



Pierce Egan's *Life in London*,
or Is *This* What Jane's
Gentlemen Were Up To
When Their Author Wasn't
Looking?

JOAN FREILICH

Joan Freilich, a retired English instructor, was a member of the Ohio North Coast chapter of JASNA.

The Editor regrets to announce that Joan passed away on 18 February 2003, while this journal was in production.

I WONDER HOW MANY JANEITES shared my feeling of slight discomfort while watching the A&E version of *Pride and Prejudice* and viewing Mr. Darcy taking a fencing lesson, diving into Pemberley Pond, and, especially, taking a bath. I felt as though I were looking into a room deliberately closed by Jane Austen herself. Unwilling to write of anything outside her personal experience, she never depicts men, except in the presence of women. Yet her male characters—good, bad, and indifferent—must have led lives outside of the drawing rooms, dining rooms, ballrooms, and country walks that they shared with the females of their acquaintance. What may those lives have been like? Pierce Egan's *Life in London: or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorne, Esq. and his Elegant Friend, Corinthian Tom, Accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis*, published in 1821, gives us a vivid picture.

Pierce Egan was almost an exact contemporary of Jane Austen, probably born late in 1774, but surviving her by thirty-two years. Of Irish Protestant extraction, he was presumably brought to England by his parents when he was a small child. His father was able to find work in London only as a humble paviour, a layer of pavements. At sixteen, Pierce was apprenticed to a printer; he later worked as a compositor for the publishing firm of Smeeton's. Largely self-educated, he eventually chose journalism as his profession. He was fascinated by the world of boxing, its champions and its patrons. His

book, *Boxiana: or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism*, published in 1812, first made him famous. The work that became the talk of the town, however, was *Life in London*, dedicated to King George IV, the former Prince Regent (Reid 5–11). Although published four years after Jane Austen's death, it described masculine lives in the capital that were representative of her own lifetime.

Introducing the 1869 edition of the book, the publisher, John Camden Hotten, reminisced:

It took both the town and country by storm. . . . Edition after edition was called for. . . . All the announcements from Paternoster Row were of books, great and small, depicting life in London; dramatists at once turned their attention to the same subject, and tailors, bootmakers, and hatters recommended nothing but Corinthian shapes and Tom and Jerry patterns. (Egan 10)

Life in London, which has been aptly described as “neither quite a novel nor quite anything else,” was “a hugely successful foray into the high and low life of the city . . .” (Thomson). It owed its popularity to its graphic accuracy, racy slang, and the lively impression it gave of the rough vitality of the Regency. Again, quoting Hotten in 1869: “The age was the age of excesses—of vulgar refinement and unreal politeness . . . [,] of coarse caricatures, of dueling, and of the glorious three-bottle system after dinner. There is no deception about the present book—and therefore its value as a true picture of life fifty years ago” (Egan 9).

Sharing many aspects of a guide book, *Life in London*, with its much-admired illustrations by the Cruikshank brothers, goes beyond the usual province of that type by including descriptions of frauds, such as fake beggars, pickpockets, and fortune-tellers, the locations of gin taverns, and the usual haunts of prostitutes. It presents city life through the adventures of three young men: Corinthian Tom, Jerry Hawthorne, Esq., and Bob Logic, the Oxonian.

Tom, whose sobriquet “Corinthian” means a wealthy man-about-town, is the only son of an immensely rich father, the “architect of his own fortune,” and of a “doting Mamma.” At twenty-five, Tom finds himself an orphan, “in the possession of fine estates, plenty of money, and no one to control his inclinations.” He goes to London intending to

participate in the pleasures of the great world. . . . *Life* in all its various shapes, he was determined to see. . . . Among the modest fair ones, Tom was an object of more than a little interest. . . . With

a certain class of the sex, better known by the higher order of “Cyprians”, the weight of Tom’s purse had gone before him and in his visits to the Opera, the Theatres, and other places of public resort, lures were held out to ensnare, captivate, and secure him. . . . (71, 76)

In London, Tom becomes acquainted with Robert Logic, the Oxonian, who has “no ambition to shine through scholarship.” He has been “out on the town” for several years, and no one “had been more industrious towards *destroying* a fine constitution, or endeavoring to reduce a long purse, than he had.” With his “high spirit, lively ideas of taste and style,” and complete self-possession, he makes a strong impression on Tom, who proves an apt pupil. His dissipated life having finally told on his own constitution, Tom decides to visit the Somerset estate of his uncle, Squire Hawthorne. There he becomes fast friends with his cousin Jerry, a typical young country gentleman: “JERRY was fond of a bit of fun—as gay as a lark—openhearted—generous and unsuspecting. . . . At *hunting* and *shooting* he would not yield the palm to anyone. . . . In throwing a *quoit* he exhibited great strength and dexterity. . . . In convivial scenes, no one made himself more jolly . . . (134–35).

Tom prevails upon his uncle to allow Jerry to accompany him back to London, where the broad-backed young countryman is outfitted in the latest city fashions by Mr. Primefit of Regent Street. The two friends then make their appearance at Hyde Park, described by Tom as the “Show-Shop of the Metropolis.” As they ride along, Jerry is impressed by the “long line of dashing equipages, rattling along” and, especially, by a splendid one, in which are seated “a plump, rosy, middle-aged female, richly attired, accompanied by three beautiful girls . . . in the highest style of fashion.” Naively, Jerry takes them for a “Mamma and her three daughters,” but Logic, who has joined them, informs him that they are “Cyprians” with their Madam (203–08).

And so, their life in London has begun. The three friends visit the Drury Lane Theatre, taking a mere glimpse of the play; they soon “bustle” into the saloon, or lobby, where they are surrounded by “numbers of the gay *Cyprians*,” who nightly frequent this place in search of customers. Later that evening, Tom suggests going to a “Sluicery”—a gin-shop, in the slums. This is, indeed, a specimen of the “low life” of the capital, patronized by prostitutes such as Gateway Peg, “a fine but afflicting portrait” of the rapid degeneration from virtue to vice. This “*lump* of infamy was once a well-known toast among the *bon vivants* for her elegance of person.” When Tom and Jerry, rather tipsy, leave the gin-shop to stroll into a coffeehouse, they find a Hogarthian picture

of “drunkenness, beggary, lewdness, and carelessness.” The customers stare at the two “*Swells*,” the prostitutes “ogle” them, and, as they leave, they are provoked into a brawl by some roughnecks. The Watch is summoned—for there is, as yet, no London police force. “Lots of Charleys came toddling up,” overpowering the two and taking them to the Watchhouse, from which they are discharged upon bail. The next day, the magistrate orders the two to make good the damages to the watchmen before being permitted to return home.

Next, the three young men attend the Masquerade Supper at the Opera House. Jerry attempts an assignation with a masqued lady but has to retire when her husband approaches. At the end of the evening, the friends separate. “Where they *went* or how they *spent* their time, is not worth the trouble of inquiring; let it suffice it to say that [none of them] found their way to Corinthian House [Tom’s residence] on bidding *adieu* to the Masquerade.” This is not the only time when Egan broadly hints that the three friends have repaired to a brothel (250).

In the morning they visit the Bond Street rooms of the former boxing champion of England, Mr. Jackson, who now gives lessons in the art of self-defense to gentlemen. The three of them then go to see the current champion, Mr. Thomas Cribb, and admire his silver trophy cup. As they are about to leave, a Cockney “dog-fancier” asks them whether they would like to see a combat between a ferocious little monkey, “*Jacco Maccacco*,” and a succession of dogs, all bigger than he. The fight takes place at Westminster Pit; the place is patronized by a motley group of dustmen, lamplighters, coachmen, bakers, farmers and butchers—but also by barristers, honourables, sprigs of the nobility, and MPs—“all in one rude contact, jostling and pushing against each other . . . to procure a front seat.” The stench is overwhelming, but they all gaze avidly as the monkey, with his sharp teeth, overcomes the fighting dogs of twice his size (258–60).

The day comes when Jerry is finally introduced to Tom’s mistress, who resides in a small, but elegant, establishment. In an earlier chapter Tom’s search for a suitable female companion had been touched upon. Tom had come to feel “a certain *vacuum* without the society of . . . a tender companion to occupy and interest his leisure moments.” His difficulty lay in finding a woman “to correspond with his critical ideas of taste and elegance, so as not to reduce the reputation he had acquired in the *Beau Monde*, . . . one who seemed to feel, or pretended to feel, *intuitively* upon all subjects of taste and elegance.” He was entranced by the beauty and style of the “Paradise of the West,” and “like a true sportsman, his shots told, and the prize was borne off

in triumph. . . . Tom was the admiration and the envy of the *Ton*; and his *chère amie* . . . the lovely Miss Catherine, was soon distinguished by the name of Corinthian Kate” (119–21).

One can only speculate as to why the “lovely Miss Catherine,” described by Egan as not having been seduced, but as “sinning with her eyes open,” has given up her virginal respectability in order to become a rich man’s mistress. Her family was probably humble; her marriage expectations limited; her love of luxurious living considerable.

In any event, Kate is a delightful hostess, together with her friend, Sue, when Tom brings Jerry and Logic to her home for tea. After refreshments, Bob requests, as a favor, that Kate and Tom would have the kindness to perform the new dance fashion, the “elegant but lascivious” waltz: “Jerry was too much attracted by the charms of lovely Sue to . . . spare the corner of one eye to view the superior dancing of Tom and Kate. . . . He thought that there was no bar to saying a thousand civil things to her; and more especially as she did not appear offended at any of his remarks” (286). Sue, who has been seduced and abandoned, is now looking for a new “protector”; she is not at all averse when Jerry insists on taking her home.

If Jane Austen writes from a feminine perspective, Pierce Egan’s viewpoint is entirely masculine. In all the activities in which the three friends engage and all the places they frequent, they do so unaccompanied by ladies. (The one exception is when Tom and Jerry escort Kate and Sue to Carlton Place, the palace of the Prince Regent.) Tom does not take Kate to the opera, the theatre, or the Masquerade Ball—though he does buy her a diamond necklace to make this omission up to her! Kate passes her time waiting for Tom to return from his “rambles and sprees,” meanwhile perfecting her accomplishments and surreptitiously consulting a gypsy fortune-teller in Sue’s company. Tom and Jerry, who have followed them, consider the “old hag” just another metropolitan charlatan. Egan shares their view. He does not seem to feel the pathos—and neither do Tom and Jerry—implicit in this quest of the two young women. As kept mistresses, their fates are highly uncertain. Yet, Egan is fully aware of the usual destiny of fallen women.

The story continues with the three friends visiting the Condemned-Yard at Newgate Prison, where they watch the irons being knocked off the legs of a convict who is about to be hanged. From there they proceed to the Royal Stock Exchange, where Tom points out the merchants and bankers who are so vital to Britain’s commercial dominance. They finish the day at “All-Max” in the East End, a slummy take-off on the exclusive Almack’s in the

fashionable West End: “All-Max required no introductions: people paired off and danced with one another according to fancy. . . . All was *happiness*, everybody free and easy. Lascars, jack tars, coal-heavers, dustmen . . . old and young, and a sprinkling of once-fine girls were all jiggling together” (320–21).

Tempus fugit in the metropolis. Tom and Jerry “sport their blunt”—that is, win their bets, at the Royal Cockpit, but then lose their winnings to a group of card-sharks in a “friendly game of whist.” A high point of London life is Vauxhall, which Tom considers “above anything in Paris” and which Bob Logic declares to be “the festival of love and harmony.” Later the young men disguise themselves to be able to take part in a gathering of the Cadgers, professional beggars who pretend poverty and disability to “cadge” charitable donations from the unsuspecting (374–76).

Inevitably, Bob Logic is “blown up at *Point-Non-Plus*”—that is, he is broke and so heavily in debt that two arresting officers appear at his lodgings. He is obliged to accompany them to the “Whistling Shop on Board the Fleet”—the Fleet Street debtors’ prison. Tom and Jerry visit him there, but, on the way home, are drenched in a cold downpour. Jerry becomes so ill that Dr. Please’em, the society physician, advises him to go home to Hawthorne Hall to recuperate. The story closes as Tom, with Bob, who has received permission to leave prison briefly, accompany Jerry to the White Horse Cellar in Piccadilly to take the stagecoach back to Somerset. As he is being driven off, he calls to them to give his regards to “the lovely Sue” (405–06).

Pierce Egan, a Londoner, wrote mainly about the capital. Jane Austen, country-bred, focuses her fiction on rural estates, country villages, and watering places, such as Bath and Lyme. *Sense and Sensibility* is the only one of her novels to have many of its scenes set in London. For Marianne and Elinor Dashwood, the months they spend there under the care of Mrs. Jennings are critical to their destinies. But Jane Bennet’s stay in London with the Gardiners is only described in her letters to Elizabeth; it is not dramatized. The same is true of Lydia’s sojourn there: at first in scandalous cohabitation with George Wickham; later in respectability with her aunt and uncle. Of all Austen’s characters, only the Gardiners and the John Knightleys reside in London, although the Crawfords spend a great deal of their time there, as does Maria Bertram after her marriage. Charles Bingley goes there with his sisters, presumably for the season, but, like John Dashwood, is really a country squire. Mr. Darcy has a town house, but he is defined by his great estate, Pemberley. Only the gentlemen, such as Frank Churchill, Mr. Elton, and Mr. George Knightley—never the ladies—go to London on short visits. But

what they do there, beyond having their hair cut, purchasing pianofortes, getting portraits framed, or seeing family, Jane Austen does not tell us.

Is this because she had no idea? Far from being a “country mouse,” she knew London quite well. As Anne-Marie Edwards notes:

The first letter she writes to Cassandra from London is dated August 1796 and headed Cork Street. . . . London was generally reputed to be a city of sin. Impishly Jane writes: “I begin already to feel my morals corrupted.” [. . .] With her delight in people she could not help enjoying the variety of London society, the excitement of its busy streets and shops, and the pleasures of its theatres, concerts and galleries. . . . But she was fully aware that while a few of the city’s inhabitants lived comfortably, . . . the majority competed for the means to live in conditions of appalling squalor. In *Sense and Sensibility* there is a vivid account of the sufferings and death of Colonel Brandon’s childhood friend, Eliza, left destitute and friendless in London. . . . (283)

In later years Jane Austen spent some months in London. In 1811 she stayed with her favorite brother, Henry, and his wife, their cousin Eliza de Feuillide, at their home in Sloane Square, while she corrected the proofs of *Sense and Sensibility*. After Eliza’s death in 1813, Henry moved into the city to live over the bank in which he was a partner. Jane came to keep him company. A few months later, Henry moved to Hans Square, a house with a pretty garden, almost surrounded by fields. Here, in 1814, Jane prepared *Mansfield Park* for its second edition, corrected the proofs of *Emma*, and continued to work on her new novel, *Persuasion*. Henry fell ill, and she nursed him devotedly. When he was better—and *Emma* published—she returned to Chawton: “Although she is primarily concerned with domestic life in country villages,” Edwards says, “her knowledge and understanding of London enriches her work and gives greater depth and contrast to her characters. She was deeply concerned about the deficiency of moral standards in city life, and this concern is at the heart of *Mansfield Park*” (285).

London society in that novel is represented by the charming, lively, attractive, intelligent, but essentially corrupt Henry and Mary Crawford. They are both typical of the Regency period: Henry, carelessly amoral and cynical in his attitude towards women; Mary, mercenary and morally obtuse. They are in striking contrast, not only to Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price, but also to Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley. As Phillip Mason, in his book *The English Gentlemen: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal*, comments:

Quite a different picture from Mr. Darcy or Mr. Knightley would have presented itself, if you mentioned the word “gentleman” to many of Miss Austen’s fellow-citizens. They would think of the Corinthian, the sportsman, or the blood. Courage, pugnacity, readiness to take a risk, disregard for money—often reckless extravagance, often a callous disregard for the feelings of other people—these were the qualities of the eccentric sporting characters who flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of them were great nobles; some were wealthy squires. . . . Their behavior was not always decorous, but they were liked and admired. (81–82)

How aware was Jane Austen of this aspect of the life of her times? Roger Sales, in *Jane Austen and Representations of the Regency*, argues that her letters, early fiction such as *Lady Susan*, and major novels reflect a considerable knowledge of, and interest in, Regency scandals. She was, after all, a child of the outspoken eighteenth century, who came to maturity during a hardly more inhibited period. While George III lived a model family life, his sons, especially his heir, did not. The liaisons of the royal princes with actresses, who often were married women, were far from secret. The Prince Regent was probably a bigamist. His official marriage, to Caroline of Brunswick, was notorious for the unseemly behavior of both partners. That Jane Austen was fully cognizant of these goings-on is evident from her letter of February 16, 1813, to Martha Lloyd:

I suppose all the World is sitting in Judgment upon the Princess of Wales’s letter. Poor woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she *is* a woman, [and] because I hate her Husband—but I can hardly forgive her for calling herself “attached and affectionate” to a Man she must detest—[and] the intimacy said to subsist between herself and Lady Oxford is bad. . . . (*Letters*)

Lady Oxford is said to have boasted that she could not keep track of the various fathers of her children; currently, she was the mistress of Lord Byron.

In a much earlier letter, written in Bath on May 12, 1801, Jane had told Cassandra: “I am proud to say I have a very good eye at an adultress, for tho’ repeatedly assured that another in the same party was the *She*, I fixed upon the right one from the first. . . . She is not so pretty as I expected; . . . she was highly rouged, [and] looked rather quietly and contentedly silly than anything else” (53). Her tone here is amused, rather than condemnatory. What a contrast to her attitude towards Maria Rushworth’s adultery and elopement

with Henry Crawford as expressed in Edmund's relation to Fanny of his last interview with Mary Crawford:

"I cannot recall all her words. I would not dwell upon them if I could. Their substance was great anger at the *folly* of each. . . . Guess what I must have felt. To hear the woman whom—no harsher name than folly given!—So voluntarily, so freely, so coolly to canvas it!—No reluctance, no horror, no feminine—what shall I say—no modest loathings! This is what the world does."
(*MP* 454–55)

Mansfield Park, completed in 1813, reflects the difference between the lighthearted girl of the 1801 letter and the thirty-eight year old spinster, perhaps writing under Evangelical influence. But even that novel confirms Sales's comment: "Austen appears to have been an avid reader of newspapers. . . . [She] was also particularly interested in what [they] had to say about high society scandals" (38). Here is her parody of such articles in the newspaper item Fanny's father chances upon in Portsmouth and gives her to read:

"[I]t was with infinite concern the newspaper had to announce to the world, a matrimonial *fracas* in the family of Mr. R. of Wimpole Street; the beautiful Mrs. R. . . . having quitted her husband's roof in company with the well known and captivating Mr. C., the intimate friend and associate of Mr. R., and it was not known, even to the editor of the newspaper, whither they were gone." (*MP* 440)

Edmund attributes Mary Crawford's moral obtuseness to her upbringing. Her uncle and guardian, Admiral Crawford, was "a man of vicious conduct" who, after his wife's death, "chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof." This open flouting of an illicit relationship was especially shocking. At a dinner party Mary remarks that, while living in her uncle's home, "of Rears and Vices I saw enough." Though she immediately prays that she "may not be suspected of a pun," it is clear by her disclaimer that she is aware of having made one. Yet, ultimately, it was Austen who thought of that pun and put it into Mary's mouth! No wonder her niece, Fanny Knight, by that time an elderly Victorian lady, thought her Aunt Jane somewhat "coarse." Times were changing, even as early as 1818, when Lady Susan O'Brien commented on the way Regency frankness was being replaced by more euphemistic language: "No one can say 'breeding' or 'with child' or 'lying in' without being thought indelicate. 'In the family way' and 'confinement' have taken their place" (Sales 9).

Many of Austen's males are unabashedly Regency types. The fop,

Robert Ferrars, devotes most of his limited intelligence to questions of dress. Vain old Sir Walter Elliot is forever admiring himself in front of the mirror. Frank Churchill rides sixteen miles into London in pursuit of a fashionable haircut. All three are representatives of the Regency dandy, exemplified by Beau Brummell (1768–1840). He established himself, while living in Mayfair on a private income, as “the emperor of an exclusive, or exquisite, cult that was committed to preserving social distinction, discrimination and distance. . . . He used charm combined with terror as his weapons. He was a butterfly with a sting, who had to amuse his spectators as well as abuse them” (Sales 73). Brummell actually mounted a challenge to the Prince Regent’s leadership of society. He made a profession out of idleness.

Henry Crawford is a “selfish dandy, who occasionally speaks in French, invades Mansfield, and then parades about in Portsmouth, of all places.” England was still at war with France, and Jane Austen may be suggesting that the idle Henry lacks the patriotism of William Price, “who has known every variety of danger that sea and war could afford.” Because little is written about Henry’s dress, one might not consider him a dandy, but Sales presents a convincing case:

The evidence of his dandyism is provided both by his mode of address and accompanying gestures, rather than his dress itself. Some of his off-the-cuff remarks have all the arrogance of Brummell himself. . . . There are frequent references to his habit of making elegant bows. . . . His behavior is technically correct and yet there is a strong hint that it hovers on the dividing line between social poise and theatrical pose. . . . Henry hovers, like Brummell, on the verge of insolence. (108)

Tom Bertram is a Regency sportsman whose style of living resembles that of Egan’s Corinthian Tom. He is an elder son “who follows the profession of pleasure and thus runs up debts. He gambles on horses, and so ends up gambling on both his own and Edmund’s inheritance” (71). Eventually, Tom’s dissipation brings him close to death:

He returns home after time spent at the races and at watering places, amid parties and friends. . . . The Honourable John Yates, although only a casual acquaintance of ten days’ standing, is regarded by Tom . . . as an “intimate friend” after they meet at Weymouth. Sir Thomas, on his return, takes a particular dislike to the dandified, aristocratic Yates, as well as to his eldest son’s general habit of picking up a large number of . . . undesirable male friends. (94, 100)

He goes from London to Newmarket, a racing town, where “a neglected fall and a good deal of drinking, had brought on a fever.” He is taken home to Mansfield by his brother Edmund in a state of collapse reminiscent of Jerry Hawthorne’s near the close of *Life in London*.

Many of Austen’s novels refer to sexual improprieties, common to her times. The dashing Willoughby, loved by Marianne, has seduced and abandoned Colonel Brandon’s ward, Eliza. Brandon himself is the victim of Mrs. Jennings’s careless gossip; she supposes Eliza to be his illegitimate daughter. George Wickham almost succeeds in persuading the fifteen-year-old heiress, Georgiana Darcy, to run away with him. A year later he seduces sixteen-year-old Lydia Bennet, hiding with her—and from his creditors—in London. Emma, abetted by Frank Churchill, mischievously imagines an illicit attachment between the married Mr. Dixon and Jane Fairfax. And *Persuasion* ends with the elopement of Mr. William Elliot and the calculating Mrs. Penelope Clay, a widow who certainly “sins with her eyes open,” to quote Pierce Egan.

Unlike Richardson, Fielding, and other great eighteenth-century male novelists, Jane Austen never presents a sexual scene dramatically. She always refers to it indirectly, either through letters or in narration. (Her reticence in romantic matters has often been remarked; it is frustrating to many readers that she does not tell us *what* Emma said when Mr. Knightley told her he loved her!)

As the sister of so many brothers, Jane Austen was naturally familiar with some masculine activities, attitudes, interests, and behavior. Her more admirable male characters probably resembled the men in her family. Captain Wentworth and William Price are naval officers, like her brothers, Francis and Charles. Sir Thomas Bertram, Colonel Brandon, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Knightley are landowners, like her brother Edward. Most of her fictional gentlemen spend much of their time in the country, attending to their duties. Her less admirable men, such as Frank Churchill, Tom Bertram, and Henry Crawford, pass a considerable amount of their time in London. What do they do there? Pierce Egan gives some answers.

Like Corinthian Tom and Jerry Hawthorne, they may ride in the park, buy or sell a horse at Tattersall’s, take boxing or fencing lessons, visit the opera or play—for whatever reasons. They may also engage in heavy drinking, bet on dogs, cocks, or horses, play at cards for high stakes, or go slumming. They may keep a mistress in town. We know that Admiral Crawford has done so and that William Elliot is about to. Finally, they may frequent brothels. In Egan’s words: “And it is in the Metropolis that *prostitution* is so profitable a business, and conducted so openly, that hundreds of persons keep

houses of ill-fame, for the reception of girls not more than *twelve* or *thirteen* years of age, without a blush upon their cheeks" (50–51).

It is not difficult to imagine a George Wickham, Tom Bertram, or the crude John Thorpe resorting to such houses. But what did “respectable” young men do, especially those who did not marry very young? Are we to think of Colonel Brandon, Captain Wentworth, or Mr. Knightley, all in their thirties, as celibates? George Eliot has given us an unforgettable picture of a forty-five-year-old male virgin in the Reverend Mr. Casaubon. Happily, none of Jane’s gentlemen resemble him! If a normal man of that era did not wish to seduce servant-girls or village maidens; if he did not keep a mistress—an expensive business—, he had to patronize brothels, at least occasionally. And where more discreetly than in London?

As a man of the Regency, Pierce Egan could write openly about this aspect of men’s lives. Was Jane Austen even cognizant of it? Perhaps not. But if she was, she averted her eyes.

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