



# INDUSTRY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, and Characters in *The Crimson Petal and the White*

# Mitchell's Questions on Memory

- "Why does the text invoke this aspect of the past, in this way and in this form, now?"
- "How does it function as a technology of cultural memory, shaping our historical consciousness?"
- "And how does it enable us, as readers, to conceptualise the *relationship* between the Victorian past and our present" (13)?
- Now one from me: considering Kate Mitchell's first two questions, how does *The Crimson Petal and the White's* postmodern narration both invoke the era and shape it for our contemporary condition?

# The Industrial Revolution and Victorian Capitalism

## The Bourgeoisie



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## The Proletariat



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# Industrial Progress

- 1874-75: "Second Industrial Revolution"
- Population and urbanization
- Increased per capita income
- Public Health Act of 1875: sewer, water, planned construction
- Elementary education in 1870s
- Well-established consumer culture
- Alice Clark: middle- and upper-class women idle, lower-class women's domestic servitude or low wages
- Ivy Pinchbeck: family as site of consumption, women employed in retail and clerking
- Triumph of businessmen over nobility
- Thanks, wikipedia!

# Mitchell's Third Question

- What are some historical differences, general or specific, between Victorian England and modernity that are evoked in *The Crimson Petal and the White*?
- How does this period, as written by Faber, echo our contemporary condition?



# INDUSTRIAL CAPILTALIST PARADOXES

The Economic Role of Women in the Novel

# Mrs. Fox's Breath

- 193: "(Mrs. Fox) points to a meadow some distance away which, on closer scrutiny, is a site of swarming industry. There are tiny workmen, cartloads of timber and earth, and a giant machine of mysterious function."
- Would Mrs. Fox's work for God be necessary without industrialization? What would she do with herself?
- 192-3: "*They, Henry, who were once the backbone of the Church, in the days when the world was not yet blighted with cities and factories. How it saddens me to think of them as they were then, tilling the land, simple and devout...*"
- Is this true, or is this R(r)omanticized pastoralism?

# Agnes Rackham's Tumor

- 140-141: "She is a high-Victorian ideal; perfection itself at the time William married her, ever-so-slightly quaint now that the Seventies are half-way over. The shapes and demeanours now at the height of fashion are not Agnes's, but she remains an ideal nonetheless; her ubiquity cannot be erased overnight. She graces a thousand paintings, ten thousand old postcards, a hundred thousand tins of soap. She is a paragon of porcelain femininity..."
- Scrubbing fingerbowls, motherhood, dreams of the convent: what is her role?
- 169: "Agnes opens...to the chapter entitled 'Defending Yourself Against the Enemy' - the enemy in this case being old age. She rubs her cheeks and temples, obeying as closely as possible the text's instructions, although she has trouble...because she hasn't any wrinkles yet...and what are the consequences of not using a lubricant, as the writer recommends? Books never address what one really needs to know."
- What does Agnes really need to know from books? Could the lack be due to capitalism?



# Sugar's Ichthyosis

- 187: "It occurs to her...he is an infant searching for a warm bed to sleep in. If she will but smooth his greasy golden curls off his sweaty brow, he'll give her anything she asks for in return."
- What is Sugar's allure – what prompts such good reviews for her in the guidebooks?
- 286: "All the way here, she's been preparing herself to play-act, whatever his little surprise should prove to be; but now there's no need for play-acting, as she reels in stupefaction."
- What are we to expect in relationships in a system ruled by capital and profit?
- 267: "The city is a filthy place...There's muck on the ground, muck in the water, muck in the air...a layer of black grime settles on one's skin."