

Putting it all Together

Practical Applications of Silver's Theories for Traditional Thrust-based SCA Rapier Combat

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Introduction

There seems to be a pervasive anti-Silver mentality in traditional SCA rapier circles. This is mostly due to his arguments against the “rapier men”, such as Saviolo¹, who were teaching in London at the end of the Elizabethan period. However, if we look more closely at the arguments Silver lays out in his *Paradoxes of Defense*², most of his statements can be attributed more to his anger at foreign teachers being allowed to teach without being tested than a true hatred of the rapier³. In fact many of his theories seem quite similar to the teachers he railed against. We can now point to instances where he advocates the teaching of rapier to students so that they will be familiar with anything their opponent might present them. While the bulk of Silver's practice, as discussed in his *Bref Instructions*, revolves around cutting attacks and thus would have many applications for SCA “Cut and Thrust” combat⁴ there is still a great deal of his theory that can be applied to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat⁵. Most of the techniques are best applied to heavy rapier combat; the heavy rapiers are a closer approximation of the swords they were using in the period and thus the timing of a fight with heavy rapier would be more similar to that of a period fight. While it may seem at first glance that Silver has little to offer traditional SCA rapier combat due to his heavy reliance on cutting attacks, a great deal of his basic theory is still applicable.

The Four Grounds and Governors

As we will show here, Silver begins his *Bref Instructions*⁶ by discussing what he calls the *Four Grounds*⁷ and the *Four Governors*⁸. The *Four Grounds* are *Judgment*,

¹ Saviolo: an Italian contemporary of Silver teaching a thrust-centric style of fighting with rapiers in London during the 1590's.

² *Paradoxes of Defense*: a volume published in 1599 by Silver outlining his arguments against the rapier-men, such as Saviolo, who were teaching a thrust-centric rapier style in London at the same time as Silver.

³ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.3

⁴ SCA “Cut and Thrust” Combat: an emerging form of combat within the SCA martial community that incorporates cuts as well as thrusts and utilizes ridged joint, head, and throat protection and blunted broad swords.

⁵ Traditional, Thrust-based SCA Rapier Combat: traditional SCA rapier combat commonly practiced with foils and epees or ridged throat protection and blunted practice rapier blades. This form of combat only permits thrusts and draw cuts (cuts executed by drawing the edge of the blade back across your opponent's body).

⁶ *Bref Instructions*: a volume written by Silver after his *Paradoxes* in which he discusses the bulk of his theory and fighting style. However it was never published. It was discovered in the 19th Century by Captain Cyril G. R. Matthey, who printed the work in 1898.

⁷ The Four Grounds: four principles that are the foundation of all true fighting.

⁸ The Four Governors: four principles which are similar to the Four Grounds and work with the Four Grounds to provide a more in-depth foundation for fighting.

Distance, Time, and Place. According to Silver, these principles work together to keep a fighter safe. If a fighter has judgment, he uses his judgment to maintain distance from his opponent. By maintaining distance he is able to control timing of the fight and determine the time that is most advantageous to him to gain placement or an advantage over his opponent. Once he has gained the place over his opponent, he can attack or retreat safely.⁹

The Four Governors are very similar to the Four Grounds and work with them to provide a more in depth foundation for fighting. The first Governor is Judgment, the second is Measure. The third and fourth Governors are combined together and embody the understanding that just as you are prepared to come in to attack, you must also be prepared to step out or back if your opponent does the same to you.¹⁰ Judgment, timing, distance, range, your position and place within the fight, and martial preparedness, are fundamental concepts that are crucial to all martial activities and very applicable to traditional SCA rapier combat.

For example, Silver states that Judgment provides an understanding of when your opponent is within your range, and vice versa. It also gives a fighter an understanding of the pros and cons of his opponent's stance, the movements and attacks his opponent can execute, and his vulnerabilities.¹¹ Judgment allows a fighter to understand the fight as they are fighting. It is necessary to know when to execute a particular movement (i.e. a Demi Volta¹²), or to know when your opponent has created an opening you can attack through.

Distance is another fundamental concept of fighting. It is important to understand and determine not only your body's distance from your opponent, but also the distance covered by you and your opponent's range of attack.

For example, let's say that fighter A and fighter B are standing 5 feet apart. For simplicity, say they both have an arm reach of 2 feet, which means that with their arms extended they still have one foot of distance between them. Now, give each fighter a standard 35-inch weapon. Now each fighter, with their arm extended, has approximately a 5-foot reach or range of attack, due to their 2-foot arm reach and additional 3-foot sword length. At a distance of 5 feet, neither fighter has to move at all to reach their opponent. In SCA terms this is generally referred to as SCA "B" range¹³. Very little fighting takes place here, since to strike your opponent, all you need to do is extend your arm. More often, traditional SCA rapier combat takes place either at SCA "A" range¹⁴ (a range also referred to as "in-fighting" in which both fighters are right next to each

⁹ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.82

¹⁰ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.83

¹¹ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.83

¹² Demi Volte: also known as the Half Circle Pace (*Fig 2*). One of many movements designed to protect to body by moving it out of line of an opponent's attack. The Demi Volte is framed by moving the rear foot circularly around to the right of the front foot until it is inline with the front foot.

¹³ SCA B Range: the range at which a fighter can strike another fighter with his sword by only extending his arm.

¹⁴ SCA A Range: the range at which both fighters are close enough to almost touch each other. Also known as in-fighting.

other) or SCA “C” range¹⁵ (a range in which to strike his opponent a fighter not only needs to extend his arm but also to advance forward in some fashion). SCA “C” range is generally the more popular range choice for fighting, as this range provides more of a passive defense buffer zone.

So let’s take our fighters, and move them out so that there is seven feet between them. They are now in SCA “C” range. With their sword arms fully extended at this distance both fighters still have an additional two feet between the end of their weapon and their opponent and need to move forward with either a simple advance or a lunge to strike their opponent. Five feet is not the extent of their range; 2 feet is not an uncommon lunge range, and if we give our hypothetical fighters a 2-foot lunge range, that brings their final full range of attack to 7 feet from their starting position.

This is a very basic example, but it highlights the importance of understanding not only your own range, but also the range of your opponent. Once you understand these ranges you are able to determine not only when you are within range to attack your opponent but also when you are within their range and in danger of being attacked yourself. Once you have obtained an understanding of range and distance you can then manipulate them to your advantage.

Silver places a lot of importance on these two concepts. Throughout his *Bref Instructions*, Silver constantly stresses that during a fight you must always take care to maintain your distance and staying out of range of your opponent, which we’ll talk about further in our discussion of stance and movement.

Timing and tempo are also important concepts to master for SCA rapier combat. Silver advises his students and readers to use distance and range to control the speed, or tempo, of the fight and through that control they would be able to choose the most advantageous time to attack.¹⁶ *This basic use of timing is in and of itself crucial to SCA combat, but you can also use the control you have obtained through your knowledge of timing in other ways. Once you have gained control of the tempo of the fight, you are then able to vary the speed of the fight to your own tastes by changing your own tempo. Once you have established control of the tempo of the fight your opponent will generally change to match you. You can then vary your timing to create holes in their defense and openings through which you may attack at your leisure.*

Silver’s General Rules

Following his discussion of the *Four Grounds* and *Four Governors*, Silver goes on to outline **ten rules** that fighters should follow when practicing their art. These rules are also very applicable to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier as they outline basic concepts that all practitioners of the Arte of Defense should keep in mind when they are faced with an opponent. For the purposes of this discussion, I would like to examine Silver’s first three *General Rules*.

In his **first rule** Silver advises that when you first arrive on the field, you should take care to note the layout of the field and any unevenness. You should take care to come on guard before your enemy is within range, and if possible, stand so that the sun is

¹⁵ SCA C Range: a range in which to strike his opponent a fighter not only needs to extend his arm but also to advance forward in some fashion.

¹⁶ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.82

in your opponent's face.¹⁷ *By inspecting the field beforehand a fighter is able to note potential hazards and determine which areas of the field would provide him the greatest advantage and help him to control the fight.*

Similarly, in his **second and third rules** Silver again stresses the importance of standing comfortably and maintaining range and distance while being constantly aware of your opponent's stance. When a fighter is in range he is in danger of being attacked and Silver strongly advocates that a fighter should spend as little time in range as possible.¹⁸ *This is a wise strategy. A fighter should be cautious about being within his opponent's range. He should take care to ensure that when he is standing inside his opponent's range, he has control of the fight, and is within range for a reason (such as executing an attack), and that he doesn't hover within range, needlessly exposing himself to attack. If a fighter is standing within range without a plan or control of the fight he is in serious danger of being attacked himself, which puts him at a disadvantage.*

Stance and movement

While Silver discusses wards in his discussion of the Four General Fights¹⁹ (see below), he does not directly discuss the placement of the feet in his *Bref Instructions*, although he does state that a fighter should take care to stand comfortably, constantly thinking about his opponent's stance and attacks²⁰, so we are left to conjecture on how he would have had his students stand. Of his contemporaries and predecessors, Marozzo²¹ is the most similar to Silver. They both rely heavily on cutting attacks but do not exclude thrusts. Their movements are similar, and although Silver has far fewer wards, some of his wards, like the Open Fight²², bear a resemblance to those used by Marozzo^{23,24}, certainly more so than those used by some of his other contemporaries²⁵. Thus we may

¹⁷ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.83

¹⁸ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.84

¹⁹ Four General Fights: Silver's wards. Guards.

²⁰ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.84

²¹ Marozzo: An early sixteenth century master often considered to be "the greatest teacher of the old school, the rough and undisciplined swordsmanship of which depended as much on dash and violence and sudden inspiration as on carefully cultivated skill". (*See Castle p. 35*) Although he was Bolognese and not Italian he taught in Venice in the last 15th and early 16th Centuries. His style was very transitional, bridging the 15th and 16th centuries. His manual was first published in 1536 and then four more times before the final publication in 1615. (*See Castle p. 35*)

²² Open Fight: A ward framed by standing with your hand and sword held over your head and your point pointing either straight up or backward, whichever the fighter feels is best for attacking or warding. (*See Silver's Bref Instructions p. 87*) This description seems very similar to Marozzo's Guardia Alta (*Fig 1*). In this guard a fighter can stand with either his right or left foot forward. His sword should be held as high as possible above his head and pointed straight towards the sky. (*See Rapisardi p. 4-8*) This ward sets up a downward cutting attack, usually to your opponent's head or upper torso.

²³ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.87

²⁴ Rapisardi, Giovanni. "The Teachings of Marozzo". <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/other/gr/>. (November 2003) p.4-8

conjecture, based on these similarities in their fighting styles, Silver's stance was probably quite similar to that of Marozzo, who favored a stance that presented the smallest possible target to their opponent with the rear foot placed at a 60° to a 90° angle from the front foot and the heels out of line in order to provide a more steady stance (Fig 1).²⁶



Fig 1: Note the alignment of the feet in the detail of Fig 1.²⁷

At first, this technique does not appear to be applicable to SCA rapier combat. Students are traditionally taught a stance that is very similar to the basic Olympic style stance. In this stance, the heels of the feet are positioned in line with each other with the rear foot placed at a 90° angle to the front foot. The knees are bent, the torso is held straight up, and the center of the body positioned away from the opponent to present as small a target as possible. The sword arm is extended at an approximately 45° angle from the body with the sword held pointed at the opponent, and the off hand is held forward to parry any incoming attacks. Silver's stance is different from the basic stance we teach our students, but once a fighter is well grounded in the basics, they can begin to branch out and experiment with these different techniques. There are quite a few advantages to doing so. Practitioners of the Arte of Defense during the period were not employing a strict stance like that employed by the Olympic style and allowing an experienced student to bend the "rules" of fencing by employing a more natural style like

²⁵ Contemporaries of Silver include Saviolo and Rocco and Jeronimo Bonetti. While he did teach cuts and outlines their use in his practices (See Saviolo, *His Practice, The First Book, The First Day*) Saviolo was a major proponent of the thrusts effectiveness over the cut which dictated massive differences between his style and Silver's. For example Silver's cutting attacks require fighters to remain outside of each other's range until they are ready to attack. Once they are ready to attack they come in and execute their attacks very aggressively and then return to a point outside of range. Saviolo's thrusting attacks allow fighters to keep the range they are fighting at constant. We can surmise that the Bonetti's style and practice are quite similar to that of Saviolo because he and Jeronimo Bonetti taught together for a time. (See *Castle p. 24*) If their practices and theories were not similar they would not have been able to run a school together. Also, while not a direct contemporary of Silver, Di Grassi's treatise was translated into English and published in London five years prior to the publication of Silver's *Paradoxes of Defense*. While there are more similarities between Di Grassi and Silver than Saviolo and Silver (Di Grassi still relies moderately often on cuts even though he believes that the thrust is a superior attack.) Di Grassi still uses a thrusting attack far more often than Silver does.

²⁶ Rapisardi, Giovanni. "The Teachings of Marozzo". <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/other/gr/>. (November 2003) p.2

²⁷ Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.60

Silver's gives them an opportunity to add more of a period effect and feeling to their fighting style. Also some movements such as body voids²⁸, like the Demi Volte, employed by practitioners of the **Arte of Defense** may require added stability in the stance. Taking the rear foot slightly out of line from the front foot as in Silver's stance helps to add stability to the stance while still maintaining balance and good body positioning. Finally, having the rear foot slight of line from the front foot creates a more natural stance than that of the Olympic style and still allows a fighter to present a fairly small target to their opponent.



On line AB:

Whole Straight Pace: C-D

Half Straight Pace: C-F

Whole Slope Pace: C-E

Half Circular Pace: C-G

Fig 2: Di Grassi's footwork demonstrating the Slope Pace and Half Circle Pace²⁹

from the danger of his opponents blade. By incorporating these movements into their repertoire a fighter not only adds an additional line of defense to his fighting but he also incorporates defensive movements that, when employed, will also provide him with a new line of attack and potential new openings in his opponent's defense.

Footwork

For the most part Silver's footwork is fairly simple, composed primarily of **passes**, **transverses**, and **slips**. **Passes** are steps forwards and backwards, while **transverses** are lateral movements. **Slips** seem primarily to be short versions of the passes and transverses. We can also see in his section on parrying (*Of div's advantages y' you may take by strykinge frō yo' warde at y^e sword fyght*; discussed below) direct evidence of the use of the Slope Pace³⁰ and the Demi Volte, or Half Circle Pace³¹ (Fig 2).³² These principles can easily be applied to traditional SCA rapier combat. Of the footwork mentioned, the Slope Pace and Demi Volte may have the greatest potential for practical applications for the individual fighter. The Slope Pace and Demi Volte (also known as the Half Circle Pace), both of which are pictured in Figure 2, are both body voids, movements designed to move the body out of line of the opponent's attack thus providing protection to the fighter by removing him

²⁸ Body Voids: movements designed to protect the body by moving it out of line of an opponent's attack.

²⁹ Di Grassi, Giacomo. *Di Adoprar si Curamente L'Arme Si Da Offesa, Come Da Difesa...Di Giacomo di Grassi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1570) p.14

³⁰ Slope Pace: One of many body voids designed to protect the body by moving it out of line of an opponent's attack. The Slope Pace is framed by moving the rear foot in front of the front foot in a diagonal away from the body. (Fig 2)

³¹ Half Circle Pace: see Demi Volte.

³² Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.100-101

The Importance of Range and Maintaining Your Distance

In addition Silver continues to stress throughout his *Bref Instructions* that during a fight you must always take care to maintain your distance, staying out of range of your opponent. He also stresses that, when you make an attack, you should move back out of the range of your opponent, beginning your movement out either as you are making your attack or immediately after you have made your attack.³³ Both of these basic techniques are used by Silver to provide an extra level of safety from attack and are integral aspects of his overall technique. *These techniques can also be applied successfully to traditional SCA rapier combat. In period, practitioners of the Arte of Defense would have fought with sharpened swords, and Silver's advice of staying well out of range and only coming into range to attack would have provided an extra level of protection to fighters employing his techniques. SCA rapier combat does not involve sharpened weapons, but does revolve around the fighters' ability to inflict "valid" blows³⁴ on their opponent. By following Silver's advice and maintaining distance from one's opponent by staying out of their range until they are ready to attack a fighter is able to create a protective buffer zone that is outside of his opponent's range of attack. By maintaining distance from an opponent until a fighter is ready to attack, and only then coming into range to execute their attack, then exiting their opponent's range, a fighter is able to minimize the chance of receiving a blow that comes from being in range of their opponent. The fighter should be careful to always have control of their opponent's weapon before coming into attack to minimize the chance of a counter attack. Too often in the SCA, when fighters come en garde at the beginning of a bout, they set up within each other's range. This puts both fighters at a disadvantage early in the fight. By understanding and following Silver's advice on maintaining range and distance, fighters can negate this disadvantage.*

Guards and Wards

Many of Silver's wards, also known as "fights" are quite similar to those employed by other practitioners of the Arte of Defense. As we noted earlier, the **Open Fight** bears a strong resemblance to Marozzo's *Guardia Alta*¹⁴. In addition, the fighter frames the **Perfect Guardant Fight** by carrying his hand and sword above his head, but with the tip pointed down towards his left knee³⁵, which is also very similar to Di Grassi's High Ward (*Fig 3*). He would also frame the **Bastard Guardant Fight** by standing with his hand and sword held below his head at chest level, and the tip of his sword pointed towards his left foot³⁶, which is similar to Di Grassi's Broad Ward (*Fig 4*). It also appears that in the case of the wards and fights that make up his **Variable Fight**³⁷,

³³ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.84

³⁴Atlantia follows the Society Rapier Rules which define a "valid blow" for traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat as any blow that would have penetrated the body assuming the sword striking the blow was a real blade with a sharp point and edge. (*Rapier Marshal's Handbook 3*)

³⁵ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.87

³⁶ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.88

³⁷ The Variable Fight: For Silver the Variable Fight includes all stances not included in the Open Fight, the Guardant Fight, and the Close Fight. The most important wards of the Variable Fight, however, are the

Silver has framed wards based on many of the attacks that are discussed by Saviolo. For example, Saviolo's **Stocatta** is an attack made under an opponent's weapon. Silver frames his **Stocatta**³⁸ ward with the sword held low by the fighter's right side (similarly to Di Grassi's Low Ward (*Fig 5*)), and it is a great position for making an underhand attack. He also frames his **Imbrocatta**³⁹ ward on a high line. Interestingly this allows a fighter to make a nice attack over their opponent's, which is how Saviolo defines his Imbrocatta attack.



Fig 3: Di Grassi's High Ward⁴⁰



Fig 4: Di Grassi's Broad Ward⁴¹



Fig 5: Di Grassi's Low Ward⁴²

*Most of the techniques we have been discussing are best applied to heavy rapier combat. The heavy rapiers are a closer approximation to the swords they were using in period, thus the timing of a fight with heavy rapier would be similar to that of a period fight. This applies to the guards and wards as well. Many of the period wards, especially those of Silver, can be applied very successfully to SCA heavy rapier combat. The **Stocatta** is a very strong and versatile ward. It forms a strong central defense for the body and it is easy to transition from this position into other wards. Also, as we*

Stocatta, the Imbrocatta, the Mountanta, and the Passatta. (See Silver's *Bref Instructions* p. 88-89) For the purposes of this paper we will not be discussing the Close Fight.

³⁸ Stocatta: For Silver the Stocatta is one of the Variable Fights and is a low ward with the sword held by the fighter's right leg designed to set up an under hand attack to their opponent. For Saviolo the Stocatta is an attack made under an opponent's weapon.

³⁹ Imbrocatta: For Silver the Imbrocatta is also classified as a Variable Fight. It is also a low ward but not as low as the Stocatta as it is designed to set up an over hand attack to an opponent. For Saviolo the Imbrocatta is an attack made over an opponent's weapon.

⁴⁰Di Grassi, Giacomo. *Di Adoprar si Curamente L'Arme Si Da Offesa, Come Da Difesa...Di Giacomo di Grassi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1570) p.18

⁴¹ Di Grassi, Giacomo. *Di Adoprar si Curamente L'Arme Si Da Offesa, Come Da Difesa...Di Giacomo di Grassi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1570) p.19

⁴² Di Grassi, Giacomo. *Di Adoprar si Curamente L'Arme Si Da Offesa, Come Da Difesa...Di Giacomo di Grassi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1570) p.19

*discussed earlier, because of the lower sword position, this ward easily sets up low-line attacks-attacks that originate from a lower line and attack from underneath the opponent's sword. The **Perfect Guardant Fight** is also very applicable to SCA rapier; this ward is generally used to execute a strong downward attack from a high line at the opponent's head or upper torso and can either be used at the beginning of a bout as an opening attack or a fighter can transition to this ward during the bout in order to change the line of attack. I have used (and seen this transition used) with great success when combined with a dagger or off-hand parry to the outside line. These wards can also be used in combination with the body voids we discussed earlier to successfully move the body out of the line of attack from an opponent, and change your own line of attack at the same time. This allows a fighter to create new openings in his opponent's defense and thus new opportunities for attacks of his own. By incorporating these wards in to their repertoire, fighters are able to bring more skill into a fight against an opponent who has not spent time learning them. Also, in addition to providing the fighter with new tricks and techniques he can use to his advantage in SCA rapier fighting, learning these techniques also brings a fighter a new way of looking at the bout and his opponent which may allow him to see openings and possibilities that he had not been able to see before.*

The Complete Education

In his *Paradoxes of Defense*, Silver takes a moment to discuss the "...evill orders or customes in our English Fence-schools, & of the old or ancient teaching of weapons, & things very necessarie to be continued for the avoiding of errors, and reviving, and continuance of our ancient weapons, and most victorious fight againe"⁴³. Silver argues against many of the teaching practices he feels are prevalent in the English schools. According to Silver, teachers in the English schools were forbidding students from using a thrust when fighting with broad swords and from using a blow when fighting with rapiers.⁴⁴ Throughout his *Paradoxes*, Silver maintained that both attacks are necessary to the "true fight", regardless of the type of weapon. He felt that students should be exposed to everything they might possibly see, because not exposing them put them at a disadvantage in real world fighting.⁴⁵ While it contrasts sharply with his anti-rapier image, he also goes further to state that the rapier should still be taught in the schools to anyone that wants to learn as long as those students are also taught with the broadsword as well.⁴⁶

The argument in favor of a complete martial education is not a new one but it is an argument with a great deal of merit and very applicable to SCA rapier combat. New fighters should be exposed to a wide variety of techniques and ideas, so that they are prepared when they come across an opponent who uses those attacks. More experienced fighters should take it upon themselves to continue to learn new techniques that they can

⁴³ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.23

⁴⁴ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.25

⁴⁵ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.25

⁴⁶ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.23-26

incorporate into their own fighting style, so that they will have more techniques available to them when they are trying to create an opening or gain an advantage over an opponent.

Moreover, a fighter's education should not be limited only to the techniques of one weapon. In the SCA, we have a multitude of offhand weapons available to us for use in rapier fighting. Silver argues that fighters should know and understand the rapier as well as the broadsword⁴⁷, and we can carry that mindset into the SCA. SCA rapier fighters should not limit themselves or their knowledge to only one or two preferred weapons forms simply because they like those forms and not the others, and especially because they do not feel proficient at other weapons forms. While a fighter should not take a weapons form that he is unfamiliar with into a melee or tournament scenario, he should not let his inexperience hold him back from working with that form at practices and at home in order to gain greater proficiency and comfort with the form. A fighter should also not confine themselves to only learning one or two weapons forms because this limits their ability to fight with the weapons forms they choose not to learn, and it also hampers their ability to fight against those weapons forms.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

An additional question that Silver posed in his *Paradoxes* that has applications to SCA rapier combat is his paradox "*George Silver his resolution upon that hidden or doubtfull question, who hath the advantage of the Offender or Defender.*"⁴⁸ During the sixteenth century, it was highly debated as to whether it was more advantageous to attack first, or whether it was better to defend first. Silver took the position that there was not inherent advantage to either strategy, but rather that the advantage of one over the other was dependent upon the situation.⁴⁹ *Often in the SCA, we see rapier fighters (especially our newer fighters) falling into one of these two categories. Some fighters will develop a very defensive fighting style in which they will rarely attack first, relying heavily on their opponent's movements and attacks to determine their reaction. Other fighters will take the opposite approach. Relying heavily on speed, aggression, and the element of surprise they will generally attack first in an effort to exert control over their opponent from the onset of the fight.* If there is such an inherent advantage in attacking first, then what is the point of parrying? Similarly if the advantage lies in defending then why should a fighter risk his life to attack? Silver holds that there is no absolute advantage in either attacking or defending. He argues that neither of these strategies has a distinct advantage over the other.⁵⁰ Rather he maintains that the advantage lies in having true pace, time, and space in the fight whether he is attacking or defending.⁵¹ *I agree with Silver as his*

⁴⁷ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.23-26

⁴⁸ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.12

⁴⁹ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.12

⁵⁰ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.12

⁵¹ Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.12

arguments carry a great deal of merit. Both strategies have their time and place in the Arte of Defense and in traditional SCA rapier combat but neither should be relied on to the exclusion of the other. By doing so a fighter is depriving himself of techniques and tricks that would make him a more well rounded and knowledgeable fighter.

By only fighting defensively he often never learns to control the bout. A fighter who only learns how to react to his opponent won't be able to learn how to influence his opponent's fighting with his own attacks. He's too busy defending his opponent's attacks and reacting to his movements. He also often finds it very difficult to understand and manipulate the timing of the bout. Although it is a cornerstone of the Arte of Defense timing is a rather nebulous concept. To truly understand it and learn to use it to ones advantage a fighter has to experiment with it. He has to practice not only timing his opponent but trying to manipulate the timing of the bout. It's a difficult concept to learn and work through and a fighter who only fights defensively will not be able to appropriately experiment with these techniques because he will be too busy defending himself from his opponent. For similar reasons he will also find it difficult to learn how to actively control range and to manipulate it to his advantage.

By only fighting offensively and never learning to be defensive a fighter leaves himself very vulnerable to attack and deception by his opponent. If he does not learn simple defensive voids and parries he will not be able to move his body out of line of attack nor will he be able to parry his opponent's blade away from himself. Also, if he never learns the caution of a defensive fighting style he is vulnerable to deceit from his opponent.

Conclusions

The traditional party line in SCA rapier circles has been that Silver's theories and practice are completely irrelevant to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat. In fact, for many years there has seemed to be a pervasive anti-Silver mentality among the rapier community most likely perpetuated by a too basic understanding of Silver's arguments against the "rapier men" of his day. It is only recently, with the advent of SCA "Cut-and-Thrust" style combat, that I have begun to see a small interest in Silver emerge. However, Silver's theories and techniques are not solely applicable to SCA "Cut-and-Thrust" style combat. They have many applications for traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat as well.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples. The importance Silver places on distance and range along with staying out of your opponent's range until you are ready to attack offers an SCA fighter an extra level of defense which fighting closer to his opponent does not offer. Also, Silver's footwork can easily be applied to traditional SCA rapier combat and offers an additional line of defense to the SCA fighter while incorporating new defensive movements into his repertoire. The Slope Pace and Demi Volte also provide the fighter with new lines of attack and potential new openings in his opponent's defense.

Thus we see that Silver's techniques and theories are not as useless to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat as some may have believed. Rather, his common sense approach to many of the same issues that arise in traditional SCA rapier combat indicates that we might begin to look at Silver's treatise for information and period advice as often as we would any of the more readily accepted masters such as Di Grassi or Saviolo.

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