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Introduction 1

Appraises sensation fiction as a genre that struggled for cultural respectability due in large part to its mass market appeal. Identifies how these controversial narratives are represented by mid-Victorian opponents as both the outcome of and response to a cultural craving which mainstream society has failed to appease. Traces the social misgivings confronted and processed by literary sensationalism. Asks what this sub-genre of Gothic fiction has to offer twenty-first century readers of Victorian literature.

CHAPTER ONE 9

The Rise, Fall and Revival of Sensation Fiction

Examines H. L. Mansel's 1863 response to the mass-market appeal of sensation fiction, as well as discussing the pointed interventions of Geraldine Jewsbury, M. E. Braddon, Margaret Oliphant and George Eliot. Details the genre's apparent indebtedness to older, working-class forms of popular entertainment. Explores Winifred Hughes's seminal construction of an apparently self-contained sensational decade. Details Andrew Maunder's notion that literary sensationalism is a complex generic hybrid that defies containment within the 1860s. Explores the Modernist denigration of sensation fiction, as part of a more general rejection of Victorian aesthetics by figures such as T. S. Eliot. Offers an overview of recent research by Lyn Pykett, Patrick Brantlinger, Jenny Bourne Taylor and Tamar Heller that has led to a remarkable revival of interest in the genre.

CHAPTER TWO 34

Crime and Detection

Addresses the genre's dependency on elaborate plots that exploit intrigue, subterfuge and the solving of puzzles. Assesses Kathleen Tillotson's designation of sensation narratives as 'novels with a secret'. Scrutinizes Martin Kayman's assessment of the secret as an

organizing principle of a sensation plot. Also discusses John Kucich's concept of a literary genre that portrays a culture obsessed with falsehood and fabrication. Gauges sensation fiction's preoccupation with questions of policing and the various forms of discipline outlined by D. A. Miller, Marlene Tromp and Brian W. McCuskey. Deals with the amateur sleuth or detective inspector as a notable and complex presence in sensation fiction, with reference to research by Ronald R. Thomas, Martin Priestman and Caroline Reitz.

CHAPTER THREE

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Class and Social (Im-)Propriety

Discusses mid-Victorian reading practices and how the language of social caste imbues initial critical reactions to the genre. Concentrates on early reviewers such as Francis Paget, Margaret Oliphant and W. Fraser Rae who sought to correlate a reading class specific to sensation fiction. Gauges the threat sensation posed to clear definitions of privilege and power, as well as the genre's potential to 'contaminate' respectable readers and erode orthodox notions of 'family values'. Discusses the scholarship of Graham Law, Deborah Wynne and Cannon Schmitt in terms of how literary sensationalism interrogates social and literary decorum.

CHAPTER FOUR

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Women, Gender and Feminism

Explores critical reactions to woman as writer-subject-reader of sensation fiction. Opens by focusing on Margaret Oliphant, one of the foremost female reviewers of the period, whose interpretations identify, and deplore, women's intimate ties to literary sensationalism. Investigates the genre's repeated portrayal of women in the throes of aberrant passion and insanity. Summarizes recent interpretations of the genre by Elaine Showalter, Tamar Heller, Ann Cvetkovich and Lillian Nayder as a challenge to repressive authorities as well as the reader's ingrained passivity. Addresses the work of E. Ann Kaplan and Lyn Pykett and how maternity becomes a chief concern for female sensation writing, especially Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*.

CHAPTER FIVE

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Domesticity, Modernity and Race(ism)

Concentrates on the sensational construction of 'home' as a site of resistance, refusal and division. Discusses the genre's preoccupation with a tainted domesticity as a critique of a modern homeland vulnerable to foreign incursion. Investigates scholarly engagements with the genre's portrayal of a hectic and anxious modernity, such as Walter Phillip's

designation of sensationalism as 'romance of the present'. Discusses work by Tim Dolin, D. A. Miller and Nicholas Daly on the 'shock' of sensation fiction and its staging of nervous debility. Investigates the genre's insistent mapping of metropolitan and national terrain, which raises questions about contested ideologies of Englishness. Samples debates surrounding sensational depictions of the foreign outsider in an age of expansionist foreign policy. Critics discussed include Jenny Bourne Taylor, Pamela Gilbert, Lillian Nayder, Deirdre David and Ian Duncan.

CHAPTER SIX

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The Mutation of Sensation

Addresses how commentators have documented the sensation genre's evolution beyond its 1860s heyday. Evaluates Sheridan Le Fanu's vexed relationship with the 'sensation school', and how his hybrid narratives have been construed as a foreshadowing of late-Victorian Gothic by recent critics such as W. J. McCormack, Alison Milbank and Victor Sage. Charts the metamorphosis of the genre into myriad textual and narrative forms between 1870 and 1900. Traces an intricate genealogy of generic indebtedness on the part of canonical writers such as George Meredith, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Henry James and Thomas Hardy. Assesses the sensation genre as an unlikely model of inspiration for Joseph Conrad in the early twentieth century. Concludes by focusing on sensation as a tenaciously resilient genre, whose influence can be felt in contemporary fiction by Graham Swift and A. S. Byatt.

Conclusion

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Evaluates the future for research into Victorian sensation fiction. Explains the genre as a transitional constellation of texts that divulge key Victorian preoccupations, such as the enervating limitations of bourgeois domesticity, the threat of the 'foreign' and the dangers for women of romantic fantasy. Revisits the seminal research of Andrew Maunder who argues for a more ambitious conception of literary sensationalism, given that re-evaluations of the genre too often result in the construction of a narrow alternative canon. Finally, historians of the periodical press such as Peter Sinnema and Jennifer Phegley gauge the genre's evolution beyond the bourgeois drawing-room into other localities and reading spaces.

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