

## "We Who Are All Players": Constructing Early Modern Tennis

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I will start with two stanzas of a personal poem on tennis, not my own, but one by someone who felt just as old playing the game, although he was only forty-five—apparently a ripe age in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is by one of the highest French noblemen of the time, Charles d'Orléans (1391-1465), taken prisoner for ransom by the English at the battle of Agincourt, after which he was forced to live in England for decades (from 1415 until 1440, when he was released). Since he seems to give his age as 45 in the poem, we can boldly claim it for English literature.

J'ay tant joué avecques Aage  
A la paulme que maintenant  
J'ay quarante cinq; sur bon gage  
Nous jouons, non pas pour neant.  
Assez me sens fort et puissant  
De garder mon jeu jusqu'a cy,  
Ne je ne crains riens que Soussy.

.....  
Viellese de douleur enrage  
De ce que le jeu dure tant,  
Et dit, en son felon language,  
Que les chasses dorenavant  
Merchera, pour m'estre nuisant;  
Mais ne m'en chault, je la defy,  
Ne je ne crains riens que Soussy (I, 144-45).<sup>1</sup>

[I have played so much tennis with Age / That now I am [or have the score of] forty-five. / We play for good bets, not for nothing. / I feel quite strong and powerful / To keep my game until now, / Nor do I fear anything but Worry ... .

Old Age irritates with pain / Because the game takes so long, / And says in her nasty language, / That from now on she will / Mark [count?] the chases, to be unpleasant to me; / But I don't care, I defy her / Nor do I fear anything but Worry.]

In the allegorical tennis game described here, seemingly a doubles or triples match, Charles d'Orléans plays against Age, Worry, and Fortune; he has only Hope (Espoir) to second him (*seconder* was a tennis term). French "*j'ai quarante-cinq*" allows the ambiguity of referring to the player's age and also to his score (I am 45 and I have 45). One may wonder why he thinks of Fortune as an opponent—possibly because at that time he began to suffer from the gout or because he is forced to live as an expatriate. The poem also indicates that, like most early modern tennis players, he plays for something, that is, some bets are placed, for one does not play for nothing in a proper game. The passing of time, which in the period is usually suggested in erotic terms by a short-lived flower, is here quite effectively presented by the tennis player's aching body reaching for the ball. A "chase" is usually defined as a stroke in abeyance. It designates the second impact of the ball which the opponent has failed or declined to return. Its value depends on how near this spot is to the end of the wall. How to mark these balls is considered the most arguable part in "real" tennis, and apparently Age will now tip the score against the speaker. Heiner Gillmeister reminds us that, according to contemporary tennis rules, the chases are contested when forty-five points have been accumulated (Gillmeister 131).<sup>2</sup> We feel the elation that leads to challenging the opponent, Old Age (*Je la deffy!*), what in our language we might call the natural "uppers" or endorphins, the "high" brought about by exercise, but also sense concern about the inevitable and crushing defeat in the refrain ending each stanza: "*Ne je ne crains riens que Soussi.*"

The most wide-ranging book on tennis in the period is the *Trattado del giuoco della palla* (1555) by Antonio Scaino (1524-1612), a priest born in Salò at Lake Garda.<sup>3</sup> In his preface, Scaino says that tennis is suited to almost all humors and temperaments: *è caro a' gioviali* [it is dear to the jovial or sanguine] and *piace ai melanconici* [pleasing to melancholics]. *Le donne ancora apresso ad Omero giocavano alla palla*. [Even women, according to Homer, played it=played ball.] "At Udine, the chief town of Friuli, and elsewhere, charming young girls [*le vaghe donzelle*] take simple pleasure in it in our times; and in Ferrara ... there were formerly young ladies [*alcune damigelle*] who were wonderfully expert and clever at the cord game with the racket" [*nel giuoco della corda con rachetta*] (Scaino 3). Scaino claims that a judicious spectator will be able to tell from the way someone is playing that person's value (perhaps he means

aptitude?) for the profession of arms, wrestling, running and other athletic exercises. He further claims, most interestingly, that a tennis-player reveals the inner core of his character on the court:

I say further that anyone of good judgment and knowledge can read from the face and the words of such a player (as though he were looking at the image of himself in a very clear mirror) all the inner sentiments of his mind, that is to say, whether he is magnanimous [*magnanimo*], generous [*liberale*], tolerant [*sofferente*], just [*giusto*], truthful [*veredico*], loyal [*leale*], perspicacious [*avveduto*] and prudent [*prudente*], and watching him play for any length of time, he will learn, on the other hand, whether he is mean [*avarro*], cowardly [*vile*], pusillanimous [*pusillanimo*], impatient [*impaziente*], quarrelsome [*contenzioso*] and ignorant [*ignorante*] ( Scaino 3-4; ed. Nonni 14.)

Scaino even goes a step further, which may remind us of the poem by Charles d'Orléans, with which I started: for he says that anyone who wishes to think theologically (by which he might mean "allegorically") could take the game as an illustration of our life "and think of the court, closed in on all sides by walls and barriers, as nothing more nor less than this troublesome world in which we who are all players are placed and across which is the cord, the brake and boundary of moderation or, better said, of justice, the source of every good . . . ." He expands on this by saying that we are not to aim the ball too high nor too low, that we should stay calm, not expose ourselves too much, be neither too daring nor too timid. His aim in this book, dedicated to the Prince of Ferrara, is not theological (therefore I rather translate that word as "allegorical") but to prove that tennis is useful within a well-ordered commonwealth.

But rather than pursuing theological, allegorical, or political uses of tennis, I want to start with a few notions about the early modern game that most people agree on. Then, in the second half of my paper, I will question or at least refine them.

1. In one of the best articles on early modern sport, Gregory M. Colón Semenza has argued that while the meaning of the word *sport* was wide and covered activities that were disorderly, frivolous, and fun as well as those that were lawful, functional, and related to exercise, most Englishmen distinguished between the "two sorts of sport" (Semenza, 2000).<sup>4</sup> His thesis is that modern attention to Bakhtinian carnivalesque has blinded modern scholars to the significant writing and thinking in the period about the function of exercise: "Early Modern Englishmen understood sport both as potentially functional and potentially superfluous—or even topsy-turvy—phenomena, depending on matters of degree and context" (Semenza, 2000, 24). In societies as highly hierarchical as the early modern ones, in which one lived and died by the rules of decorum, tennis was not for everyone, particularly not in England. Depending

on the kind of persons playing, the time, and the place of play, tennis could be seen as frivolous or noble activity.

2. Tennis is a "modern" game. Understandably in a period that used to be called the "Renaissance," some of the best-known authors on athletic activity, as, for instance, Mercurialis (in his *De arte gymnastica*, 1565), are beholden to ancient (particularly Greek and Latin) models and have little sympathy for "modern" ones (Manson 361).<sup>5</sup> Invariably, writers in the period will try to connect the game with accounts of games with small balls in Homer or by Galen. Thus Mulcaster, talking about "hand ball" with and without "rackette," adds that Galen wrote an entire book on ball play as a preservation of health (Mulcaster 103).<sup>6</sup> Of course it is notoriously difficult to determine what, for instance, Latin *ludus pilarum* might mean. In her brief section on tennis in her book *The Gentlemanly Recreations*, Marcia Vale points out that John Northbrooke, "a denouncer of most contemporary pastimes, couples tennis with the two most revered aristocratic recreations," namely hawking and hunting, and in an imaginary dialogue has Age reply to Youth's question about the value of all three: "These exercises are good, and have been used in ancient times, as we may read in Genesis" (Northbrooke 79).<sup>7</sup> Of course there is no tennis in Genesis. In the most recent book-length history of tennis, Heiner Gillmeister claims that "the racket was not elected protector of the tennis players' hands before the sixteenth century" (Gillmeister 5).<sup>8</sup>

3. Tennis is an aristocratic game, even if (as Gillmeister correctly points out) the argument from the name "real tennis" as in "royal tennis" is weak, for the term "real tennis" is only just over a hundred years old and emerged in the 1870s in opposition to new-fangled lawn-tennis (Gillmeister 28). Many attempts were made to reserve the game for the aristocracy. This is so, although in his cultural history of tennis, Heiner Gillmeister has shown convincingly that the origins of the game lie with clerics in the cloister (Gillmeister, ch I). (Even the "penthouse" still used in real tennis can be traced to the arcaded walk of the cloister.) In the famous illustrated *Orbis pictus* (1658) by the Czech educator Comenius, tennis (*ludus pilae*) is still called *ludus nobilium* (game for, or of, aristocrats) (Marshall, 84). Indeed, there are many proclamations by English and French kings forbidding commoners to play tennis. Julian Marshall has collected some of these, beginning with the first restrictive act by Edward III in 1365 (because allegedly tennis does not improve military strength), followed by another "class legislation" in 1389 (in which servants are allowed to use bows and arrows on Sundays and holidays, but are forbidden "idle games" such as tennis), to Edward IV (for whom the tennis historian Marshall does not hide his distaste: "a selfish, cruel and revengeful man"), who repeated the interdictions of tennis, and finally to Henry VIII, who, while building new tennis courts in his castles for his courtiers and himself, forbade the game to the "baser sort" (Marshall 55). And there is at least one famous episode of "pulling rank" (on the tennis-court) involving an eminent English poet that we will discuss later.

4. As a game of gentlemen and occasionally even noble ladies, tennis is a gentle game in the other sense: it is not violent. In Thomas Elyot's classification of "the diversities of exercises" in his *Castle of Health* (1541), tennis appears twice: once in the group of "swifte exercise without violence," as different from "strong and violent" such as wrestling or football ("wherein is nothyng but beastly fury"). Another time it appears in the category of "moderate exercise" together with loud reading, running, throwing the ball, and walking (*The Castle* 46 ; *Govenor* 69). The non-violent nature of tennis seems to be a commonplace. In Mulcaster, the moderation of the exercise is what makes it so beneficial:

The litle (sic) *handball* is counted to be a swift exercise, without violence, and therefore, the rakketers in tennyse play, if they use in that kinde, which is thought to be the most healthfull, must shew them selves nymble without straying, & yet it falleth out most commonly contrarie, while desire to wynne some wager makes the winners loose a benefit, which they wish for more, & would gladly get to better their health by (104).

Mulcaster thus distinguishes ideal and practice (i.e., how tennis is played "most commonlie"). I will get to the violence of tennis and connected with tennis a little further down.

At this point, let me add a little more precision to the four notions about the game I singled out.

1. While there was a good measure of Puritan opposition to all kinds of recreation—the notorious Phillip Stubbes condemns tennis in his *Anatomy of Abuses*—there seem to have been all kinds of "tennis" in France, in Italy, and also in England (Sig. L2<sup>v</sup>).<sup>9</sup> As we have already seen, tennis was, more often than not, played with bets, and there are reports of people ruining themselves in the game. Even in Erasmus' colloquy *De lusu*, the school boys put up a penny to make the game more interesting. To play on an indoor court must have been quite expensive: Benvenuto Cellini reports that he drew "considerable profit" (which may refer to his physical conditioning through playing) from the tennis court he had in his Paris castle or mansion, but he says of someone else (Le Petit Nesle) that "he keeps a tennis-court in his Château, from which he draws a substantial income" (bk. ii, ch. iv). One played at least for the cost of the expensive balls and rackets, but also for the rent of the court, for food and drinks, and the cost of the victory celebration (Fontaine 100).<sup>10</sup> Thus tennis is commonly included with or at least associated with, games of fortune such as card games and dice. This seems to have been particularly true of England.

In the light of these remarks, we may reconsider the well-known passage from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The French ambassador here says to the young King Henry:

Your Highness, lately sending into France,  
 Did claim some certain dukedoms, in the right  
 Of your great predecessor, King Edward the Third.  
 In answer of which claim, the prince our master  
 Says that you savor too much of your youth,  
 And bids you be advis'd: there is nought in France  
 That can be with a nimble galliard won;  
 You cannot revel into dukedoms there.  
 He therefore sends you, meeter for your spirit,  
 This tun of treasure; and, in lieu of this,  
 Desires you let the dukedoms that you claim  
 Hear no more of you. This the Dolphin speaks.  
*K. Hen.* What treasure, uncle?  
*Exe.* Tennis-balls, my liege (I.ii. 246-58).

While my students in California tend to say "Wow, man, awesome: a ton of tennis-balls!", Henry in Shakespeare's terms undoubtedly understands this gift correctly as a taunt, referring to his earlier profligate and care-free ways as a madcap prince, when he says: "Tell the pleasant prince this mock of his / Hath turn'd his balls to gun-stones." But, while as Greg Semenza has demonstrated, Englishmen had a clear understanding of the two "sorts" of sport, the disorderly-frivolous and the functional, tennis for many of them seems to have been much farther to the frivolous side than for the French, for whom tennis had become something like the national sport, that reached its peak about 1600. Somewhat ironically, Shakespeare seems to impute a particularly English sense about tennis onto the French.

The editors of the highly reputed Riverside edition boldly say in their footnote to this passage (without any further explanation): "There is apparently no historical foundation for this famous episode of the tennis balls." Such boldness may be surprising, for Holinshed's *Chronicle*, Shakespeare's most common source for the histories has the following:

Whilest in the Lent season [1414] the king laie at Killingworth, there came to him from Charles [error for Louis] Dolfyn of France certeine ambassadors, that brought with them a barrel of Paris balles, which from their maister they presented to him for a token that was taken in verie ill part, as sent in scorne, to signifie, that it was more meet for the king to passe the time with such childish exercise, than to attempt any worthie exploit (Bullough 376-77).<sup>11</sup>

In fact, report of the incident is older than Holinshed and Hall, whom Shakespeare usually consulted. Thomas Otterbourne, a contemporary to the event (unavailable to Shakespeare), writes (in Latin):

In the same fourteenth year, as the King was staying at Kenilworth, Charles, son of the king of the French and called Dauphin, sent French balls [*pilas Parisianis*, by the editor interpreted as faulty for *Parisianas*] for him to play with boys. To whom the English King wrote back that he would soon send balls from London, with which he would frighten and confound his roofs (Otterbourne 274-275).<sup>12</sup>

There is no question that the English King's verbal outburst in Shakespeare is a dramatization of such a report. While tracing a transmutation of a source might suffice a Shakespeare scholar, our interest is larger: it is inter-cultural, namely the possibility that the status of the game was different on the two sides of the Channel. It is therefore reasonable to ask what the French say about the episode.

The earliest French reference I can claim to have read myself is from François Belleforest (1568):

Henry V ... asked for the hand of Catherine, daughter of the King. But the princes (since the King was ill) gave such a cold response and excused themselves so poorly that the Englishman got the opinion that they disdained him and that it seemed to the French that he was unworthy of the match. Therefore he thought of how to avenge himself ... (276).<sup>13</sup>

But for any other indications of a diplomatic rift between England and France than these hints in Belleforest my consultation of French accounts of history remains disappointing. Most say that the English ambassadors were well received, in fact were treated to a *tournoi*, and while the negotiations about the Catherine dowry were protracted, there would have been no interest in offending the English.<sup>14</sup> None of these quite detailed accounts mention an intent to insult the English (nor do they mention the reputed "tun of tennis balls").

Presumably such doubts about historicity are behind the brief note in the Riverside edition denying the episode a historical foundation. Indeed, James Hamilton Wylie, a modern historian, says that "the French chroniclers know nothing whatever of the incident" (53). The same historian asserts that on the other side (of the Channel) "King Henry's contemporaries believed that he had been made a laughing-stock through the rejection of his pretensions by the French and that he himself afterwards officially repeated the charge ..." (I, 437). Before Wylie, a German historian had combed the records and had found nothing factual to substantiate the tennis ball story, except (most interestingly) he had pointed to the prominence in Greek romances read in the period of a similar ball story connected to the Alexander-Darius rivalry: as a sign of his lack of respect for Alexander because of his youth, Darius is supposed to have sent him in a box a whip and some balls. As anecdotes connected with famous persons often do, the ball story would have separated from the ancient Greek

conqueror and would have become attached to Henry V (Emmerig 363-401). This would add a little more meat to a very recent historian's surmise that "the tale [of the insulting tub of tennis balls] may have been a piece of propaganda, invented and put about by Henry's agents" (Seward 53).

Thus, while the story of the barrel or tun of tennis balls is most likely not historical, it is not Shakespeare's invention. But the imputation of French mockery is English and Shakespeare participates in it. How English an interpretation it is will be a little more apparent and convincing when, further down, we will consider the different status of tennis on the two sides of the Channel in the early modern period.

2. Was tennis a modern game? The answer to that question depends on what we call tennis. The range of what was called tennis or *jeu de paume* was wide. Scaino praises as one of the advantages of tennis that "it does not require much equipment, like hunting and other pastimes; all that is required is a ball at a very low price" (Kershaw 2). Really? Is that all? For Erasmus the sport he advocated was a team sport, although he at least mentions rackets. These, I would think, go back farther than Gillmeister claims, who (as we saw) thinks that "the racket was not elected protector of the tennis players' hands before the sixteenth century." While a "modern" invention, the racket was probably not as recent as that. For what would Chaucer have had in mind in the second half of the fourteenth century when he had his Troylus say, in *Troylus and Cryseyde*, "But canstow playen racket, to and fro, / Nettle in, dokke out, now this, now that, Pandare?" (IV, 460). There are more uncertainties. I wonder what Queen Elizabeth I saw on her progress through Hampshire in 1591. On the third day of the entertainment at Elvetham, as she opened a "casement of her gallerie window," she listened to three musicians "disguised in ancient attire," who played for her a song.

The same day after dinner, about three of the clocke, ten of my Lord of Herefords servants, al Somersetshire men, in a square greene Court, before her maiesties window, did hang up lines, squaring out the forme of a Tennis-court, and making a cross line in the midle. In this square they (being stript out of their dublets) played five to five with the hand-ball, at bord and cord (as they tearme it) to so great a liking of her highnes, that she graciously deynded to beholde their pastime more than an houre and a halfe (*The Honorable Entertainment* Sig. D3<sup>v</sup>).

Thus this game was also played without back and side walls and without "grille." I might add that it has been attempted, I would say mistakenly, to derive the name *tennis* from such games of five plus five, that is ten players (Minsheu).<sup>15</sup> But my main point is that what contemporaries in a general way think of as tennis is a chameleon or, as they said in the period, a waxen nose that bent this way and that.



Certainly Queen Elizabeth knew what "real" (in the sense of *royal*) tennis was. Here is a contemporary report of a quarrel that erupted in her presence most likely in the *dedans*, the aisle next to the indoor tennis court. (The opening words are missing and are reconstructed by Julian Marshall, from whom I borrow this passage):

[I have it from this] nobleman's mouthe that latlye the Dukes G. [of Norfolk] and my L. of L. [Leicester] were playenge at tennes the Q. beholdinge of them, and my L. Rob. being verie hotte and swetinge tooke the Q. napken oute of her hande and wyped his face, which the Duke seinge saide that he was to sawcie and swore that he wolde laye his racket upon his face. Here upon rose a great trouble and the Q. offendid sore with the Duke (69-70).<sup>16</sup>

The threatened violence here is only marginally related to tennis (as *post lusum* exhilaration or "high") and therefore does not interest me particularly. However, we will return to violence more closely related to tennis later.

Also at the margin of our interest, we may point to what the traveler Thomas Coryat saw in Venice on Sunday evenings: "Sixe or seven yong men or thereabout weare certaine round things upon their armes, made of timber, which are full of sharpe pointed knobs cut out of the same matter . . . . Having put this round instrument upon one of their armes, they tosse up and downe a great ball, as great as our football in England: sometimes they will toss the ball with this instrument . . ." (Coryat I,385).<sup>17</sup> I mention such games because with them we are getting closer to what Renaissance humanists considered ball games of the ancients.

3. Here is the next problem: if the game was so aristocratic, how could ten servants so ably display their skills at it in front of the Queen's window (if this was tennis)? For Paris, if we can believe the Venetian envoy, who wrote in 1577 that "there are more than 1800 tennis courts in various parts of the town . . .", it cannot have been true that the game was restricted to the aristocracy (Scaino xlvi).<sup>18</sup> He goes on to speculate that a thousand crowns are spent daily in Paris on the purchase of rackets. In England, attempts to restrict tennis to the highest classes seem to have been more effective. In fact, a well-known incident of 1579 involving the famous Renaissance poet Sir Philip Sidney and Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> earl of Oxford (1550-1604, the very one still held up by a few as the putative author of Shakespeare's works), is evidence that rank was pulled even on the tennis court itself. To understand the account by Fulke Greville one needs to know that Edward Vere was indeed of the highest rank, that he was the son-in-law of Lord Burghley, and that he had the ear of princes:

[Sir Philip Sidney] being one day at Tennis, a Peer of this Realm, born great, greater by alliance, and superlative in the Princes favour, abruptly came into the Tennis-Court; and speaking out

of these three paramount authorities, he forgot to entreat that, which he could not legally command. When by the encounter of a steady object, finding unrespectiveness in himself (though a great Lord) not respected by this Princely spirit, he grew to expostulate more roughly. The returns of which stile comming still from an understanding heart, that knew what was due to it self, and what it ought to others, seemed (through the mists of my Lords passions, swoln with the winde of his faction then reigning) to provoke in yeelding. Whereby, the lesse amazement, or confusion of thoughts he stirred up in Sir *Philip*, the more shadowes this great Lords mind was possessed with: till at last with rage (which is ever ill-disciplin'd) he commands them to depart the Court. To this Sir *Philip* temperately answers; that if his Lordship had been pleased to express desire in milder Characters, perchance he might have led out those, that he should now find would not be driven out with any scourge of fury. This answer (like Bellows) blowing up the sparks of excess already kindled, made my Lord scornfully call Sir *Philip* by the name of Puppy. In which progress of heat, as the tempest grew more vehement within, so did their hearts breath out their perturbations in a more loud and shrill accent. The *French* Commissioners unfortunately had that day audience, in those private Galleries, whose windows looked into the Tennis-Court. They instantly drew all to this tumult: every sort of quarrels sorting well with their humors, especially this. Which Sir *Philip* perceiving, and rising with inward strength, by the prospect of a mighty faction against him: asked my Lord, with a loud voice, that which he heard clearly enough before. Who (like an Echo, that still multiplies by reflexions) repeated this Epithet of Puppy the second time. Sir *Philip* resolving in one answer to conclude both the attentive hearers, and passionate actor, gave my Lord a Lie, impossible (as he averred) to be retorted; in respect all the world knows, Puppies are gotten by Dogs, and Children by men (Greville 74-77).<sup>19</sup>

Giving someone "a lie" of course called for a challenge to a duel, and it was utterly improper for Sir Philip to do that to someone outranking him by as much as did the Earl of Oxford. Fulke Greville describes beautifully how the effect of the challenge, to which only the response by a weapon is possible, sinks in: "Hereupon those glorious inequalities of Fortune in his Lordship were put to a kinde of pause, by a precious inequality of nature in this Gentleman. So that they stood silent a while, like a dumb shew in a Tragedy." Then Sidney abruptly led his friends away, while the Earl of Oxford started his game. Greville then describes at length how Sidney remained in suspense for a day

waiting for the formal challenge, while the great lord's thoughts "wandered between glory, anger, and inequality of state" (78).<sup>20</sup> It took the intervention of the queen (who "lays before him [Sir Philip Sidney] the difference in degree between Earls and Gentlemen" or enforces privilege) to squash this struggle for a tennis-court.

While there is evidence that even the "middling sort" found some alleys to play tennis even in England (where also the ten servants mentioned earlier would have picked up the game), there is no question that tennis was more restricted there than in France. Visitors from England were struck by the popularity of tennis in France, as was Robert Dallington in his *View of France* (1604). Again a rather long quotation is necessary: its flavor adds to the authenticity of his observations, and from his view of France we can reconstruct how elitist tennis was in England:

As for the exercise of Tennis play ..., it is more here used, then in all of Christendome besides; whereof may witnesse the infinite number of Tennis Courts throughout the land, insomuch as yee cannot finde that little *Burgade* [sic], or towne in France, that hath not one ormore of them. Here are, as you see three score in *Orleans*; and I know not how many hundred there be in *Paris*: but of this I am sure, that if there were in other places the like proportion, ye should have two Tennis Courts, for every one Church through France.

Me thinks it is also strange, how apt they be to play well, that ye would thinke they were borne with Rackets in their hands, even the children themselves manage them so well, and some of their women also, as we observed at Blois. [Blois had been the castle of Charles d'Orléans, with whose poem I started.]

There is this one great abuse in this exercise, that the Magistrates do suffer everypoor Citizen, and Artificer to play thereat, who spendeth that on the Holiday, at tennis, which he got the whole weeke, for the keeping of his poore family. A thing more hurtful then our Ale-houses in England, though the one and the other be bad ynough. And of this I dare assure you, that of this sort of poor people, there be more Tennis Players in France, then Ale-drinkers, or Malt-wormes (as they call them) with us (Dallington Sig T5-T5<sup>v</sup>).

Although modern precisionists might object that Dallington should have taken into account wine drinkers in his comparison, it is still clear what the righteous Englishman is seeing and what he is comparing it to. It is this very imbalance of the status of tennis on different sides of the Channel that I brought to

bear on the passage with the problematic "ton" of tennis balls. Was tennis so widely accepted in France that the gift was not intended to be an insult?

I am giving full weight to contemporary Dallington's report, since it is the best we have, although I need to admit that Julian Marshall, one of the "classical" authorities on the history of tennis, whose book is chock-full of precise information, appears to disagree on this very point. Perhaps carried away by some kind of late-romantic utopian idealism that has him imagine a period when noblemen and peasants played tennis together, he misreads a passage from Thomas Dekker's *Gul's Horne-Booke* (1609):

If you be a courtier ... discourse ... how often you have sweat in the Tennis-court with that great Lord: for indeed the sweating together in France (I mean the society of tennis) is a great argument of most deare affection even between noble men and peasants (42-43).

The quotation elicits the following comment from Marshall: "The passage from Dekker ... incidentally proves that the game was commonly and amicably played by nobles and peasants together, at the time when he wrote" (Marshall 78). I oppose Marshall's opinion, who says elsewhere that "the game was ... played by all classes," only reluctantly, since his research is usually solid (70). But his reading of the Dekker passage is problematic. The first problem with his wide-eyed reading is that Dekker throws in the words *in France*: he is not talking about tennis in England. The second problem is that Dekker's passage, like so much of his book, is satire and drifts away from French tennis to the treatment (in sweat baths, often with the use of guaiacum wood) of the French disease, a treatment that was more democratic than the English tennis-courts.

4. We saw tennis praised for being not a violent exercise. For many Renaissance observers with their classical training (as, for instance, for Erasmus and for Mulcaster), the moderation of tennis, allied to the Aristotelian *mezotes*, assured its health benefit. But in the words of Mulcaster, which I quoted earlier, there was the admission that the desire to win "some wager" may make the contestants lose that benefit and strain themselves.

Immoderation takes at least two forms: addiction to the game and violence. Protestants liked to cite Charles IX's infatuation with the game. A portrait of the future king at the age of two significantly shows him with a racket in hand. It is reported that on the day of the Batholemew massacre (August 22, 1572), the Admiral Coligny walked the King to the tennis court, where he left him to play doubles. On the way from there, Coligny was attacked and mortally wounded in the street. It is reported that before he died he asked someone to report to the King what had happened. The messenger still found the King on the court at play, who greeted him with outrage: "N'aurai-je donc jamais de repos, s'écria-t-il; quoi! Toujours de nouveaux troubles" (Luze 47). Then, throwing his racket to the ground, Charles returned to the Louvre.

There are indications that early modern tennis was more violent than we would expect. Montaigne's brother was killed on the tennis-court at the age of twenty-three by a ball that hit him under his ear: apparently, when several people played, the positions close to the cord were particularly dangerous. There are many references in the period to the number of shirts tennis players sweat through while playing as well as also references to players dying from exposure to cold after overheating. In 1316 Louis X, called "le Hutin" [the quarrelsome], is supposed to have died as the result of a *jeu de la paume* (the French word for handball and for tennis): after being unusually heated from playing in the Forest of Vincennes, he retired to a grotto, where he became chilled and shortly after died (Noel, Clark 2)<sup>21</sup>. When King James I's son Henry died so young (at age 18 in 1612), rumors abounded about the cause of his death, and a chill after playing tennis, a game the prince loved, was one of them.

Prince Henry's passion for tennis leads me to the final episode I am going to narrate, which is about a different kind of violence related to the game. Prince Henry's tennis partner was the young Earl of Essex, son of a famous father and admirer of Queen Elizabeth (Sir Walter Devereux). The elder Essex had been appointed by her governor of Ireland, but for having returned to London in arms, he had been convicted for insurrection and then executed as a rebel. All this one needs to know to understand what happened on the tennis court, when Prince Henry played with young Essex:

*Prince Henry* was pleased to bee very conversant and familiar with him [Essex], being neere unto him in age, but more neere in affection then in yeeres. Betwixt whom and this Earle, there happened a remarkable passage, which I conceive in this place not improper to insert.

*Prince Henry*, and this young Earle delighted themselves one morning with the exercise and pleasure of the Tennis Court. After that a set or two were played there did arise some difference, upon a mistake: From banding of the Ball, the Prince being raised into a cholar, did begin to bandy words, and was so transported with his passion, that hee told the Earle of *Essex* that he was the son of a Traytor. The Earl of *Essex* was then in the flourish of his youth, and full of fire and courage, and being not able to containe himselfe, he did strike the Prince with his Racket on the head, and that so shrewdly, that (as tis said) some drops of bloud did trickle down. The news of this was presently brought to the Kings eare, who having examined the businesse, and fully understood the manner and occasion of it, did dismisse the Earle without any great check, and (being a true peace-maker) he told his Sonne, that he who did strike him then, would bee sure with more violent blowes to strike his Enemy in times to come (Codrington 5).

In the seventeenth-century author's wordplay "from banding of the Ball" to "bandy words," *banding* is derived from the tennis term *bandy*, a noun explained in the OED as (1) "a particular way of playing at tennis, the nature of which is not now known" and (2) "a 'return' at tennis, a stroke." *Shrewdly* means "hard" or "dangerously." King James I, incidentally, in his *Basilikon Doron* (1603), a book written for and addressed to that very Prince Henry, had commended tennis, with other forms of exercise (such as running, wrestling, fencing) if played "moderately, not making a craft of them." Here he had to exercise his role as peacemaker (which he liked to attribute to himself in European politics), because tennis had gotten violent.

However, one may object that with the last episode I have descended to the level of the *National Inquirer* or, as one would have put it in the seventeenth century, to the level of the *Mercurius Gallo-Belgicus*. Therefore it is time to venture a few conclusions.

On the wide band denoted by early modern *sport* (from frivolous activity to athletic exercise), tennis could occupy different positions in different contexts. In England tennis had opponents not only among Puritans (who associated tennis with card-play and dice because of the common wagering connected with the game) but also among the highest aristocrats, who wanted to prevent the vast majority of the population from playing the game because, since tennis was a "modern" game, there was no tradition of justifying it as para-military conditioning. There tennis tends to be seen as a frivolous pastime. In England tennis is also highly hierarchical—even, as we have seen in a famous episode, when it comes to determine who has the use of the court. On the Continent there are far-ranging claims and justifications for the game, including that it reveals the innermost of a person's character and that it can be read "theologically" or allegorically ("we who are all players"). Inter-cultural difference, the difference of status between the game in France and in England, may have been used by early politicians to give the tennis-balls of a famous diplomatic episode (later used by Shakespeare) a particular "spin." Both in England and on the Continent, however, there is a bothersome uncertainty of two kinds: how far back in early modern and medieval history can we project a game we call "tennis," and can we accept anything as tennis that early modern observers call by that name. (What was the game that delighted Queen Elizabeth for an hour and a half?) In view of the scarcity of evidence, it may be hard or even impossible to avoid shifting between a perspective linguists call onomaseological (starting from a concept) and another called semaseological (starting from a word, in this case *tennis*). As to theory versus practice, there is evidence that the practitioners of the game gave little heed to the neat spot of moderation or *mezotes* that the classically trained educators or humanists had chosen for tennis to elevate its status: the practitioners sweated through half a dozen shirts, argued about points, and occasionally even drew blood with the tennis racket.

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## Notes

1. At the age of 12, Charles was engaged to the young widow of Richard II of England, Isabelle, and married her in 1408. (She died soon at childbirth.) In later years, he suffered of the gout.
2. Gillmeister translates the entire ballad.
3. I will quote from the English translation, *Scaino on Tennis* by W. W. Kershaw (London: Strangeways, 1951) and will occasionally give the original wording from the recent edition *Trattato del giuoco della palla*, a cura di Giorgio Nonni (Urbino: Quattro Venti, 2000).
4. Relevant by the same author are also: "Sport, War, and Contest in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 1221-1272; and "Samson Agonistes and the Politics of Restoration Sport," *SEL*, 42,3 (Summer 2002), 459-73.
5. "Nous noterons que, même si Mercurialis admet qu'on puisse utiliser les exercices modernes (la paume, par exemple), la majorité des auteurs du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle s'entienent aux modèles antiques."
6. This is something like a commonplace in the period. In 1659, La Mariniere still wonders whether Galen meant "*le jeu de la pelote*" or "*le jeu de la paume*" [=tennis]. See his section "*Le Ieu Royal de la Paume*" in *La maison académique contenant les jeux* (Paris, 1659), p. 132.
7. Marcia Vale, p. 100. She points out that in Gen. 27:5, Esau goes out to hunt venison. Of course no ball game is mentioned.
8. See also p. 17: "Tennis rackets must have come into being around the turn of the sixteenth century."



9. In the section on the sabbath: "pyping, danncing, dicing, bowling, tennis playing."
10. See the chapter "*Le jeu de la paume comme modèle des échanges: quelques règles de la sociabilité à la Renaissance.*"
11. Holinshed (1587 ed.). Quoted from Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Bullough (p. 377) also refers to the early modern historian Hall, who clearly imputes an insulting intent to the French prince. According to Hall, "the Dolfyn thinkynge Kyng Henry to be geven still to suche plaies and light folies as he exercised and used before the tyme that he was exalted to the croune sente to hym a tunne of tennis balles to plaie with, as who said that he coulede better skil of tennis then of warre, and was more expert in light games then marciall pollicy."
12. pp. 274-75: "*Eodem anno in Quadragesima, rege existente apud Kenilworth, Karolus, regis Francorum filius, Dalphinus vocatus, misit pilas Parisianis [sic] ad ludendum cum pueris. Cui rex Anglorum rescripsit, dicens, se in brevi pilas missurum Lononiarum, quibus terreret et confunderet sua tecta.*" If *Parisianis* is not an error for *Parisianas* (as the editor Hearne thinks), one could translate "for him to play with Parisian boys."
13. "*Henry le quint ... demanda Catherine fille du Roy en mariage. Mais les Princes (estant le Roy malade) donnerent la responce si froide, et s'excuserent si maigrement que l'Anglois eut l'opinion qu'on le mesprisoit, et qu'il s'embloit aux François qu'il fust indigne de leur alliance. A ceste cause delibera s'en venger ...*"
14. See, for example, Bernard de Montfaucon III, 162; I. *Le Laboureur* II 962-1001; Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi XII, 463-470.
15. In his *Ductor in Linguas* (1617), John Minsheu, is undoubtedly closer to the truth with the second etymology he gives for *tennis*: "'tenez' Frenchmen use to speke, when they strike the ball at tennis." (His first etymology.) is from Greek "to stretch out.")
16. Letter of Randolph to Throckmorton, State Papers, Scotland, vol. X, No. 31A, according to Julian Marshall, *The Annals of Tennis*, pp. 69-70.
17. Coryat's book was first published in 1611.
18. Quoted from W. W. Kershaw's "Historical Notes" at the end of *Scaino on Tennis*.
19. For helpful explanatory annotation, see Fulke Greville, *The Prose Works*, ed. John Gouws. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
20. In his recent and impressively meticulous book on the Earl of Oxford, Alan H. Nelson has recounted the incident in detail and shown that the challenge was actually made and that Charles Arundel and Sir Walter Raleigh were the messengers requesting the duel. See section 37, "Oxford and Sidney," 195-200; particularly p. 198.
21. Citing Villaret, *Histoire de France*, tome vii, p. 46.