

## Victorian Taster Session: Fiction

*The Old Curiosity Shop*, Charles Dickens, 1840-1—serialised in weekly installments in *Master Humphrey's Clock*

*Rajmohan's Wife*, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 1864—serialised in weekly installments in *Indian Field*

(a) ...By a... pleasant fiction his single chamber was always mentioned in the plural number. In its disengaged times, the tobacconist had announced it in his window as “apartments” for a single gentleman, and Mr Swiveller, following up the hint, never failed to speak of it as his rooms, his lodgings, or his chambers, conveying to his hearers a notion of indefinite space, and leaving their imaginations to wander through long suites of lofty halls, at pleasure. In this flight of fantasy, Mr Swiveller was assisted by a deceptive piece of furniture, in reality a bedstead, but in semblance a bookcase, which occupied a prominent situation in his chamber and seemed to defy suspicion and challenge inquiry. There is no doubt that by day Mr Swiveller firmly believed this secret convenience to be a bookcase and nothing more; that he closed his eyes to the bed, resolutely denied the existence of the blankets, and spurned the bolster from his thoughts... Implicit faith in the deception was the first article of his creed. To be the friend of Swiveller you must... repose a blind belief in the bookcase. (*The Old Curiosity Shop*, Ch. 7)

(b) ‘...the romantic side of familiar things...’ (*Bleak House*, 1852-3, Preface)

(c) It was not difficult to divine that they were of a class of itinerant showmen—exhibitors of the freaks of Punch—for, perched cross-legged upon a tombstone behind them, was a figure of that hero himself... Perhaps his imperturbable character was never more strikingly developed, for he preserved his usual equable smile notwithstanding that his body was dangling in a most uncomfortable position, all loose and limp and shapeless, while his long peaked cap, unequally balanced against his exceedingly slight legs, threatened every instant to bring him toppling down. (*The Old Curiosity Shop*, Ch. 16)

(d) Our social novels profess to represent the people as they are... A picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish

into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment... Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. (George Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, *Westminster Review*, July 1856)

(e) The business of professional writers of light literature is to amuse the public... There is no harm in being a pastrycook. If he happened to make his fortune by his cream tarts, [a sensible person] would feel the impropriety of immediately proceeding to scarify[ly] the Lord Chief Justice in gilt gingerbread caricatures. (James Fitzjames Stephen, ‘Light Literature and the Saturday Review’, *Saturday Review*, 11 July 1857)

(f) Mr Bob Sawyer, having previously passed through the *Gazette*, passed over to Bengal, accompanied by Mr Benjamin Allen; both gentlemen having received surgical appointments from the East India Company. They each had the yellow fever fourteen times, and then resolved to try a little abstinence; since which period, they have been doing well. (*The Pickwick Papers*, 1836-7, Ch. 56)

(g) We ought to *disanglicise* ourselves, so to speak, to a certain extent, and to speak to the masses in their own language. (Bankim to Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, 14 March 1872, quoted by Supriya Chaudhuri, ‘RW and the Novel in India’, in *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, ed. Ulka Anjaria)

(h) Some two or three English books were scattered on the couch, and one of these Madhav held in his hand but he hardly read it. He sat with his abstracted gaze fixed on the dark but star-besprinkled heavens which were visible through the open windows. (*Rajmohan's Wife*, ‘What Befell Our Hero’)