

FORGETTABLE INFRACTIONS: STREET HARASSMENT IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

Our research traces street harassment to a specific moment in history: nineteenth-century London, as the urban space was modernized and occupied by both genders. We investigate the intersection of crime and mobility in this time of urban upheaval by tracking character travel and instances of violence in four Sensation novels:

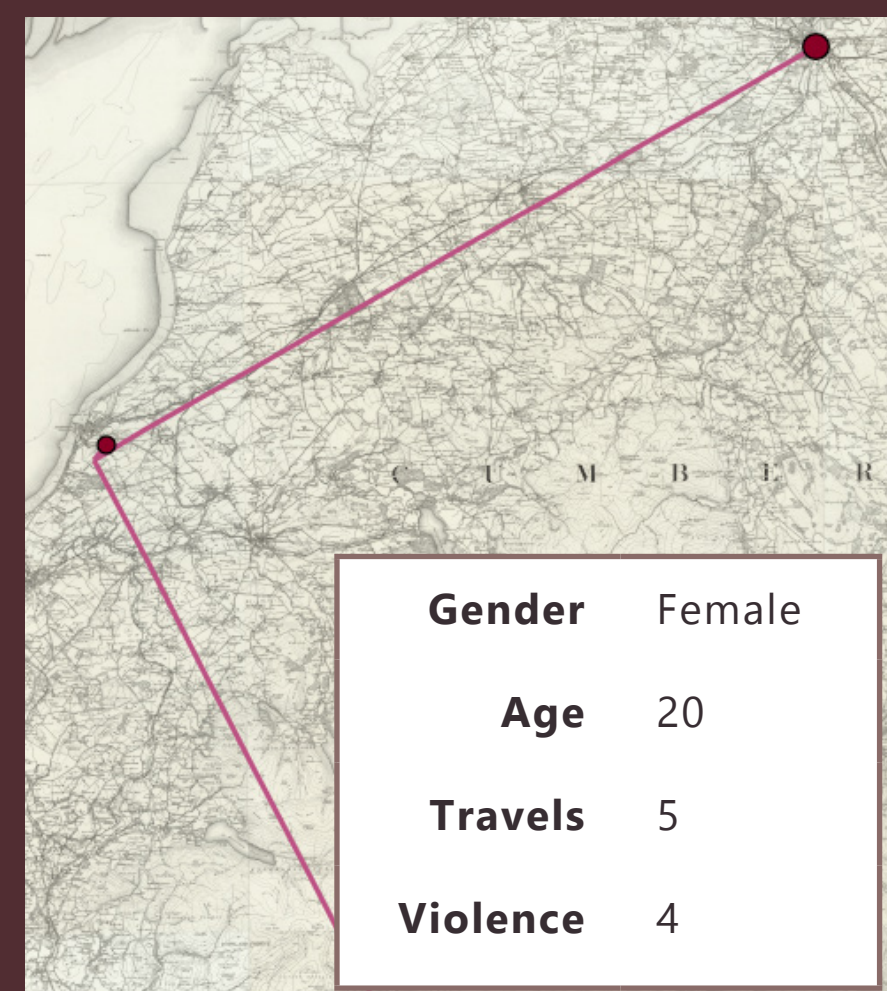
Woman in White 1860 Wilkie Collins	The Moonstone 1868 Wilkie Collins	Lady Audley's Secret 1862 Mary Braddon	East Lynne 1861 Ellen Wood
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SENSATION FICTION

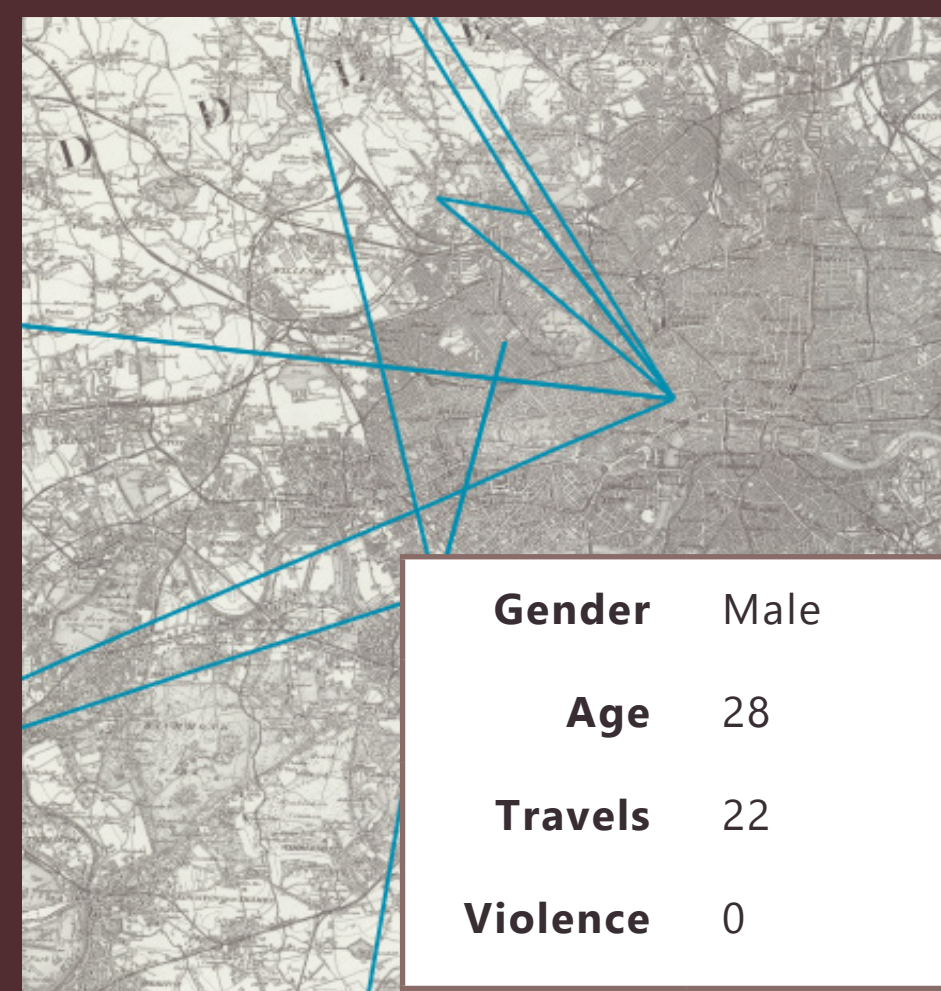
The invention of the printing press and electric lighting, as well as increased literacy rates, meant that Victorians of all classes were reading more than ever. Newly established libraries gave the novel an incomparable influence on public opinion. Sensation fiction, a popular genre at the time, was rife with drama, mystery, and, most importantly, gendered violence.

WOMAN IN WHITE: A CASE STUDY

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OBJECTIVES

- Explore how hyperbolic violence in Sensation fiction normalized microaggressions
- Identify the contexts in which mobile women were subject to public harassment

METHODS

- Track character travel and incidents of violence in four Sensation novels
- Digitally map data to visualize female mobility and street harassment in Victorian London
- Analyze primary sources (photographs, police reports, articles) to contextualize findings

DISCUSSION

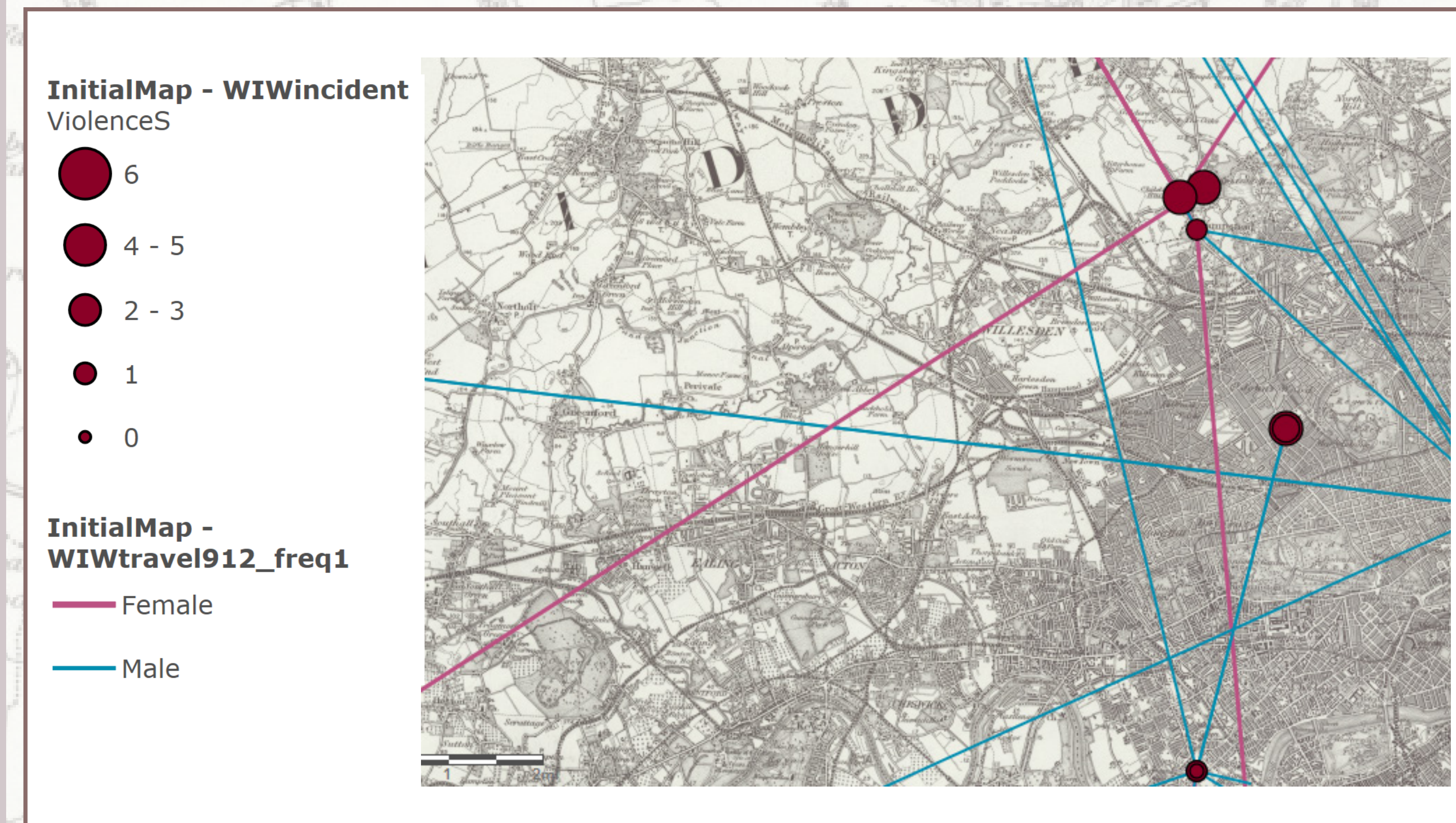
Sensation fiction is well-known for its dramatic crime plot. However, focusing on hyperbolic gendered violence and dismissing instances of public harassment standardizes "microaggressions," which include:

- feelings of dread
- leering glances
- stalking
- unwelcome advances

Contrary to popular definitions of "harassment," male aggressors were far more likely to be known to their female victims. Women were subject to harassment from fathers, husbands, and acquaintances, as private disputes followed them into public spaces

Although they traveled far less, and rarely alone, women were still more likely to be subject to violence. This remains true today: as women navigate urban spaces, practicing caution and taking preventative measures, their mobile bodies remain targets for harassment.

The prevalence of microaggressions in Sensation literature, as well as the popularity and influence of books, established a script for gendered harassment—one that is still followed today.



Digital map of character travel in Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*, categorized by gender.

Name	Anne Catherick
Gender	Female
Age	20
From	12b (Todd's Corner)
To	17a (Carlisle Station)
Purpose	Anne has been frightened and "must go"
Mode	Carriage, train
Incidents	Mr. Gilmore sends a servant to follow Anne, but loses her at the station
Mood	Hasty
MoodClass	Intense: negative
Violence	Yes
ViolenceClass	Firsthand
ViolenceD	Stalking
Intent	Deliberate
AggressorG	Male
AggressorN	Mr. Gilmore
Social Class	Lower
Companion	F (Mrs. Clements)

Selecting a specific route from the map above allows you to see all of the information concerning that travel, including character demographics, instances of violence, and literary context.



REFERENCES

Flint, Kate. "Victorian Readers." *Discovering Literature: Romantics & Victorians*, The British Library, 29 Apr. Print.
Collins, Wilkie. "Woman in White." Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974. Print.