Miss Braddon’s novel of the same title (London: T Hailes Lacy, n.d.)

An American edition of the same play can be found at [http://www.archive.org/stream/ladyaudleyssecret00sute#page/n1/mode/2up](http://www.archive.org/stream/ladyaudleyssecret00sute#page/n1/mode/2up)
Week 6

Reading Week

Week 7

Sensation and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood


Selections from John Ruskin; will be available on Keats

Week 8

Sensational Novels

Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (1861)

Week 9

Dickens and Melodrama

Charles Dickens: *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (1844)

Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870)


Week 10

Late Sensation

Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* (1871)
Week 11

**Race, Melodrama and America**

Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1851)

Theatre production:

George Aiken, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) at:

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**Further Reading**

*History of science*


*Victorian literature and science (including theories of race)*


Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire: discourses of class, race, and colonialism in the works of Charles Dickens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004)


*Sensation Novel*


Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation, or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in 19th-century Britain* (London: Anthem, 2003)


*Feminism and Sensation*


Jill Matus, ‘Disclosure as “cover-up”: the discourse of madness in Lady Audley’s Secret’, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 62.3 (1993),


*Pre-Raphaelitism*


Lindsay Smith, *Victorian Photography, Painting, and Poetry: the enigma of visibility in Ruskin, Morris, and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)

Melodrama


Joseph Donahue and James Ellis, eds, *The London Stage Project: a documentary record and calendar of performances*, [http://people.umass.edu/a0fs000/lsp.html](http://people.umass.edu/a0fs000/lsp.html)


Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in theatre, science and education* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2007)


*Sentiment*
