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"There goes Tom and Jerry": On a Spree with Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1820-1)

David Stewart

Northumbria University

Pierce Egan's *Life in London; or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq., and His Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom, Accompanied by Bog Logic, the Oxonian, in Their Rambles and Sprees Through the Metropolis* was first serialised in monthly parts from August 1820 and published in book form in 1821.[1] This article draws on research that I am undertaking towards the production of an edition of *Life in London* for Oxford World's Classics along with John Gardner, Simon Kövesi, and Matthew Sangster.[2] *Life in London* is a rare book, and one that is difficult to read without notes. Its appeal – then and now – lies in Egan's vast range of references to a rapidly changing city scene. That very range presents challenges to a reader and to an editor. One might easily find oneself bewildered as Egan's characters skip from Somerset House to Gattie and Pierce's to Mother O'Shaughnessy's. I wish to suggest that a certain amount of bewilderment is worth prizing. *Life in London* is itself, I'll propose, concerned with reading, something prompted by its subject matter, London. Egan's contemporary, Charles Lamb, enjoyed 'hovering in the confines of light and darkness… where "both seem either"'.[3] Lamb is remembering writing suggestive jokes for the newspapers, a task and an attitude to broad humour that he shared with Egan. Both learned to appreciate that ability to hover between states in Regency London and its print culture.

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[1] References to *Life in London* are to the 1821 edition published by Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, available via Google Books.

[2] This article is developed from a paper given at a meeting of the Charles Lamb Society. I would like to thank the Chairs for their invitation and the members for their helpful questions and comments. I would also like to acknowledge the help of my co-editors, John Gardner, Simon Kövesi, and Matt Sangster.

[3] Lamb, 'Newspapers Thirty-Five Years Ago' (1831); *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas, 7 vols (London, 1905), II: 221.

It is striking that many of Egan's best critics – amongst others, Richard Cronin, Gregory Dart, Deborah Epstein Nord, Simon Hull, and John Strachan – have also been critics of Lamb. Lamb and Egan shared more than a city: they shared a fascination with London as a place of culture that was so culturally productive that it proved hard to make sense of. They both, as I will go on to say, hovered between high and low culture. Here I explore Egan's joyously miscellaneous novel and point to its affinity with Lamb. They both help readers make their way around London, while accepting that part of the pleasure of the city entails getting occasionally lost.

Before introducing Egan's novel fully, I will pause to consider a moment in which Lamb, Egan, and the London streets came together. Thomas Hood tells an anecdote of the *London Magazine* days, the time of John Clare's second visit to London in 1822. Lamb and Clare hit it off and

> In wending homewards … through the Strand, the Peasant and Elia, *Sylvanus et Urban*, linked comfortably together; there arose the frequent cry of "Look at Tom and Jerry – there goes Tom and Jerry!" for truly, Clare in his square-cut green coat, and Lamb in his black, were not a little suggestive of Hawthorn and Logic, in the plates to "Life in London".[4]

There are reasons to question Hood's reminiscence, not least that Hood's article of 1839 is posed in a self-consciously ironical manner. Lamb are Clare are identified as 'Tom and Jerry', that is, Corinthian Tom and his country cousin Jerry Hawthorn from Egan's novel. Lamb is an unlikely Tom: urban, certainly, but nothing like Tom's tall, upright, casually self-confident figure on the right here. Hood recognises that by making Lamb not Corinthian Tom, but Bob Logic, the bespectacled, shorter, soi-disant Oxonian on the left. Lamb, of

[4] Thomas Hood, 'Literary Reminiscences No. IV', *Hood's Own: or, Laughter from Year to Year* (London, 1839), pp. 545-68 (p. 555). Simon Kövesi discusses very insightfully the Clare-Lamb connection and this anecdote in 'John Clare, Charles Lamb and the *London Magazine*: "Sylvanus et Urban"', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 135 (July 2006), 82-93.

course, only visited Oxford in the vacation, but there are some similarities here. Bob is a punster, a learned man, and one who often 'timed his Saturnalia amiss', to use Lamb's phrase: drinking too much alcohol for an increasingly genteel age.[5] But it feels like a slip: would the crowds really have called Lamb Tom? What gives the anecdote an air of plausibility is that, when Clare visited London in 1822, Egan really would have been on the tongues of working-class Londoners. By 1822 there was a *Life in London* mania that embraced the very lowest price points in the print market, including cheap illustrations and a vast number of theatrical productions.

Pierce Egan kick-started that phenomenon, though he was not its sole author. Egan's origins are in Charleville, the market town in the rich farming country in north County Cork, Ireland, where his grandfather was a Church of Ireland minister. Egan's uncle took one branch of the family on to wealth and respectability in Hungary. Egan's father, James, sank down the social scale, moving to Dublin. Pierce was, probably, born in Dublin in late 1774, and the family very shortly after moved to London.[6] Pierce was apprenticed to a printer in Bloomsbury in 1786. It is a trade that he never really left. Egan knew all the branches of the printing trade and all its levels. He edited (that is, embellished, reworked, and reprinted) texts for the cheap book trade. He worked as a compositor and a newspaper editor. Richard Cronin calls Egan 'the most typographically inventive author of the period', a period notable, as Cronin shows, for its typographical flair.[7] Egan's writing is fascinated with the mechanics of work, especially the mechanics of authorship.

Egan was a jobbing writer, a 'gentleman of the press' to use the phrase of the era, a phrase that points to the dubious class position of the print trade. He published extensively,

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[5] 'Confessions of H. F. V. H. Delamore' (1821), Lucas, *Works*, I: 210.

[6] J. C. Reid's *Bucks and Bruisers: Pierce Egan and Regency London* (London, 1971) remains the most accurate source on Egan's life. Reid corrects the *ODNB*'s dating of his birth. On Egan's Irish heritage and interests see John Strachan, 'Pierce Egan, West Briton', *Ireland: Revolution and Evolution,* ed. John Strachan and Alison O'Malley, (Oxford, 2010), pp. 15-35.

[7] Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture After Waterloo* (Oxford, 2010), p. 110.

from an account of the scandalous liaison of the Prince of Wales and Mary Robinson titled *The Mistress of Royalty* (1814), true crime reportage such as *Pierce Egan's Account of the Trial of John Thurtell and Joseph Hunt* (1824), to a novel about the theatre, *Life of an Actor* (published in monthly parts 1824-5). A great number of his publications, including his two newspapers (*Pierce Egan's Life in London and Sporting Guide* (1824-7) and *Pierce Egan's Weekly Courier to the Sporting, Theatrical, Literary and Fashionable World* (1829)), use his name in the title. He was a name, a celebrity of a kind. And yet his was a precarious career. Egan is best known as a boxing journalist, as discussed most fully in David Snowden's excellent *Writing the Prize Fight*.[8] Egan's *Boxiana*, published between 1813 and 1829, made his name. The mixed social world of boxing was Egan's true love. He was a proud member of the Daffy Club, a drinking club (daffy is slang for gin) that celebrated boxing and was located at the Castle Tavern in Holborn, a pub owned by the boxer Tom Belcher. The slang and intensely masculine homosociality of boxing and drinking was where Egan was happiest. It is typical of Egan that he would seek to celebrate such groups by referring to their public utility: 'The present age is in nothing more distinguished than for the creation of numerous societies, for the carrying on of purposes which one man might be unable to effect'.[9] The Pugilistic Club, he says, can stand alongside charitable societies, the Royal Society, the Geological Society, and Missionary Societies. The mask slips somewhat when he claims the superiority of the Daffy Club to 'any other society in the metropolis' because its members are 'always in spirits'.[10] Egan's writing is always more than social documentary: he is, like Lamb, constantly playful in tone, teasing his readers. He shared his other great love with Lamb, too: the theatre. As I will go on to note, a huge number of the reference points in *Life in London* are theatrical, and the novel achieved its greatest success in theatres. He later

[8] David Snowden, *Writing the Prizefight: Pierce Egan's Boxiana World* (Oxford, 2013).
[9] Pierce Egan, *Boxiana; or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism*, ed. John Ford (London, 1976), p. 132.
[10] *Boxiana*, p. 177.

wrote a novel set in the green rooms of London, *Life of an Actor* (1824-5), a clear influence on Dickens's depiction of the Crummles family in *Nicholas Nickleby*. It is appropriate that he later made a success as an actor in productions of *Life in London* and *Life in Dublin*.[11] Egan was always acting up.

His greatest splash was *Life in London*. The book was serialised from 31 August 1820, selling at 2/6 with uncoloured plates, or 3 shillings coloured. Half a crown (or 3 shillings) is not cheap, but neither is it hugely expensive: it is the same price, interestingly, as an issue of the popular magazines Lamb wrote for, like *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* or the *London Magazine*, which sold at 2/6, or the *New Monthly Magazine*, which sold at 3s. The book consists of a succession of adventures, or sprees, taken by Tom as he shows his cousin Jerry around in the company of Bob Logic. The trio tour around London, though their geographical limit is relatively circumscribed.[12] Those scenes are pointedly – staggeringly – diverse. They take in drinking blue ruin with beggars, a trip to the theatre and a visit to the green room, horse riding on Rotten Row, the Fleet prison, Almack's ballroom, Carlton Palace, the Royal Exchange, and Newgate. A summary is irresistible, but impossible: the sheer variety of the book prompts problems in how we read it.

It is a colourful tale, made more so by the images. Egan worked with Bob and George Cruikshank who provided woodcuts and 36 colour plates. The text was so popular that, according to Egan's Victorian editor John Camden Hotten, 'a small army of women and children' were employed to colour the plates, meaning that the surviving editions are not uniform.[13] The relationship between text and image is unusually important in *Life in London*. It is sometimes said that the plates came first and Egan simply annotated them. This is untrue:

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[11] Egan typically played the part of Bob Logic, a role he performed in Liverpool, Brighton, Dublin, London, and elsewhere. Egan's *Life in Dublin* was first performed in 1834.

[12] The geographical range is helpfully visualised in Matthew Sangster's interactive map at the *Romantic London* website. The website also includes reproductions of the *Life in London* colour plates. http://www.romanticlondon.org/life-in-london-map/#13/51.5074/-0.0877

[13] John Camden Hotten, ed. and introduction, *Life in London* (London, 1869), p. 10.

the text came first, and the book is properly described as Pierce Egan's *Life in London*. Yet to describe these as *illustrations* is to miss their importance. Often Egan's text is a gloss to the images, pointing out features the reader may have missed. The two work together to create the kaleidoscopic blur that is the novel.

The distinction between text and image is further diminished in a book in which the printed text is itself constantly an image. Egan's use of italics and small caps became famous. Thackeray described the effect memorably: 'How nobly those inverted commas, those italics, those capitals, bring out the writer's wit and relieve the eye! They are as good as jokes, though you mayn't quite perceive the point'.[14] Thackeray is right to say they are 'as good as jokes': the look of the page is just as important as the words on it. His additional comment is even more perceptive. It is hard to know where to look: Egan's page glitters with attractions. The reader risks being dazzled. It is not clear that Egan, even, is always sure what the point is. That, I would suggest, is part of the pleasure the book extends to its readers.

The idea of a book detailing the thrills and dangers of London life was not original. On the contrary, there were dozens of such books published throughout the eighteenth century, often offering contrasts between the poor and the elite, and frequently dwelling on the seedier side of London, especially its prostitution. The most famous example is Ned Ward's *London Spy* (1698-1700); *The Devil Upon Crutches in England, or Night Scenes in London* (1755) is close to Egan in offering a tour from the theatres, the 'Quality end of the Town' to 'Whores, Pickpockets, and Authors'. It may not have been an original idea, but none became a phenomenon quite like Egan's *Life in London*.[15] The book sold very well,

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[14] William Makepeace Thackeray, 'De Juventute', in *The Roundabout Papers* (1863): *Lovel the Widower* (London, 1950), p. 400.

[15] Rohan McWilliam describes the new fascination with the West End of London in this era, noting that the 'mythology of the West End is that it became a place you went in order to see "life"', with 'life' defined by its 'curious juxtapositions of aristocratic grandeur and low life pleasures': '"A Pantomime and a Masquerade": The West End of London in the Age of Charles Lamb', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 174 (Winter 2021), 44-58 (pp. 47, 48).

with multiple editions throughout the 1820s carrying on throughout the nineteenth century. J. C. Reid describes a 'Tom and Jerry mania, which extended to snuff-boxes, painted fire-screens, shawls, handkerchiefs, fans, cushions, and dress-stuffs marked with the images of the two heroes and Corinthian styles from tailors, bootmakers and hatters'.[16] In the book Tom and Jerry knock over a Charley, a watchman, in his box, and Egan was blamed for starting a fashion for repeating the trick. Later in life he brazenly wrote to Sir Robert Peel asking for a pension, claiming that by starting the fashion he had hastened the reform of the Charleys leading to the Bobbies, the new police.[17]

Any phenomenon encourages people to cash in, and they certainly did with *Life in London*. It was a readily transportable phenomenon. *Life in London* imitations abounded. Some were simply attempts to replicate the same story, sometimes shifting the location. Some brought the price point down: Jem Catnatch's were 2d and are mainly composed of songs with woodcuts and a brief summary of the story. These are truly popular productions, aimed squarely at a labouring-class audience and using techniques not so different from the broadside ballad tradition. The theatrical productions were the true money-spinner. Almost every theatre in London, legitimate, illegitimate, and even the children's toy theatre, with or without on-stage horses, had a theatrical *Life in London*. The phenomenon spread around Britain and Ireland and further afield. Egan did, eventually, do very well out of the theatre, though the vast majority of these 'Tom and Jerry plays' (as they became known) did not make him a penny. David Worrall is the best guide to this culture, and his *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality* tracks the phenomenon in its many manifestations, including across the Atlantic to a company of Black actors on Mercer Street, off Broadway, who found a place

[16] Reid, p. 74
[17] Quoted in Reid, pp. 185-6.

for Tom and Jerry in New York City.[18] The afterlife of Egan in the popular culture of the 20s and 30s has been discussed splendidly by Brian Maidment and Mary Shannon.[19] This extraordinary level of activity and popularity suggests that Thomas Hood's anecdote has some truth in it. Seeing two men walk by, one in a green coat, one in black, might well have brought the cry 'There goes Tom and Jerry'.

Egan sits at the centre of this buzz of activity, and his book reflects that in its giddy succession of scenes. Almost every critic of Egan remarks upon the theatricality, or spectacularity, that results from this rush of different scenes. There is a half-hearted attempt to give the story a plot in that Bob ends up in debtors' prison and Jerry is beaten 'to a stand-still' by all the carousing and must return to the country to recuperate. That the novel seems happy to leave Bob in the Fleet Prison is one indication that tying up the threads of the narrative was not Egan's interest. That metaphor – of the text composed of threads that are woven together to create a pattern – does not work. *Life in London* is composed of bits, to use the word the characters use, as in a 'prime comic bit' (209), or seeing a 'bit of Life' (283). When it was printed as a single volume in 1821, Egan changed the order of the episodes slightly from the order they appeared as serialised numbers. It didn't make the least difference.

A serialised episode of *Life in London* cost the same as a copy of one of the monthly magazines that were a publishing phenomenon in the post-Waterloo period. Like those magazines, Egan's book depends on an aesthetic 'principle of miscellaneity'.[20] These publications created a style as diverse as its audience, an audience figured most clearly in a

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[18] David Worrall, *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787-1832: The Road to the Stage* (Basingstoke, 2007). Reid's account of the spin-offs and his bibliography provides most of the facts: *Bucks and Bruisers*, pp. 73-92.

[19] Brian Maidment, *Dusty Bob: A Cultural History of Dustmen, 1780-1870* (Manchester, 2007); Mary Shannon, 'The Multiple Lives of Billy Waters: Dangerous Theatricality and Networked Illustrations in Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film* 46: 2 (2019), 161-89.

[20] David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 14-51.

crowd at one of the entertainments attended by Tom and Jerry. Egan makes much of this in *Life in London* and elsewhere. Visiting the Castle Tavern (the famous boxing pub) you might encounter 'the different grades of life – abounding with originals of all sorts – a kind of masquerade'.[21] Visiting Westminster Pitt to see Jacco Maccacco the fighting monkey, Tom and Jerry 'surveyed *flue-fakers*, dustmen, lamp-lighters, stage-coachmen, bakers, farmers, barristers, swells, butchers, dog-fanciers, grooms, donkey-boys, weavers, snobs, market-men, watermen, honourables, sprigs of nobility, M.P.s, mail-guards, *swaddies*, &c. all in one rude contact, jostling and pushing against each other' (222). These masquerading crowd scenes ask for us to put them in order at the same time as they make that order seem impossible. Egan called London 'a complete CYCLOPÆDIA' (23), but if the city is like a book it is not one with a comforting structure that allows the reader to find their place. Egan created a style appropriate to a city and a cultural moment that made order at once desirable and hard to achieve. It was a style that shared much with the magazines, as Gary Kelly was the first to notice: 'Egan brings to the novel the racy literariness, the linguistic extravagance and self-consciousness, the effects of immediacy and spontaneity found in much contemporary journalism and magazine writing'.[22] Egan had no interest in reading the city as a continuous whole or putting it into alphabetical order. Egan's ideal London observer is, I have argued, a Cockney of the kind best suited to the magazine market in which Lamb found his place: one in-between social and aesthetic categories, and better able to appreciate the giddy whirl of 'scenes'.[23]

It sounds fun, but it can be troubling. Deborah Epstein Nord's influential account of the novel emphasises a theatricality that keeps the characters aloof from what they observe,

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[21] *Boxiana*, p. 171.
[22] Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, 1789-1830 (London, 1989), p. 207.
[23] Stewart, *Romantic Magazines*, pp. 92-6.

negating any understanding of social disturbance.[24] John Gardner's account of Egan's use of the cross-class audience attained by radical satirists like William Hone finds the reasons for Egan's 'de-radicalization' of popular literature in the book's spectacularity.[25] Simon Hull finds the same feature leads to an amoral indifference to poverty.[26] Richard Cronin calls Egan 'a pathologically unfeeling writer', a point that is formal rather than censorious: it is exactly by passing so quickly from scene to scene that the readers, as much as Tom and Jerry, 'are freed to become amused spectators' of what they see, whether that is the Italian Opera or a man condemned to death at Newgate.[27]

These critics worry at a common problem: how to make something of a text that seems to resist our efforts to do anything other than skip from scene to scene. Egan gives us sentimental moments: the characters are upset to see a Cyprian (a higher class of prostitute) wrongly tried; they witness poverty; they shed a tear over the noble behaviour of an aged duke who is kind to his much younger wife; Bob Logic seems genuinely moved by seeing his one-time drinking pal reduced to being a condemned criminal at Newgate. But such moments last such a short time that it seems absurd to take them seriously as part of a coherent aesthetic or social vision. One might say similarly that Egan has his moments of political anger: a huge footnote about the iniquity of pawnbrokers, or more problematically Tom's supposed exposure of the beggars who claim to be disabled but are in fact healthy and wealthy. One could find a counterexample at every moment: a point of sentiment balanced by a point of callous indifference; wearisome misogyny balanced by a celebration of a woman

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[24] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and The City* (Cornell, 1995), p. 20.

[25] John Gardner, 'De-radicalizing Popular Literature: from William Hone to Pierce Egan', in *The Regency Revisited*, ed. Tim Fulford and Michael E. Sinatra (New York, 2016), pp. 177-94. See also Roger Sales, 'Pierce Egan and the Representation of London', in *Reviewing Romanticism,* ed. Philip W. Martin and Robin Jarvis. (London, 1992), pp. 154-69: 'He educated and entertained his readers at a time when the government, through the Six Acts and other measures, was trying to contain a mass readership' (p. 163).

[26] Simon P. Hull, *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine: Metropolitan Muse* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010).

[27] Cronin, pp. 189, 191.

who resists male oppression; a succession of sly references to the radical cause celebre of 1820-1, the Queen Caroline Affair, balanced by scenes that indicate that the poor lead rich and fulfilling lives, and the status quo seems just fine.

It is hard not to feel angry at the indifference to suffering that structures the text. Simon Kövesi describes Tom and Jerry 'economically secure in their decadent fun, safe in the fat belly of the middle classes'.[28] This is also the feeling Dickens seems to have had when he took the slight sneer the Cruikshanks give to Corinthian Tom in the plates and created Sir Mulberry Hawk in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Going around knocking over watchmen might sound, if we are generous, like the behaviour of the members of P. G. Wodehouse's Drones Club; if we are less generous, like the behaviour of the current Prime Minister when he was a member of the Bullingdon Club. The Bullingdon Club built on historical precedent, but it is the Mohocks they resemble most, the aristocratic thugs of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. That's not Tom and Jerry. Dickens's Sir Mulberry Hawk is different not just because he is a villain but because he has an interior life and a definable social position, someone with a past whose actions have consequences. He is a character of a quite different kind to Corinthian Tom, and Dickens's is an attitude to the novel of a different kind.

Simon Hull thoughtfully uses the word 'tentative' to describe Lamb's engagement with London life and its social inequalities.[29] There is a similar tentativeness in Egan, one that results from the feeling that these constant transitions from scene to scene, this endless masquerade, is so obviously a spectacle. Hull distinguishes Lamb and Egan: 'Egan's amoral swells typify city-as-theatre hedonism, whilst Elia assimilates this aesthetic to a notion of social responsibility'.[30] Hull is surely right to claim Lamb's greater subtlety and moral seriousness. He is also at least partially right that Tom and Jerry are amoral swells. But Egan

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[28] Kövesi, p. 89.
[29] Hull, p. 122.
[30] Hull, p. 179.

has some of the tentativeness Hull identifies in Lamb. Egan's *Dictionary* of slang defines a swell as 'a gentleman; but any well-dressed person is emphatically termed a *swell*, or a *rank swell*'.[31] A gentleman is, of course, not at all the same thing as 'any well-dressed person'. The first plate in *Life in London* gives us 'Jerry in training for a "Swell"'. The idea seems simple enough: the countryman learning city ways. But one might wonder whether the training is the important thing: these are people trying on a pose. Lamb's Elia becomes a way of testing out identities, a testing out made possible by a metropolitan atmosphere he describes as 'a pantomime and a masquerade'.[32] It is a perception Egan's novel shares, and one that adds piquancy to Hood's claim that the city crowds pointed at the real Charles Lamb and his *London Magazine* colleague John Clare and called them Tom and Jerry.

Gregory Dart describes Egan with most precision in pointing to his 'indeterminacy [and] vagueness' that was 'essential' to his huge popular appeal.[33] It is this that made Egan, as Dart argues, such a helpful guide to a 'Cockney Moment' that came into being in the years after Waterloo, a time in which social as well as cultural identity felt newly unfixed. Dart describes the development of Cockney aesthetic modes characterised by their troubled self-awareness about being in-between, 'the misshapen "foster-child" of Romanticism and Social Realism'.[34] Dart roots that literary culture in a broader set of cultural and economic changes, such as the democratisation of fashions in dress that made it possible for Egan to temporarily confuse a 'gentleman' and a 'well-dressed person'. Sambudha Sen's insightful work emphasises a randomness that inheres in the relation between the city's variety, the 'superficial' characters, and Egan's lack of interest in plot.[35] *Life in London* made a cross-

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[31] Egan, ed., *Grose's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1822).
[32] Letter to William Wordsworth, 30 January 1801; Lucas, *Works*, VI: 210.
[33] Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 109.
[34] Dart, p. 25.
[35] Sambudha Sen, 'Hogarth, Egan, Dickens, and the Making of the Urban Aesthetic' *Representations* 103.1 (2008), 84-106. Sen helps us find a way of reading Egan outside of the expectations of the realist novel: '[Tom and Jerry's] behaviour also focuses on their persons the city's propensity to destroy the internal integrity of things and habituate the mind instead to the experience of random diversity and juxtaposition, fragmentation, and superimposition. Indeed, Tom and Jerry can sustain their situation as connoisseurs of urban variety only be

class appeal to readers, and it did so by virtue of not belonging anywhere. It was a product of what Dart calls 'that uncertain realm between popular and polite literature', a realm that included the literary magazines that sold at the same price point as a serialised number of *Life in London*.[36] Like those magazines, and like Lamb, Egan produced work that mingled liberation and uncertainty in equal measure, a cocktail made possible by being in-between cultural categories, 'half-bound' as Lamb said of magazines.[37]

Learning to 'see Life' in London is, for Egan, also about learning to read life in London. Just as he had done in his boxing journalism, Egan helps the reader become an insider by learning the languages of groups who speak a special dialect. In 1822 Egan published a radically updated version of Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), building also on Hewson's Clarke's 1811 revision *Lexicon Balatronicum*. This was one of Egan's attempts to cash in on the Tom and Jerry phenomenon, but it also builds on something that he recognises as essential to *Life in London*. Editing *Life in London* in 2022 can resemble a work of translation: some of the pages are almost incomprehensible without notes. But Egan was himself concerned with translation. In one of his many long footnotes he states that he wishes to make himself 'perfectly intelligible to all parties. Half of the world is *up* to it; and it is my intention to make the other half *down* to it' (84). And slang is not exclusive to one class: Dingy Sall talks of 'her *prime jackey*, an *out-and-out* concern' while the Duchess 'in her dislikes, tossing her head, observes it was *shocking, quite a bore, beastly stuff*' (85).

The pleasure lies in the way that Egan leaves us half in and half out, glossing some words with footnotes, but leaving gaps for us to fill in. Take this account of Tom's character:

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learning how to rapidly erase from or superimpose upon their personalities such markers of social class or station as may or may not be relevant to a particular social encounter' (p. 95).

[36] Dart, p. 114.

[37] Discussing different types of binging in 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', printed in the *London Magazine* in July 1822 at the height of the *Life in London* craze, Lamb says that for magazines 'the dishabille, or half-binding… is *our* costume': Lucas, *Works*, II: 173.

‘His *peep* into the *Stews* was merely *en passant*; and the knowing, enticing, Mother DISH-*up’s* something “new” was tried on in vain to “have the best” of our Hero only for a single *darkey*!’ (90). Egan’s *Dictionary* defines a ‘darkee’ as ‘a dark lanthorn used by housebreakers’, but it is clear from the use elsewhere that it means simply ‘night’. Stews is easy to guess, and *en passant* is simple enough even for anglophone readers without French. We start to piece it together: Tom only rarely visited brothels, and the cunning madam may have palmed off her latest prostitute on him, but only for a single night. This is Egan at his most risqué; the novel is far more cautious than we might expect (as is his dictionary). The point I wish to emphasise is that experience of piecing it together. As we read *Life in London* the book becomes slowly more and more legible, without ever becoming completely transparent.

Reading the book can feel like stumbling about in the dark as every fourth word – placed in italics by Egan – is slang of some kind. Some are easy enough to get: a *fish-fag* is not in Egan’s dictionary, but is a ‘foul-mouthed woman’ as was notoriously the case of the fishwives of Billingsgate market. *Gills* are cheeks; the *knowledge box* is the head; a *castor* is a beaver skin hat; *ogles* are eyes, and a *suit of mourning* a pair of black eyes. Egan takes his slang from dustmen, thieves, beggars, the Navy, prostitutes, Oxford students, members of the Fancy and, importantly, actors. Some are still used, such as ‘pigs’ for police or to ‘floor’ meaning to knock down; some are still used in Regency Romances that borrow indirectly from Egan via Georgette Heyer, such as ‘pink of the ton’. There are an enormous number of words for gin, including Deady’s Fluid, Max, blue ruin, Old Tom, tape, jackey, stark naked, and flashes of lightning. But one must be careful with some of Egan’s translations. His 1822 edition of Grose gives Corinthian, as in Corinthian Tom, as ‘the highest order of swells’. Robert Morrison’s excellent *Regency Revolution* suggests that we need to be careful: Morrison glosses Corinthian (accurately) as a ‘a chic Regency designation that revealingly

implies that he is both elegant and lewd'.[38] Egan's *Dictionary* elects to be much more modest than his two forebears. Grose and Clarke have 'Frequenters of brothels. Also, an impudent, brazen-faced fellow'. Looking at the Cruikshanks' illustrations, one wonders if some of the seediness identified in the earlier dictionaries remains in Corinthian Tom. The impudence that might suggest an unwarranted assumption of a higher class status is worth bearing in mind. Tom, after all, is no aristocrat: his father was in trade.

Egan employs a trick that many novelists have subsequently used: Jerry the ingenue is, like the reader, brought into a defined social setting and must be gradually taught the language of that realm. It happens in the 1830s in *Oliver Twist*: Oliver is taught how things work in the London underworld by being taught how to speak its language. Something similar happens in *Clueless*, the 1995 film adaptation of Austen's *Emma*, in which the outsider Tai is instructed in how to behave in a Beverley Hills school; when she asks what words like 'a Monet' and 'a Betty' mean when applied to other girls, the viewer, too, learns the code and feels the warm pleasure of being part of the in-crowd. *Life in London* does this, though it does so in an accelerated way that becomes bewildering rather than reassuring. Rather than learning the language of a single social realm, the characters learn those of a huge range: boxers, coach drivers, thieves, dustmen, artists, aristocrats. Tom, Jerry, and Logic use them all. Gregory Dart points out that Egan casually conflates the words 'slang' and 'cant'.[39] These were two different things: slang was used by a range of classes, while cant was a code used by criminals to avoid detection. Egan is a fundamentally casual writer. But the effect is important. The language one reads in *Life in London* is not the language of a particular group. Although Egan did not invent new words, it is accurate when the *Sheffield Independent* said in 1828 that Egan 'invented a language', because no one group spoke like

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[38] Robert Morrison, *The Regency Revolution: Jane Austen, Napoleon, Lord Byron and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2019), p. 126.
[39] Dart, p. 122. Gary Dyer discusses the importance of cant, flash and slang to a wide range of fiction in this era in 'Reading as a Criminal in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *Wordsworth Circle* 35.3 (Summer 2004), 141-6.

that.[40] It becomes a generalised slang of Londoners, a kind of theatrical patter adopted by those who are careering around the city. Egan's slang is not a marker of authenticity – a connection with a particular group located socially or geographically – but, quite the contrary, a marker of a willingness to adopt the guises presented by a diverse city, as if London were one linguistic dressing-up box and the streets were a masquerade ball.

The point comes home when the characters are at the Royal Cockpit. Bob Logic is the guide to the slang of the mixed crowd, but at one point Jerry says 'Lethe'. 'I am not up to that phrase; it is *new* I suppose … and you want to *quiz* me' replies Bob (318). It is the word Tom and Jerry had used as code earlier in the novel whenever they risked exposing themselves in the high society setting of Almack's. Bob's moment of doubt is characteristic of the book: all of these words are *new*, and no one uses them with total authenticity. Simply by italicising *new* the word starts to hover dubiously; we wonder if it, too, is a kind of slang. Egan prompted into life two rival, parallel, genres of novel that gained huge popularity in the 1820s and 1830s: the Silver Fork novel and the Newgate novel. Both depend on bringing the reader into a closed-off social world. The Silver Fork novel brings middle-class readers behind the scenes of aristocratic life. It takes its name from teaching readers the importance of knowing which fork to use when eating fish. The Newgate novel does the same with London criminals. This division of high and low is much too neat for Egan. We cannot read *Life in London*'s use of language as the upper classes appropriating the slang of the lower classes as they 'slum it', because these characters, and their language, belong in no one location.

The other reason that Egan's book needs an editor in the twenty-first century is the sheer range and number of references he makes to people and places, and the number of unattributed quotations. The edition we are producing will gloss these to help the modern

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[40] Quoted by Egan in *Pierce Egan's Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry, and Logic, in their Pursuits Through Life in and out of London* (London, 1830), p. 6. The *Finish* was first serialised 1827-8.

reader. But, like the slang, I wonder whether our notes restore us to an original reading experience – give us the reference points that everyone would have had in 1820 – or whether a certain amount of bewilderment was always part of the point of *Life in London*. A fine example is this account of Tom's ability to traverse the moral and financial challenges of London life:

> Upon descending into the *Hells*, if he did not prove himself as troublesome an inmate as the *dramatic* Don Giovanni, or possess the icy qualities of Signor Antonelli, the fire eater and hornpipe dancer upon red-hot iron bars, he nevertheless had found out the *secret,* – which, if it did not altogether prevent him from being *scorched* a little, yet saved him from being *burnt to death!* (91)

He casually mentions Signor Antonelli as if he were well known. I have been unable to locate him, though there were several men and women who ate fire or set themselves on fire. Monsieur Ivan Ivanitz Chabert, 'the only Really Incombustible Man' who appears in the newspapers of this era dancing on red hot iron bars, is the closest to Egan's account of Signor Antonelli. The *Don Giovanni* reference is more complex than might be apparent. Egan may have in mind Mozart's opera, which was performed to huge acclaim at the King's Theatre in 1817, or W. T. Moncrieff's burletta *Giovanni in London* (1817), a vast success that prompted many imitations. Moncrieff's *Giovanni* foreshadows *Life in London* in many ways, including his transportation of the scene to the St Giles slums and a play on the double meaning of Hell and gambling Hells (leading to Don Giovanni being imprisoned for debt, just like Egan's Bob Logic).[41] Moncrieff's next big hit was a burletta of *Life in London*. It was Moncrieff who made the most money out of the *Life in London* phenomenon, more than Egan ever did, to Egan's mild chagrin. But perhaps Moncrieff was calling in a debt of his own, because *Life in*

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[41] In the novel Tom and Jerry go to Drury Lane to see Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, though they don't seem to actually watch the opera, spending their time in the Green Room with the actors instead.

London borrowed so much from *Giovanni in London*. It seems important to me that it is so hard to tell if Egan is referring here to Moncrieff or Mozart, to the burletta at the Olympic or the opera at the King's.

David Worrall describes an 'essentially popular or plebeian network of intricate intertextuality largely cut off from the heritage of English spoken drama as exemplified by Shakespeare' in the cheap popular theatre of the era.[42] Moncrieff is a central figure in this network. It was a popularity that Egan drew on, and that Moncrieff in his adaptation of *Life in London* drew him into. But this is not the authentic home of Bob, Jerry and Tom. Charles Lamb reviewed Moncrieff's *Don Giovanni in London* at the Olympic Theatre in *The Examiner*.[43] Lamb enjoys the slang of the piece and includes phrases such as '*too hot to hold him*' in italics. Indeed, Lamb's playful use of small and large caps and italics in this review (common in *The Examiner* and other periodicals of the era) is a reminder of the influence of the periodical press on Egan's novel, in so many ways a periodical work itself. Lamb loved the theatre, but in writing about such a popular phenomenon in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, he was marking both his admiration of its plebeian energy and his own distance from it. That slight uneasiness is important. Egan is like Lamb in being so able a guide to the social whirl of the late Regency by virtue of not quite being sure to which category (social or cultural) he belongs.

Life in London gives us a rush of names and places. It creates a fascinating picture of the social scene in 1820. Cranbourne Alley is not just a street, but a street with milliners' shops on it, and associated with parvenu pretensions to gentility: dropping the name is a kind of code. Most scholars of this era will know Canning, Brougham, Jeffrey and Hazlitt; fewer will know Jacco Maccacco (the fighting monkey), Maria Theresa Bland (the singer), Andrew

[42] Worrall, p. 1.
[43] Published in *The Examiner*, 22 November 1822; subsequently titled 'Mrs Gould (Miss Burrell) in "Don Giovanni in London"': Lucas, *Works*, I: 372-3.

Whiston (the disabled Dundonian beggar), and André-Jean-Jacques Deshayes (the ballet dancer, teacher and choreographer). Egan drops these names as if they are all the same, but I suspect he knows that they aren't. Egan is such a helpful guide to what Angela Esterhammer describes as a 'self-conscious age of proliferating information' that is also 'a self-defined age-in-formation', a historical moment that produced huge amounts of culture and huge amounts of anxious reflection on that over-productivity.[44] As I have argued, this was a 'period of doubt' in which social and cultural status was unusually hard to fix.[45] Egan's teasing playfulness is like Elia's irony: it leaves us unsure where to locate the things he describes, and this quality makes his book so characteristic of a culture defined by its self-doubt.

Something similar happens with Egan's unattributed quotations. J. C. Reid is right to say that Egan does not know much of the great Romantic poets. It tips the balance too much the other way when Reid says that Egan makes up for this 'in his encyclopaedic knowledge of popular writing and sub-literature, of street-songs, ballads, broadsides, thieves' chronicles'.[46] He knows these texts, but editing *Life in London* leads me to say that the truly popular street literature is not Egan's real home. His home was much closer to that inhabited by Lamb: the print culture that produced the magazines, visual satire, and the theatre. There are numerous references to farces or the comedies of George Colman and R. B. Sheridan that played constantly on the London and provincial stages in the Regency. Many of the popular songs he quotes are best known not so much as broadside ballads but as songs that became part of the repertoire of the comedians like Liston and Munden that Charles Lamb celebrates in 'The Old Actors' and elsewhere. Egan quotes the popular ballad 'The Beggars' Imitations'. I've found cheap broadsides of this song, but I also know that it was the

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[44] Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 26.
[45] See David Stewart, *The Form of Poetry in the 1820s and 1830s: A Period of Doubt* (Basingstoke, 2018).
[46] Reid, p. 7.

speciality of the actor James Robertson who performed it at theatres in London, Bath and elsewhere; other songs are famous for being performed by Lamb's favourite 'mug-cutter', the comic acting genius Joseph Munden. What initially looks like a marker of Egan's low authenticity may be just that: he quotes a song that is really known to the labouring poor, printed as a penny broadside. But I suspect he, and his audience, know it best from the theatre, a venue that was so important to Egan not for giving access to one social class, but in giving access to them all.

A revealing example is a reference that initially *threw me off the scent*, to borrow the hunting slang beloved of Jerry Hawthorn. At a masquerade ball the trio hear the strains of a 'favourite air' from *Guy Mannering* (206). Scott's novel of 1815 was an enormous popular success. The song does not, though, appear in it. 'O slumber my darling' is from Daniel Terry's 1816 theatrical adaptation of Scott's novel. As Annika Bautz explores in an excellent recent article, this adaptation is an important feature of Regency theatrical history.[47] Far, far more people saw Terry's adaptation than read Scott's novel: it played all over Britain and Ireland (and beyond) for many years. This is the version that Keats knew and referred to on the Scottish tour when he wrote a poem about it; he hadn't read the novel. The play opened at Covent Garden, which – newly expanded to hold 3000 people – was increasingly vying with the illegitimate theatres for the same audiences. Terry's play, Bautz argues, is a delicate balance between the desire to attract a large audience and to remain respectable for the middle classes. The point is made nicely by Egan. The song they hear is a parody. Rather than Terry's 'Oh! slumber, my darling, / Thy Sire is a knight / Thy Mother a lady /So lovely and bright', we have a song about a young criminal: 'O slumber, my kiddy, / Thy dad is a scamp, / Thy mother's a bunter, / Brushed off on the tramp' (206). What seems an impish

[47] Annika Bautz, 'The "universal favourite": Daniel Terry's *Guy Mannering; or, The Gipsey's Prophecy* (1816)' *Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 47, *Walter Scott: New Interpretations* (2017), 36-57.

inversion of cultural categories is not quite that. Parody is always a mirror: to get the joke, we need to be in on both sides of the reference, to know both Walter Scott and the underworld. Both kinds of song would be equally acceptable at the theatres where *Guy Mannering* played. Egan clinches the point by having the song sung at a masquerade ball, a location in which identity is a game. It is sung not by a real thief – or, we suppose not – but by an unknown woman dressed, as Egan coyly says, 'à la Poissarde' (206). J. C. Reid says that *Life in London* 'was to make Egan as well-known an author on the vulgar level as Scott was on the polite one'.[48] In fact, both novelists reached a very similar audience, and both reached the 'vulgar' or plebian culture through the efforts of their adapters for theatre and print culture. The result is that Egan hovers between social, political, and cultural categories.

Egan gives us a constant cascade of reference points, a cascade that does not clearly differentiate between cultural or social categories. It is a variety that makes the novel unusually hard to place, or even to read. Editors read more intensely than others, but it may be that they do not always read so well. Perhaps an editor misses the point of the book on which they lavish attention exactly by that lavished attention; they are mired in a pile of tiny details while a reader sees the narrative arc. My favourite 'bit' of *Life in London* is the dustmen's story overheard in a gin shop on the way home from seeing Jacco Maccacco. There's lots of things I like about it, but one reason it sticks in my head, I suspect, is that it is so full of slang and obscure references that it took me such a long time to annotate. It's another 'bit' that challenges any reading of the novel as coherent: Tom and Jerry fade from view as the dustmen's story takes on an energy that exceeds any underlying principle one might look for. And yet this feeling that *Life in London* is a series of detachable 'bits' rather than a consolidated whole is not unusual: indeed, it *is* the novel. It's a problem that critics and other readers try to solve when placing Egan in a pattern. Many historians use Egan's novel

[48] Reid, p. 50.

as an example of a vanished world: Ben Wilson in *Decency and Disorder* sees it as the last gasp of Regency licentiousness that became impossible by 1837.[49] Lamb was complaining in the 1820s about 'this damned, canting, unmasculine, [unbawdy] … age!' and often looked back wistfully on an earlier age in which he and his friends 'liked a parting cup at midnight, as all young men did before these effeminate times'.[50] Thackeray and Dickens had the same impression, and theirs was not always a wistful backward glance, as *Nicholas Nickleby*'s Sir Mulberry Hawk and Kate Nickleby, so unlike Corinthian Kate, indicate.[51]

Such views seek to place Egan in a historical moment, which seems right and yet too confident. It seems striking that this reaction to Egan seemed to occur almost immediately: his was *already* a depiction of a culture that no longer existed. Egan's London is palpably real and yet a fantasy. Watching Jacco Maccacco, the fighting monkey, Tom notes the overpowering smell caused by the crowd and the blood. It's a rare author who notices smells, and a mark of Egan's attachment to the living moment. Tom's joke is to ask Jerry 'if he did not like *Perfumery*, as the Pit was as highly *scented* as GATTIE'S' (224). Gattie and Pierce was a fashionable chemist that sold perfume on New Bond Street. It is a startling camp way of being realistic, and indicates that Egan's realism cleaves to the reality of a culture of contradiction, juxtaposition, and masquerade. Editing Egan throws up a huge range of names and words: I still don't know who Signor Antonelli is, but I'd know Caleb Baldwin and George Barrington if I met them in Gattie and Pierce's; I could tell you what a bow-wow shop is, even if I lost my barnacles while being a bit bosky over burnt wine in the back slums. The edition, we hope, will help readers find their way around Egan's London. But even with

[49] Ben Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789-1837* (London, 2007).
[50] Letter to Bryan Waller Procter, 29 January 1829: Lucas, *Works*, VII: 799; 'Newspapers Thirty-Five Years Ago' (1831); Lucas, *Works*, II: 222.
[51] Thackeray could be wistful, as in his comment on Tom, Jerry and Logic that 'there is an enjoyment of life in these young bucks of 1823 which contrasts strangely with our feelings of 1860' ('De Juventute', p. 399). But he was not always so forgiving. His account of a gentleman of the 1860s dandling his grandchildren reminds us more censoriously that in his youth this gentleman drank to excess, gamed, duelled, and would hold the coat of 'Richmond the black boxer' and 'shout and swear, and hurrah with delight' as Richmond was 'beating Dutch Sam the Jew' ('George the Fourth', p. 163).

our notes on top of those Egan himself provides, a certain amount of bewilderment will remain. I think that’s appropriate. Egan was a success at the end of the Regency not because he gave readers reality in the way we think of it later in the nineteenth century, the reality found in a novel by Zola. It was, rather, the reality of a Regency world that mirrored Egan’s novel in being so overproductive that it was impossible to draw it into a coherent pattern.