

Montaigne and the Sports of Italy

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Résumé : *De son propre aveu (Essais II, 17) Montaigne n'était pas très sportif. Pourtant, dès la première édition des Essais il y inséra de nombreuses allusions aux sports et de fréquentes métaphores tirées de pratiques athlétiques. De même, pendant son voyage en Allemagne, Suisse et Italie il assista — à une exception près — à toutes les manifestations sportives qui se présentèrent, préférant toutefois celles qui impliquaient la noblesse ou qui lui rappelaient la Rome ancienne. En France à l'époque il y avait très peu de possibilités de regarder des concours athlétiques, et encore moins de parler sport avec des gens de sa classe sociale et intellectuelle. En Italie, il a pu faire les deux, et se réjouissait d'être invité parmi des nobles florentins à discourir un après-midi sur l'escrime.*

Beyond Italy's occasional wins or near-misses in the World Cup of soccer, people in general are not accustomed to thinking of Italians as being particularly athletic. Nor, when Michel de Montaigne comes to mind, do people associate sport with the diminutive *philosophe* from Bordeaux secluded on the top floor of his not quite ivory tower. It thus may seem that my subject is *un peu tiré par les cheveux*: using sport to link unathletic Montaigne with unathletic Italy seems both unnecessary and far-fetched. But our perceptions here do not coincide with the facts. Italy has a long athletic tradition, which began in the seventh century B.C.E. with the introduction of chariot-racing and which was articulated by the Greek-style sports contests recounted in Book Five of Virgil's *Aeneid*, one of the founding documents of the concept of *Italia*. That tradition continues to the present day: out of the thirty-six modern Olympic Summer and Winter Games in which Italy has participated, it has finished among the top ten medal winners twenty-nine times.

Athletic excellence was an equally strong component of Italian culture in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The actual physical manifestations of sport in this period will be dealt with below, but as a preamble it must be mentioned that between 1450 and 1650 there were over eighty books in Italian or by Italians dealing wholly or partially with some aspect of athletic activity.¹ The scoring systems for jousting were devised, *inter alios*, by the Italians; the rules and tactics of tennis were laid down by an Italian (though the game itself was French); and the first prescriptive account of team ball-games was provided by another Italian. Between about 1515 and the early seventeenth century, virtually all the manuals of fencing were by Italians, as were all the books on horsemanship and the only books on mat gymnastics and wooden-horse vaulting.² However, we do not need to delve into the specialized literature to be convinced of the importance of sport in Renaissance Italy. Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano* reminds us that the perfect Italian courtier had to be an accomplished athlete, adept at wrestling, fencing, jousting, javelin throwing, jumping, running, swimming, tennis, and all manner of equestrian sports.³

Now Michel de Montaigne was a prominent French courtier during the reigns of Charles IX and Henri III, but in contrast to the Italian model outlined by Castiglione, he was by his own admission a very poor athlete. In a passage of the *Essais* (Book II, ch. 17, "De la præsumption") he enumerates the sports and other physical activities in which he either completely failed, or produced a very mediocre performance: he was an average runner, had acquired only a slight ability to dance, wrestle, and play tennis, and could not swim, jump, fence, or do gymnastics.⁴ Despite Montaigne's unathletic nature, however, there were over forty references to sports and competitive physical games in the first edition of the *Essais*, published immediately before his departure on the long trip he made to Italy in 1580–81. Some of these references are among his *exempla*, some are metaphors, but all reveal that athletics were never farther from his mind than were the intellectual pursuits that we more readily associate with his essays. It is thus not completely unexpected that he found the best part of Virgil's *Aeneid* to be Book Five, which is devoted, as I have said, to recounting the details of some athletic games.⁵ For anyone as interested in sport as Montaigne was, Renaissance Italy was, as we shall see, a *terre d'élection*.

Montaigne's Florentine contemporary, Giovanni Bardi (1534–1612) is perhaps the most factual source for the prevalence of sport in sixteenth-century Italian life. Arguing in 1580 in favour of state support for the game of *calcio*, he pointed out to the Grand Duke Francesco that modern Florence was just as fond of sport and physical exercise as the city's ancient Roman founders had been:

I Romani mentre nelle scuole e nelle palestre si esercitarono, fur si robusti que ... distesero senza termini l'Imperio. . . . Perochè questa . . . città tenendo le medesime vie che tennero i Romani, non ha mancato insino a qui d'occupar la gioventù in esercizi nobilissimi.⁶

Bardi goes on to specify what these most noble exercises are: ball-games, tag, swimming, hunting, horse vaulting, wrestling, *calcio*, jousting, tournaments, and equestrian games.⁷

Beyond Bardi's Florence, other cities in Italy were similarly fond of sport. Tournaments were frequent in Naples, Rome, and in the cities of the north. Bologna was famous for its fencing and riding schools; Lucca had an annual crossbow and harquebus competition that began in 1443; Siena had its *palio*, Venice its regatta, and other cities had traditions of aristocratic and popular sports that dated back to the Middle Ages.⁸ What is perhaps most significant, however, is that Italy was undoubtedly the best place, if not the only place, to see public displays of athletic prowess.

The reasons for this are perhaps in the first place the peculiar character of Italian urbanism. Natural heirs to the Roman concepts of municipal patterning, Renaissance Italian cities seem to have had more structured open spaces inside their walls than did other places in Europe. The 1540 and 1614 plans of Paris show that Notre Dame was still hemmed in by houses and shops. Apart from the eastern end of the rue Saint-Antoine, wider than other streets in the city, the only publicly available spaces inside the walls were the politically sensitive Place de Grève, in front of the Hôtel de Ville, and some ill-defined vacant lots along the Seine — and these were mostly encumbered by the commercial activities relating to the boats and barges that plied the river.⁹ Similarly, the *Plan scénographique de la ville de Lyon*, executed between 1548 and 1562, reveals a narrow space in the centre baptized the “jeu de l'arbalète” [the crossbow grounds], in which archery contests were presumably held. Otherwise sporting activities seem to have been banished to the undeveloped spaces lying outside the built-up areas.¹⁰

This was not the case in Florence. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century plans and paintings reveal several well-situated, largely rectangular public squares: the Prato, Santo-Spirito, Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, the Piazza della Signoria, the Santissima Annunziata, etc. Contemporary accounts, both pictorial and verbal, reveal that these spaces were regularly used for *calcio* games, chariot races, and tournaments, and that they could and did accommodate large numbers of spectators, for whom temporary stands might be erected. Similar public squares in Rome, Siena, Perugia, and Venice were host to other kinds of publicly attended sports. In Pisa and (again) Venice, mock combats on the bridges afforded spectators unimpeded

views of the action, while in Verona the partially restored Roman arena, with its unobstructed sight lines, was a venue for aristocratic equestrian sports. All in all, then, the traveller to Italy could see everywhere sights unavailable at home: frequent sports contests and other physical games, in which Italians displayed a superior degree of athletic ability.¹¹

More than the *Essais*, the *Journal de voyage* bears eloquent witness to Montaigne's curiosity about sport. During his eighteen-month absence from home, he records having missed only one opportunity to be present at a sporting event, and otherwise he went out of his way to attend displays of athletics, whether competitive or not.¹² Some of these, of course, fell into the category of tourist attractions: the Roman carnival, marked by footraces and equestrian events, and the chariot races and the like that went on in Florence during the feast of St. John the Baptist, the city's patron, before and after 24 June. Of Montaigne's three stays in Florence, the longest (22 June–2 July 1581) seems to have been timed to observe these events. Indeed, the extent to which Montaigne was eager to observe sports events can be gauged by the fact that, although he confesses to having been miserly at this period in his life, he actually went to some expense to attend them.¹³

One of the first things Montaigne did on reaching Italy was to make for the Roman arena in Verona (1–2 November 1580), and although he appears not to have seen any of the jousting or other equestrian events that the local nobility held there, his secretary records that Montaigne found it to be "le plus beau bâtiment qu'il eût vu en sa vie" (p. 158).¹⁴ In Bologna (17–20 November) he went to the fencing school of a master he refers to as "le Vénitien" (p. 172), who taught what Montaigne judged to be an innovative method of swordplay ("en beaucoup de choses différentes des communes" [*ibid.*]), a remark that suggests that he had, if not expertise, at least familiarity with the techniques of sword-play. Montaigne may have been inclined to visit this school because the Vénitien's best pupil was one of his *conci-toyens*, "un jeune homme de Bordeaux, nommé Binet," but more likely it was because his arrival in that city coincided with that of the seventeen-year old seigneur de Monluc, who had come to Bologna "pour l'école des armes et des chevaux" (*ibid.*). This young man was the grandson of the celebrated military commander, Blaise de Monluc (1502–77), whom Montaigne had counted among his close acquaintances.¹⁵ Bologna obviously possessed an international reputation as a place to learn those athletic skills that befitted a gentleman. In contrast, Florence, at least on Montaigne's first visit (22–24 November), did not display any propensity in that direction: "nul exercice qui vaille, ni d'armes ni de chevaux" (p. 182).

The Roman carnival (1–7 February 1581) afforded another opportunity to attend some sporting and pseudo-sporting events. Montaigne laid out

three *écus* to have a platform built in the Corso in order to watch footraces of various marginalized groups (children, Jews, naked old men) and of animals (horses, donkeys, buffaloes) ridden by small boys or goaded by men on horseback. He did not find these races very enjoyable (a lack of pleasure he would experience again in Florence), but he admired the equestrian games — quintain and the like — of the Roman nobility, whom he found to be very adept at “les exercices de cheval” (p. 206), no small praise coming from someone who prided himself on being an excellent horseman. On 2 February, Montaigne was invited to watch a “combat à la barrière” (p. 207) — probably a mock tournament — organised by the commander of the Castel Saint’Angelo (the son of pope Gregory XIII) and held at night in a specially constructed and decorated wooden amphitheatre. And on 6 February he watched two teams of noble riders (“deux belles et riches compagnies” [p. 208]) compete against each other at quintain, just as he had watched other nobles tilting at the ring, noting that they wore masks to do so.¹⁶

Montaigne does not mention any sports events again until his third trip to Florence, at the end of June. There, in the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, he attended the chariot race, instituted by Cosimo I in 1563 in a clear attempt to recreate imperial Roman grandeur.¹⁷ Montaigne notes that the grand duke and his duchess watched the race from a “palazzo,” perhaps in emulation of the Roman and Byzantine emperors, whose palaces were immediately adjacent to the circus/hippodrome, who subsidised the races as part of their imperial largess, and who expected political loyalty in return.

The race was a close one, with the Strozzi chariot gaining so rapidly on the Grand Duke’s at the end that it was ultimately a photo finish, so to speak. The judges ceded to popular pressure and awarded the victory to the Strozzi, a decision that was, in Montaigne’s opinion, “contra la ragione” [unjust] (p. 472). More interesting, however, is Montaigne’s overall reaction to the race: “Mi piacque questo spettacolo più che nissun altro che avessi visto in Italia, per la sembianza di questo corso antico” [I liked this show more than any other I had seen in Italy, because of its resemblance to ancient chariot racing] (*ibid.*). Taken together with the mural themes in his cabinet, his admiration for Book Five of the *Aeneid*, and his aesthetic appreciation for the Roman arena in Verona, this reaction demonstrates that at least part of Montaigne’s enthusiasm for things athletic stemmed from his humanistic enthusiasm for the life of the ancient Romans.

On the other hand, the *palio*, which was run in Florence on Saturday 24 June through the Corso and the other narrow streets with which it is aligned, proved a disappointment: “È cosa poca dilettevole, perchè, essendo su la strada, non vedete altro che passar in furia questi cavalli” [watching it isn’t much of a pleasure, because being in the street, you don’t see anything except

the horses racing madly by] (p. 473). Montaigne had looked forward to the event, and his disappointment echoes and explains his earlier lack of pleasure at watching the races on the Roman Corso. He simply could not see enough of them to take them all in, and so the following Thursday he skipped the second palio, preferring instead to revisit the gardens at Pratolino (p. 475).¹⁸

There are four more allusions to sport in the *Journal de voyage*, two of which are quite brief. While staying in Lucca in July 1581, Montaigne notes that the locals are good at the sport of *pallone* and that one can often see well-played games there (p. 325).¹⁹ The second brief reference occurs at the end of Montaigne's stay in Rome (15 October 1581), when he reports that he has given his much younger brother Bernard, the twenty-year old seigneur de Mattecoulon, money to stay in Rome for the next five months to study fencing (p. 351). Taken together with the earlier mentions of the Bordelais Binet and the young Monluc, Mattecoulon's decision confirms the attraction that the superior quality of Italian athletic prowess exerted on the gilded youth of France — and presumably of other nations as well.²⁰

Finally, there are two accounts relating to sport that rival in length the description of the Florentine chariot race. In Rome in October 1581, Montaigne went to the Baths of Diocletian to watch an equestrian acrobat. This man, an Italian who had been a slave in Turkey, put on a display of elaborate tricks that he had learned in captivity (pp. 492–93).²¹ Although Montaigne does slip a couple of laudatory phrases into his account (“rare cose,” “grande agevolezza” [unusual sights, great ease of performance]), it is mostly a dry enumeration of an astounding set of athletic feats. Though a great admirer of good horsemanship, Montaigne's failure to respond commensurately to the acrobat's show no doubt betrays a feeling that this kind of equestrian skill was not suited to what Thomas Elyot had called in 1531 the “exercises apt to the furniture of a gentleman's personage.”²² For Montaigne, acrobatic feats were part of another world, the world of slaves, underlings, and the wandering mountebanks that sometimes came to his château.²³

The world to which Montaigne did feel he belonged was exemplified by a Florentine dinner party to which he was invited at the house of Silvio Piccolomini (Monday 26 June 1581), a man he admired greatly.²⁴ The other guests were a “buona compagnia d'altri gentiluomini” [a fine company of other gentlemen] (p. 474), and the occasion clearly gave a considerable boost to Montaigne's self-esteem. Although the conversation of these gentlemen seems to have ranged widely (“ci furono messi innanzi molti discorsi” [a lot of different subjects were discussed]), the only one that Montaigne reports is his host's eloquent opinions on warfare and fencing. On the latter subject, Piccolomini dismisses at some length — and with a single exception — the

entire Italian school of swordsmanship as being without “regola” [method] or “arte” [technique], including among those he denounces the Vénitien, the very master whom Montaigne had previously admired. Piccolomini also told his guest that he had written a book on sword-play that was about to be published (though like many other books that authors have announced, this one appears never to have seen the light of day).

In short, Renaissance Italy was not only the best place in Europe to be a sports spectator and to learn proficiency in certain athletic practices; it was also perhaps the only place where refined, scholarly gentlemen could discourse knowledgeably about sport and actually boast that they had studied the subject enough to write a book on it.²⁵ The question that then arises is, why were these things not possible among the French? Why did they not emulate the Italians in this area, as they did in so much else? It cannot be said that they were not athletic. Castiglione, for example, recognized that the French were the best tourneyers in Europe.²⁶ Antonio Scaino, the Italian who first set down the rules of all the varieties of tennis, acknowledged the French as models for the sport.²⁷ Tennis was in fact almost literally the national sport of France, and the chauvinistic Henri Estienne asserted that the French were “plus habiles et adroits” than people of other nations in playing it.²⁸ The English traveller Robert Dallington wrote that the French played physically violent games even in the hottest weather, that there was a shooting range in every town, and, taking the country as a whole, two tennis courts for every church.²⁹ But despite the royal example — François I, Henri II, Charles IX, and Henri IV were all fond of strenuous games — sports in the sixteenth century never acquired the aura of respectability in France that they had in Italy; they never became the object of intellectual speculation.

The explanation may lie in the religious wars that wracked the country from 1560 almost to 1600. Life seemed too serious to waste it on play. In his essay on the education of children (I, 26), Montaigne advises his readers that if any boy, however noble, should prefer tennis to the dirt and dangers of strenuous military sports — which were the training for a soldier’s life — then he would be fit only to be a pastry cook.

The explanation may also lie in a recurrent Italophobia that Montaigne did not share, but that is visible in Du Bellay and noticeable in the pattern of French visitors to Italy. Before 1560 all French writers and intellectuals paid at least one visit (Ronsard is a notable exception). After that date, the French visiting Italy seem to be only the kind of vulgar tourist that Montaigne wants to avoid (*Essais*, I, 26), or young men wanting to learn to fence.

But I think the real explanation may simply lie in the intellectual advance Italy had over France. The development of mathematics and the rational method in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had enabled the

Italians to form abstract models of sports, just as they did of other phenomena. All of the books I have referred to earlier rely heavily on measurement, quantification, and proportion, that is, on the mental processes whereby any given entity — in our case, the varieties of athletic practices — can be envisioned as embodying ideal form. Until the publication of Gérard Thibaut's *Académie de l'espée* in 1628/30, French fencing manuals remain mired in pragmatism and empiricism. Much the same can be said of books on horsemanship and tennis, until the appearance of Pierre de La Noue's *Cavalerie françoise et italienne* in 1620 and Charles Hulpeau's *Le jeu royal de la paulme* in 1632. Talking to Piccolomini and his intellectual friends about sport that June day in 1581, Montaigne found himself on a *terrain d'entente* that was impossible to discover among the backwater nobility of southwest France, and that he could have enjoyed only when in the company of the Académie du Palais of Henri III — but then that circle was neither open to him nor interested in sports.

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Notes

1. See A. Krüger and J. McClelland, "Ausgewählte Bibliographie zu Leibesübungen und Sport in der Renaissance," in *Die Anfänge des modernen Sports in der Renaissance*, ed. Krüger and McClelland (London: Arena Publications, 1984), pp. 132–80.
2. Among the landmark books regulating and describing athletic activities are the following: *Regolamento delle giostre che si tennero in Milano nel maggio* (1465); Antonio Manciolino, *Opera nuova . . . nel mestier de l'armi* (Venice, 1531); Achille Marozzo, *Opera nuova chiamata duello* (Modena, 1536); Federico Grisone, *Gli ordini di cavalcare* (Naples, 1550); Camillo Agrippa, *Trattato di scienza d'arme* (Rome, 1553); Antonio Scaino, *Trattato del giuoco della palla* (Venice, 1555); Pasqual Caracciolo, *La Gloria del cavallo* (Venice, 1567); Girolamo Mercuriale, *De arte gymnastica* (Venice, 1569); Giacomo di Grassi, *Ragione di adoprare sicuramente l'arme* (Venice, 1570; Eng. trans. London, 1594); Angelo Vizzani, *Lo schermo* (Venice, 1575); Giovanni Bardi, *Discorso sopra il giuoco del calcio fiorentino* (Florence, 1580); Vicentio Saviolo, *His Practice... of the Use of the Rapier and Dagger* (London, 1595); Arcangelo Tuccaro, *Trois dialogues de l'exercice de sauter et voltiger en l'air* (Paris, 1599); Giocondo Baluda, *Trattato del modo di volteggiare e saltare il cavallo di legno* (c. 1630). Some of these books have been excerpted in Carlo Bascetta, ed., *Sport e giochi: Trattati e scritti dal XV al XVIII secolo*, 2 vols. (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1978).
3. Baldessare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, bk. I, ch. 17–27, and bk. II, ch. 7–12.
4. Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. P. Villey and V.-L. Saulnier, 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), p. 642A (the letters A, B, and C attached to any quotation indicate whether the passage in question first appeared in 1580, 1588, or before 1592, respectively).
5. "Le cinquième livre en l'Æneide me semble le plus parfait" (*Essais*, II, 10, p. 410B, i.e., after Montaigne's return from Italy). In line with what I said above regarding the neglect

of Italy's athletic achievements, Book Five of the *Aeneid* receives less attention from classical scholars than do the other books.

6. "As long as the Romans did physical training in the schools and gymnasiums they were so robust that they...extended their Empire beyond all limits. . . . Because this city [*i.e.*, Florence] has held to the same ways as the [ancient] Romans, it has never failed thus far to occupy young people in the most noble exercises" (Bardi, *Discorso*, as quoted in Bascetta, ed., pp. 134–35).
7. Curiously, Bardi omits from this list another sporting activity, fencing, in which the Italians in 1580 were the acknowledged masters of Europe.
8. See William Heywood, *Palio and Ponte: An Account of the Sports of Central Italy from the Age of Dante to the XXth Century* (London: Methuen, 1904; repr. New York: Hacker, 1969); Horst Bredekamp *et al.*, *Florentiner Fußball* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1993); Robert C. Davis, *The War of the Fists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Alessandra Rizzi, *Giocare in Italia alla fine del medio evo* (Rome/Treviso: Fondazione Benetton, 1995).
9. The Place de Grève, which bordered on the river —almost the literal equivalent of London's Strand — was a place of execution, the gathering place of unemployed workers (hence "être en grève," to be on strike), and a place to demonstrate against the authorities. In Rabelais's *Gargantua* (ch. 23), the eponymous hero goes "en Bracque" to play ball-games; this refers, apparently, to an outdoor tennis court, *le grand Bracque*, situated at the Place de l'Estrapade, now in the fifth *arrondissement*, but then outside the walls.
10. The plan does, for example, depict a ball-game apparently similar to Florentine *calcio* — perhaps indeed identical to it, since there were so many Florentines in Lyons at the time — but it is being played in a narrow, irregular, and totally inadequate space alongside the river, just beyond some defensive earthworks. To judge by the presence of three musicians as well as a few spectators grouped to one side, the artist was representing an organised match. Its only purpose in the plan is picturesque, but its very presence seems to reflect the draughtsman's experience of life in the city. Tommaso Rinuccini, an Italian living in Lyons in the sixteenth century, reported that the Italian community played a game of *calcio* in honour of the French king Henri III when he passed through the city in 1575, though he does not say just where the game was played (*Memorie*, quoted in Luciano Artusi and Silvano Gabbrielli, *Calcio storico fiorentino ieri e oggi* [Florence: Comune di Firenze, 1986], p. 66).
11. In addition to the references cited in notes 8 and 10 above, other secondary sources for the frequent practice of sport in the *piazze pubbliche* are Pietro Gori, *Le feste fiorentine attraverso i secoli*, 2 vols. (Florence: Bemporad, 1926); G. G. Bertelà and A. P. Tofani, eds., *Feste e apparati Medicei da Cosimo I a Cosimo II, mostra di disegni e incisioni* (Florence: Olschki, 1969); Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980); Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989); and Heidi L. Chrétien, *The Festival of San Giovanni: Imagery and Political Power in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).
12. Michel de Montaigne, *Journal de voyage*, ed. Fausta Garavini, Folio (Paris: Gallimard, 1983). Subsequent references are to this edition.
13. See *Essais* I, 14, pp. 64–65BC; *cf. Journal*, p. 206.

14. Goethe, towards the end of the eighteenth century, noted the curious failure of the Veronese to use the arena for a ball-game that had attracted a large number of onlookers (*Italianische Reise*, ed. Christoph Michel, 2 vols. [Frankfurt: Insel, 1976], pp. 60–61).
15. *Essais*, II, 8, p. 395A.
16. By the latter part of the sixteenth century, jousting had become more of a spectacle than a sport. The memorialist Pierre de Brantôme tells of various French nobles jousting in outlandish masquerades (*Œuvres complètes*, éd. L. Lalanne, 10 vols. [Paris: Veuve Jules Renouard, 1868], 4: 159–61), and Sir Philip Sidney jousted in costume at the *fêtes* marking the 1581 visit to London of the duc d'Alençon (Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney, Courtier Poet* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991], pp. 201–12).
17. The “chariots” seem to have borne no resemblance to their ancient Roman counterparts. Montaigne describes them as being “cocchi vuoti” [empty coaches] (p. 472), but since it is inconceivable that they were driverless, they were most likely open carriages that were otherwise used for normal transportation by their wealthy owners.
18. One may also surmise that part of his pleasure at seeing the Verona arena, the chariot race, and the equestrian exercises of the Roman nobility came from the fact that his eye and his mind could embrace these places and events in their entirety. They either did not extend the full length of the Roman Corso or were circumscribed by fences, by their own structure, or by existing buildings. On the importance of point of view for Montaigne, see Laura Willett, “Montaigne’s Italian Prospects,” *Montaigne Studies* 15 (2003): 43–57.
19. *Pallone* was played with an inflatable ball that the players struck with a wooden *bracciale*, or wrist-guard. Long, straight streets were a favourite venue, because the ball could be ricocheted off the facades of the buildings. There are records of an intercity match being played in Florence in what is now the Via Tornabuoni, and in the late sixteenth century the game was banned from the nearby Via del Parione (Giulio Dati, *Lamento di Parione* [Florence: Giunti, 1596]).
20. Mattecoulon apparently acquired such expertise in swordplay that a man he knew only slightly asked him to be his second in a duel. At that time the seconds fought each other as well as assisting their principal. Mattecoulon killed both his adversary and his principal’s adversary and avoided imprisonment only after the French king intervened (*Essais*, II, 27, pp. 696–97B).
21. In many ways — sociological as well as athletic — they are reminiscent of the feats performed by Gymnaste, Gargantua’s exercise master, which bemuse two enemy soldiers (Rabelais, *Gargantua*, ch. 35).
22. Thomas Elyot, *The Book of the Governor*, ed. S. E. Lehmborg (London: Dent, 1962), ch. 16, p.60.
23. Cf. this remark made by Montaigne before going to Italy: criticizing empty pomposity in second rate poets, he draws an analogy between them and “ces hommes de vile condition, qui en tiennent escole, pour ne pouvoir représenter le port et la decence de nostre noblesse, cherchent à se recommander par des sauts périlleux et autres mouvemens estranges et bâtelersques” (*Essais* II, 10, p. 412A). Like the equestrian Montaigne watched in Rome, the gifted acrobat Arcangelo Tuccaro, who performed at the French court in the 1570s and 1580s, was treated not as an artist or an athlete, but as a servant and an unsettling curiosity.
24. Montaigne had earlier described him as being “le plus suffisant gentilhomme de notre temps à toute sorte de science et d’exercice d’armes” (p. 184).

25. The acrobat Tuccaro's book, *Trois dialogues de l'exercice de sauter et voltiger en l'air* (Paris, 1599), provides evidence that Montaigne's dinner party was not an isolated phenomenon. Although the setting is the French court, the six men who participate in the dialogues about gymnastics are all Italian — three acrobats and three gentlemen.
26. *Cortegiano*, I, ch. 21.
27. Antonio Scaino, *Trattato del giuoco della palla* (Venice: Giolito de' Ferrari, 1555), pp. 161–62 and 251.
28. Henri Estienne, *Project du livre intitulé De la precellence du langage françois* (1579; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1972), pp. 101–3.
29. Robert Dallington, *The View of Fraunce* (1604; rpt. London: Shakespeare Association, 1936), sig. T4^v–V1^v.