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Footnotes More Pedestrian Than Sublime

A Historical Background for the
Foot-Races in *Evelina* and
Humphry Clinker

EARL R. ANDERSON

ONE OF THE MOST DELIGHTFUL INCIDENTS in Fanny Burney's *Evelina* is the foot-race which occupies letters 64, 65, 66, and 68 (dated 19, 20, 24, and 28 September).¹ This is first occasioned by a wager of one thousand pounds between two empty-headed and conceited men, Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley, who at first cannot agree on how to settle the wager. In the parlor conversation on this important subject, on 19 September, the indomitable Mrs. Selwyn exposes their ignorance by suggesting that whoever can recite the longest ode by Horace will win. It turns out, of course, that neither Merton nor Coverley had ever read a line of Horace, even though both had been to university. The next day, *Evelina* asks Lord Orville how the bet was to be settled.

He told me, that, to his great satisfaction, the parties had been prevailed upon to lower the sum from one thousand to one hundred pounds; and that they had agreed it should be determined by a race between two old women, one of which was to be chosen by each side, and both were to be proved more than eighty years of age, though, in other respects, strong and healthy as possible.

On 24 September, after breakfast, *Evelina*'s conversation with Lord Orville is interrupted by the appearance of Merton and Coverley, who want Orville's opinion on the site they have chosen for the foot-race. And so the whole company walks to Mrs. Beaumont's garden:

the two gentlemen are as anxious as if their joint lives depended upon it. They have, at length, fixed upon objects, but have found great difficulty in persuad-

¹Fanny Burney, *Evelina, or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, with an introduction by Lewis Gibbs. Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1958), pp. 262–92. *Evelina*, of course, first appeared in 1778.

ing them to practise running, in order to try their strength. This grand affair is to be decided next Thursday.

And so we learn, through Evelina's manner of writing, that the discussion of the forthcoming foot-race occupied most of that morning. The first half of letter 68 (28 September) is taken up with the race itself, run at five o'clock in the afternoon.

The reader's attention is first drawn, properly, to the place of this foot-race in the comedy of manners. When Evelina expresses surprise that such a large sum should be engaged in this extraordinary affair, Lord Orville pronounces what must have been Burney's own judgment of it (letter 65);

"I am charmed," said he, "at the novelty of meeting with one so unhackneyed in the world, as not to be yet influenced by custom to forget the use of reason: for certain it is, that the prevalence of fashion makes the greatest absurdities pass uncensured, and the mind naturally accommodates itself, even to the most ridiculous improprieties, if they occur frequently."

Despite this Johnsonian pronouncement, Evelina's relationship to the event is, actually, ambiguous. She feels snubbed by Lord Merton when he solicits backing from the other ladies (letter 68):

He wanted to engage the ladies to *bet on his side*, in the true spirit of gaming, without seeing the racers. But he could only prevail on Lady Louisa, as Mrs. Selwyn said she never laid a wager against her own wishes, and Mrs. Beaumont would not *take sides*. As for *me*, I was not applied to. It is impossible for negligence to be more pointed, than that of Lord Merton to me, in the presence of Lady Louisa.

If asked, she would have refused; but she would have liked to have been asked. It was necessary for Burney to keep her heroine at a distance from the race, since through it she exposes the brutality of Merton and Coverley. At the beginning of the race, the old ladies fall from the shock of unaccustomed exertion, but are revived with wine, and despite complaints of injury, obliged to continue. Finally one woman slips and falls with great force.

Involuntarily, I sprung forward to assist her, but Lord Merton, to whom she did not belong, stopped me, calling out, "No foul play! no foul play!"

Mr. Coverley, then, repeating the same words, went himself to help her, and insisted that the other should stop. A debate ensued; but the poor creature was too much hurt to move, and declared her utter inability to make another attempt.

Mr. Coverley was quite brutal; he swore at her with unmanly rage, and seemed scarce able to refrain even from striking her.

Lord Merton then, in great rapture, said it was a *hollow thing*; but Mr. Coverley contended that the fall was accidental, and time should be allowed for the woman to recover. However, all the company being against him, he was pronounced the loser.

The place of this incident in the comedy of manners is, of course, acknowledged. In this article I propose to call attention to three other dimensions of the foot-race incident which may, perhaps, be less familiar to most readers of Fanny Burney: first, its literary background; second, its background in the history of gambling and gambling law; third, its background in the history of pedestrianism.



Fanny Burney's literary source for the foot-race is, very likely, J. Melford's letter to Sir Watkin Phillips, dated 10 June, in Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, which appeared in 1771, seven years prior to *Evelina*. Melford describes a foot-race after dinner, between a "spruce bookseller, called Birkin," who generally took his exercise "a-horseback, for he was too fat to walk a-foot," and a gaunt author, Tim Cropdale, who made some "sarcasms" about Birkin's "unwieldy size and inaptitude for motion," and then "proposed that Mr. Birkin and he should run three times around the garden for a bowl of punch, to be drank at Ashley's in the evening, and he would run boots against stockings."² That is, Cropdale would, as a handicap, wear Birkin's heavy boots during the race. "The bookseller, who valued himself upon his mettle, was persuaded to accept the challenge, and he forthwith resigned his boots to Cropdale, who, when he had put them on, was no bad representation of Captain Pistol in the play." In the first round in the garden, "Birkin had clearly the advantage, *larding the lean earth as he puffed along*" like Falstaff. But the foot-race comes to an abrupt end when Cropdale "in a twinkling disappeared through the back-door of the garden" and ran off with Birkin's boots, leaving, in their place, his own threadbare shoes. Smollett's story, incidentally, has interesting similarities with a popular story told about the Duke of Queensberry, reported thus by a correspondent to *Notes and Queries*:³

²Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, Vol. VII in *The Works of Tobias Smollett*, ed. James P. Browne (London, 1872), pp. 178–79.

³William J. Thoms, "Running Footmen," *Notes and Queries*, ser. 2, 1 (1856), 9.

I have been told that the late Duke of Queensberry was the last nobleman who kept running footmen; that he was in the habit, before engaging them, of trying their paces, by seeing how they could run up and down Piccadilly, he watching and timing them from his balcony. They put on his livery before the trial. On one occasion a candidate presented himself, dressed, and ran. At the conclusion of his performance he stood before the balcony. "You'll do very well for me," said the duke; "Your livery will do very well for me," replied the man, and gave the duke a last proof of his ability as a runner by then running away with it.

Beyond this immediate source, of course, lies the heroic example of the foot-race at the funeral games for Patroklos (*Iliad* 23.740-97) and its mock-heroic descendant in Book II of *The Dunciad*, almost certainly known to both Smollett and Burney.⁴



We turn next to the thousand-pound wager of Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley, and its connection with the law. On May Day, 1711, under Queen Anne, the gambling legislation was revised from several earlier acts intended to proscribe or regulate bets on athletic events, and given the shape it had at the time *Evelina* was published. This law (9 Anne c. 14), "for the better preventing excessive and deceitful Gaming," makes it clear in its preamble that previous laws had not been effective:

Whereas the Laws now in force [sc. 16 Car. 2 c. 7] for preventing the Mischiefs which may happen by Gaming hath not been found sufficient for that Purpose; therefore, for the further preventing of all excessive and deceitful Gaming, be it enacted . . .

that all "Bills, Bonds, Judgments, Mortgages, or other Securities or Conveyances whatsoever" be considered void if

won by gaming or playing at Cards, Dice, Tables, Tennis, Bowls, or other Game or Games whatsoever, or by betting on the Sides or Hands of such as do game at any of the Games aforesaid.⁵

⁴In epic tradition the front runner in a foot-race is prevented from winning by some unexpected accident: this is the case with Aias in the *Iliad* (Ajax in Pope's *Iliad* 23.911 ff.); Teucer in Quintus of Smyrna's *Fall of Troy* book 4; Nisus in Virgil's *Aeneid* book 5; Parthenopaeus in Statius' *Thebaid* book 6. The fate of Edmund Curl in Pope's *Dunciad* 2.17 ff. is a mock-heroic variation; so also Coverley's lady pedestrian in *Evelina*.

⁵*British Parliamentary Papers: Social Problems—Gambling*, Vol. I (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1968), Third Report, [1844], pp. 52–53.

Under Charles II, bills, bonds, etc., could be engaged up to one hundred pounds. Under Anne only ready cash could be engaged, and anyone who lost more than ten pounds ready cash could sue for recovery treble the value plus court costs. If he did not sue within three months, anyone else who had knowledge of the affair could sue for the forfeiture. If we refer these legal matters, then, to the foot-race in *Evelina*, we find that Merton and Coverley, being persuaded to reduce their wager from a thousand to a hundred pounds, brought their gambling within the legal limit under the Charles II law; but they were still far beyond the legal limit under the Queen Anne statute then in force.

From the point of view of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century legal authorities, the court case which was most important in placing athletic contests under the Queen Anne statute involved a foot-race: *Lynall v. Longbottom*, 1756. The parties in this suit had a wager above ten pounds concerning the performance of a single runner, Clarke, who was to run a distance within a certain period of time. (More specific detail is lacking in the legal record.) This was a tricky case, because only one runner was involved, and he apparently had no connection or interest in the wager. The case was heard twice. The first time around, Chief Justice Willes expressed doubt that the event in question was “a Foot Race as laid in the Declaration [of the wager], for Clarke might run for his Diversion or Exercise, and it does not appear he contended for any Bet, with anybody, or against Time, and Clarke can never be said to be playing unless it had been laid in the Declaration.” At the same time, Willes insisted that a foot-race would come under the Queen Anne statute, for foot-races “are mentioned in the Statute of the Sixteenth of Charles the Second, to which the Statute of the Ninth of Anne must relate.”⁶ The case was argued a second time and settled in favor of the defendant. Chief Justice Willes concludes:

It is agreed on all Hands that a Foot Race is within the Statute of Anne, . . . and, therefore, the single Question is, whether it appears that Clarke was playing a Game called a Foot Race, for if he was that was a betting within the statute.

But since it was not stated in the declaration of the wager that Clarke was playing a game, the plaintiff’s action to recover his bet under the Queen Anne statute could not be maintained. In subsequent court cases involving athletics, including various cases involving coursing and cricket, *Lynall v. Longbottom* was cited as the legal precedent which brought

⁶Ibid., pp. 25–26.

sports under the Queen Anne statute, even though in that case the plaintiff lost out on a technicality.

Considering the inclusiveness of the phrase “other Game or Games whatsoever” and the liberal interpretation that the legal authorities placed on this language, it is surprising that athletics came to the attention of the courts as infrequently as it did, during a period when practically any sporting event was the subject of heavy betting, most of it, as in *Evelina*, in amounts that violated the statute. Between 1660 and 1844, 116 gaming cases went to Westminster Hall, but most involved games of chance or gaming houses, or else equestrian events. Only 12 involved athletic contests: 4 foot-races, 4 boxing, 3 cricket, 1 wrestling.⁷ Nevertheless the Queen Anne statute places Fanny Burney’s foot-race in a compromised legal context, just the right setting for Merton’s and Coverley’s display of their disregard for the dignity of other human beings.



The history of pedestrianism has yet to be written, despite the head start which Walter Thom gave sports historians in his *Pedestrianism, or An Account of the Performances of Celebrated Pedestrians during the last and present Century* (Aberdeen, 1813).⁸ We shall attempt to com-

⁷Ibid., pp. 37–50. The figures are drawn from a register of the relevant court cases, which the Select Committee on Gaming had composed for its convenience.

⁸Also of interest: Lord William Pitt Lennox, *Fashion Then and Now*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1878), II, 157–79, where Lennox gives a catalogue of (apparently) all the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pedestrian events known to him.

The best account of pedestrianism is still the one found in Montague Shearman’s *Athletics and Football* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), which makes generous use of Thom, supplemented by miscellaneous sources to which, however, a great deal could be added. Shearman’s work is not free from errors, as the following sentence from his p. 50 will illustrate: “In 1860 L. Bennett, better known as ‘Deerfoot,’ a Canadian Indian, appeared on the scene in England, and there began a series of matches between him and the best English pedestrians, which excited the public interest even more than the great period of ten years or so before.” Louis (or Lewis) Bennett actually began his British tour in September 1861 (not 1860), adopting the track-name “Deerfoot” at that time, in accordance with the promotional practice of runners in Victorian England. He was a Seneca Indian from the Chatteraugus Reservation, Erie County, New York, not from Canada. I have seen Shearman’s errors on Bennett reappearing in numerous sports histories, including some very recent ones; and elsewhere I have seen the date of his death given incorrectly (1897 in the *Dictionary of American Biography*; he actually died in 1896). In one recent book, which I shall not mention for fear of embarrassing a living author, I have seen Deerfoot identified as a runner who also called himself the “American Deer”; this was actually Billy Jackson, whose best running years were in the 1850s. I mention these as only the most obvious factual errors which occur to me at the moment, to illustrate what appears to be a serious gap in scholarship, and one which has yet to be rectified.

pensate for this handicap by discussing three topics in the field of pedestrianism which seem relevant to Smollett and Burney: first, runners in the 1770s and their place in the overall history of the sport; second, women and pedestrianism; third, the phenomena of “freak runs.”

If the several hundred anecdotes on pedestrianism, scattered variously in literature, local histories, diaries, sporting papers, and newspapers, ever manage to get collected and analyzed properly, it will probably turn out that there were four periods of widespread interest in this sport. The first of these was the general revival of sports interest in the years following England’s release from Puritan repression in 1660.⁹ This period is difficult to document but there are some revealing anecdotes. For August 1660, Samuel Pepys records that he went “with Mr. Moor and Creed to Hide Park by coach, and saw a fine foot-race three times round the Park between an Irishman and Crow, that was once my Lord Claypoole’s footman”; and in his entry for 30 July 1663, Pepys bears witness to the widespread popularity of the sport and its connection with gambling:

The towne talk this day is of nothing but the great foot-race run this day on Banstead Downes, between Lee, the Duke of Redmond’s footman, and a tyler, a famous runner. And Lee hath beat him; though the king and Duke of York, and all men almost, did bet three to four to one upon the tyler’s head.¹⁰

During the same period we learn, from Dalrymple’s memoirs, that the Duke of Monmouth, eldest son of Charles II,

entered into all country diversions, and, as he was of wonderful agility, even ran races himself upon foot; and when he had outstripped the swiftest of the racers, he began again in his boots, and beat them though running in their shoes. The prizes which he gained during the day, he gave away at christenings in the evening.¹¹

Was Smollett familiar with the story of the Duke of Monmouth wearing boots as a handicap in a foot-race?

⁹The most important general survey is now Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society, Elizabeth to Anne* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

¹⁰*Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. R. C. Latham and W. Matthews (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1970–76), 1.218 (10 August 1660) and 4.255 (30 July 1663).

¹¹Quoted in Lord William Lennox, “The Prince of Wales as a Sportsman” (Ch. xxvii of his “Here’s Sport Indeed”), *The Sporting Magazine*, ser. 3, 41 (July-Dec. 1862), 127.

A second period of widespread interest in pedestrianism was inspired by the career of Foster Powell, who in 1764, at age thirty, ran 50 miles on the Bath Road in 7 hours, covering the first 10 miles in 1 hour.¹² For the next few years he put on pedestrian exhibitions in France and Switzerland, then in 1773 went on foot from London to York and back—402 miles—in 5 days 18 hours, a performance which he repeated in 1790, and again in 1792 when he reduced his time to 5 days 15½ hours. These and others of his performances attracted much public attention and drew great crowds, and also inspired many imitators. Powell's influence on other people is witnessed most eloquently in the diary of John Byng, later fifth viscount Torrington, who in his entries for 23, 27, 28 August and 2, 3, September 1790, tells of a tour to Bedfordshire undertaken at the same time as Powell's 1790 exhibition. Byng was accompanied by George Colman the younger, who was inspired to imitate Powell. For 23 August Byng writes, "he [Colman] told me that Powell arrived at Huntingdon at 12 o'clock; that he [Colman] walked forward with him about 5 miles to observe his pace and manner. Mr. C would be a famous walker with some little practice. But he does everything by starts; either very tediously, or with violent rapidity."¹³ Subsequent entries in Byng's diary are full of the latest news of Powell.

Keen interest in pedestrianism did not survive long beyond the death of Powell, which occurred shortly after his London-York performance of 1792. In 1801 the first significant historian of English sports, Joseph Strutt, felt obliged to write:

In the present day foot-races are not much encouraged by persons of fortune, and seldom happen but for the purpose of betting, and the racers are generally paid for their performance. In many instances the distance does not exceed one hundred yards. At fairs, wakes, and upon many other occasions where many people are assembled together, this species of amusement is sometimes promoted, but most frequently the contest is confined to the younger part of the concourse.¹⁴

Interest was revived as a result of the performances of Captain Barclay Allardice, who began his public exhibitions in 1796, at age fifteen, and

¹²Powell's career is summarized briefly by Shearman, pp. 32–33.

¹³*The Torrington Diaries: A Selection from the Tours of the Hon. John Byng (later Fifth Viscount Torrington) between the years 1781 and 1794*, ed. C. Broyn Andres, abr. to one vol. by Fanny Andrews (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954), pp. 296–305; quotation from p. 296.

¹⁴Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* [1801], ed. J. Charles Cox (London: Chatto and Windus, 1898), p. 143.

gained increasingly in popularity and reputation after about 1806. Interest in “peds” waned again after 1825, but was revived in the 1840s through the 1860s, the golden age of pedestrianism, which, however, does not concern us here.

During the decade of *Humphry Clinker* and *Evelina*, pedestrianism was in one of its boom periods, the one inspired by Powell, as we have seen. Its social status at this time, despite some ambiguities, was basically lower-class, and would remain so until the early nineteenth century, when Captain Barclay Allardice (usually referred to in the sporting press as Captain Barclay or simply Barclay) made the sport respectable for gentlemen. There had been, to be sure, a courtly tradition of athletics and sports, reflected in the courtesy books, but running had no significant place in that tradition: its emphasis was on activities which had a military application.¹⁵ Robert Dover, through his sponsorship of the Cotswold games beginning c. 1616, had sought to transform a Whitsuntide folk festival into a blend of “pastoralism” (that is, rural life as seen through courtly eyes), neoclassicism, and the courtly ideal of sports; the poems collected in *Annalia Dubrensia* (1636), to honor Dover for his games, develop these idealisms to the point where the specific sporting events at Cotswold are disappointingly generalized, leading one to wonder whether or not the contributing poets had any firsthand knowledge of the sporting events which they praise.¹⁶ At any event, by the 1770s the Cotswold games had pretty much reverted to the lower classes. Samuel Rudder, in *A New History of Gloucestershire* (1779), wrote that “we hear but little on the Coteswolds of . . . Mr Dover, since whose time the diversions have also much declined, for want of so good a patron” (pp. 24–25), and in 1797, a correspondent to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* wrote:

A faint imitation [of the Cotswold games] is continued into the present time, and from its founder still retains the name of Dover’s Meeting. It is usually attended by a vast concourse of people, and the athletic manoeuvres, manly exercises, and rural diversions are still practised, though not countenanced by persons of such rank and consequence as Justice Shallow, Knight of the Shire, and custos rotulorum.¹⁷

¹⁵For the courtly tradition of sports see Brailsford, pp. 8–32, 70–84. Also of interest, though lacking analytical discussion, is Marcia Vale, *The Gentleman’s Recreations: Accomplishments and Pastimes of the English Gentleman 1580–1630* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1977).

¹⁶For the Cotswold games the authority is now Christopher Whitefield, *Robert Dover and the Cotswold Games* (London: Henry Sotheman, 1962), which includes an annotated edition of the *Annalia Dubrensia*.

¹⁷Quoted in Whitefield, p. 71.

In the seventeenth century there was already a social gap between “courtly” and “rural” sports; by the time of Smollett and Burney that social gap had widened. One’s sporting preferences were influenced by class-consciousness. Most of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century “peds” were servants—running footmen;¹⁸ some were tradesmen or farmers; except for an occasional maverick like the Duke of Monmouth none were men of fortune or social standing. Participation in races by persons other than peds—at festivals or fairs like the Cotswold games—was usually perceived as entertainment for the lower classes: Maitland’s *History of London* (1739), for example, describes running and leaping matches as lower-class amusements;¹⁹ so also Joseph Addison in the second volume of *Spectator* essays, No. 161, supposedly describing a “Country Wake,” actually describing a festival he had seen at Bath.²⁰ The low social standing of pedestrianism, of course, helps create the setting which Burney requires for her satire against Merton and Coverley for their thoughtless exploitation of members of the lower classes.

Even more decisively lower-class was the participation of women in foot-races. The only context in which women participated was in “smock races” or “she-shirt races” at festivals and fairs. These were so called from the prize, a smock, which was displayed on a post prior to the race. (The men’s prizes were usually hats.)²¹ Leaving aside these smock races, the earliest evidence which I have been able to find for a woman participating seriously in pedestrianism occurs in May 1820, and occasioned the following specimen of antifeminism in the *Leamington Spa Courier*:

Last week a female, apparently about seventeen years of age, not content with her sex’s rapid movement of one member, resolved to compete with the lords of the creation in the exercise of the feet as well as the tongue, and succeeded in accomplishing the arduous performance of walking forty miles a-day for six successive days, which she completed last Saturday night. The ground chosen was from the Punch-bowl Inn, on the Butts, Warwick, through Leamington, five miles out and back again, which she traversed four times a-day. This self-imposed task was not for any wager, but merely for such remuneration as a ‘generous public’ might bestow; and, notwithstanding the influx of visitors, attracted by Warwick races, we believe she acquired little beyond the fame of

¹⁸On the status and duties of running footmen: E. W. Bovill, *English Country Life 1780–1830* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 96–100.

¹⁹Shearman, p. 22.

²⁰*The Spectator*, ed. George A. Aitken, 8 vols. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1898), II, 381–86.

²¹For smock races see Shearman, pp. 22–23, and Brailsford, pp. 113, 206, and 239.

her exploit, the public wisely discouraging an abandonment of useful labour for the vagabondizing habits of a female pedestrian. She is, we hear, a native of Birmingham.

Forty years later the great sports historian, Lord William Lennox, was disposed toward a more charitable opinion:

. . . we do not endorse the ungallant sayings of the writer, who, we think, might have selected a milder phrase as applied to one of the female sex. By this we do not mean to say that pedestrianism forms part of a woman's destiny; but as men often leave theirs, to stand behind the counter, as measurers of tape, silks, and satins, we ought not to be too hard on those of the feminine gender, who wish to emulate the deeds of Barclay (of Ure), and other great pedestrians.²²

But if a woman pedestrian was rare in 1860 and unique in 1820, in 1778 she was unheard of. We should keep these things in mind when we consider *Evelina's* several allusions to the ancient women in the foot-race as "creatures" or as "poor creatures"; these epithets are not free from ambiguity. *Evelina's* use of them reflects her sympathy for the two abused women, but even more it reflects her consciousness of her social superiority to them, a topic which the "upwardly mobile" heroine could be expected to be sensitive about.

One additional characteristic of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pedestrianism is relevant to the foot-races in *Humphry Clinker* and *Evelina*: the prominence of what we shall call "freak runs," in which one or more of the contestants either was ridiculous, or had a ridiculous handicap imposed on him. In the nineteenth century these freak runs came to occupy a much smaller proportion of the various pedestrian matches; this, at least, is the general impression one gets from the lists of forthcoming matches in *Bell's Life in London*, especially after 1838 when such matches were frequent enough (twenty to thirty each week) to warrant their own heading instead of being listed at the end of the column entitled "The Ring." The lower proportion of freak runs in the nineteenth century is probably related to the new-found respectability of pedestrianism, which we attributed, above, to the career of Captain Barclay. In any event the ridiculous features of Smollett's and Burney's foot-races belong to a tradition reported at least as early as 1660, when the *Loyal Protestant* tells of a race on Newmarket Heath:

²²Lord William Lennox, *Pictures of Sporting Life and Character*, 2 vols. (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1860), I, 114–15.

At 3 of the clock in the afternoon there was a foot-race between 2 cripples, each having a wooden leg. They started fair and hobbled a good pace, which caused great admiration and laughter among the beholders; but the tallest of the two won by 2 or 3 yards.²³

The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1780 tells of a seventy-five-year-old man who ran 4½ miles around Queen Square in 58 minutes. In 1788 a young man, with a jockey booted and spurred on his back, ran a match against an elderly fat man named Bullock. Other curious pedestrians of the period include a fish-hawker who ran 7 miles from Hyde Park Corner to Brentford, with 56 pounds weight on his head, in 45 minutes; a man who trundled a coach-wheel 8 miles in an hour round a platform erected in St. Giles' Fields; and a man who competed on stilts against another man on foot. The man on stilts was given a 20-yard start in a race of 120 yards—and won.²⁴ The sometimes freakish character of pedestrianism in this period makes it easier for modern readers to believe a story reported by James Boswell concerning some Englishmen who, trapped into going round the Uffizi, submitted to be shown a few pictures, but then, “seeing the gallery so immensely long, their impatience burst forth, and they tried for a belt who should hop first to the end of it.”²⁵ In this case we find men of fortune demonstrating their impatience through lower-class behavior. Eighteenth-century readers would very likely have witnessed ludicrous foot-races like the ones described by Smollett and Burney, and would have recognized the ludicrous details as part of the sociological characterization of them as lower-class.

Humphry Clinker, gambling statutes, court cases, Frances Powell, freak runs—it is always difficult to say exactly what details from literature or life an author had in mind when shaping a particular passage in a work of fiction, though of course Burney would have known Smollett's novel and would probably have heard of the Queen Anne statute and of Frances Powell, on whose behalf that statute was often violated. Other matters, such as *Lynall v. Longbottom*, would not have been known to her. It is less difficult, perhaps, to decide what factors might have influenced the response of eighteenth-century readers to particular passages of fiction. Readers of Smollett and Burney would probably recollect the foot-race in *Humphry Clinker* while reading

²³Quoted from Shearman, p. 18.

²⁴Shearman, pp. 29–30.

²⁵See J. R. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 74.

Evelina. They would have recognized that the hundred-pound wager in *Evelina* was beyond the limit allowed in the gambling statutes, but if they disapproved of the conduct of Merton and Coverley, most would do so not on legal grounds, but on grounds that these two gentlemen had made fools of themselves, and abused two poor old women while doing so. And in the ludicrous details of both foot-races, especially the one in *Evelina*, they would have recognized an expression of class-consciousness.

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