

# Silver's *Gryps* and *Clozes*

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## Intro

Grappling was a common practice among practitioners of the Art of Defense during the Sixteenth Century. The Arte of Defense was primarily about gaining advantage over your opponent physically and tactically while protecting yourself from attack. Grappling allowed fighters to gain a significant physical advantage over their opponent and in many cases to use their opponent's body against them. Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries Silver also incorporated grappling into his practice. Although he considered an understanding of range and the correct use of distance to be more advantageous to a fighter than grappling tactics he still noted that a good knowledge of the grips could be very valuable to a fighter. In this article we will explore several of Silver's grips. We will investigate how they are performed as well as the advantages they may offer to a student of Arte of Defense.

## About the Grips

In his treatise Silver discusses closing with your opponent, "**close**" or **infighting**<sup>1</sup>, and **grips**<sup>2</sup>. Grips refer to actually grabbing your opponent during the fight and are very similar to Marozzo's **presas**<sup>3</sup>. These movements are generally used to gain a physical advantage over your opponent, cause personal harm (such as breaking an arm), wrestle his weapon out of his hand, or put your opponent on the ground.

In order to better understand when and how grips should be used within Silver's practice we must first understand his stance on distance and range. While he does use **grappling** in his treatise, overall Silver favors maintaining ones **distance**<sup>4</sup> from their opponent through the majority of the fight. Throughout his *Bref Instructions* Silver strongly advocates for two major principles that he believes are necessary to keeping a fighter safe. The first is that you must always take care to maintain your distance, staying out of range of your opponent. The second is that, when you make an attack, you should move back out of range of your opponent, beginning your movement out either as you are making your attack or immediately after you have made your attack. Silver

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<sup>1</sup> close or in-fighting: The range within which both fighters are close enough to come into physical contact with each other and/or grapple.

<sup>2</sup> grips: Also known as grappling grips are wrestling techniques that can be used by a fighter to gain a physical advantage over their opponent during a fight.

<sup>3</sup> Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.173-194

<sup>4</sup> distance: The physical distance between two opponents.

stresses using both in order to provide an extra level of safety from attack<sup>5</sup>. There are many examples where Silver applies and encourages the use of these principles throughout his treatise. For example in Silver's third **General Rule**<sup>6</sup> he cautions fighters to maintain distance and not to allow their opponent to place them within his range. Once they are within their opponent's range they are in danger of being hurt by an attack. A fighter should always know at what range his opponent can attack without having to advance forward<sup>7</sup>. He also promotes their use in several of the weapons sections. As an example, in his section on single sword vs. single sword he states that if your opponent is standing in **Open**<sup>8</sup> or **True Guardant**<sup>9</sup> and attacks the left side of your head or upper torso, your best defensive ward is the True Guardant ward. In this ward, if he attacks from Open or True Guardant and doesn't close, then, once you have successfully parried the attack, you should quickly uncross your sword from your parry and attack his head, retreating as you throw your attack<sup>10</sup>.

Now that we understand of the roll distance plays in Silver's practice we can use that knowledge to gain new and better insights into how and when grappling should be used. Silver maintains that highly skilled practitioners of his fighting system will not need to come to grips to prevail over their opponent<sup>11</sup>. However, while that may be true for highly skilled fighters grappling was still a common occurrence during fights of the time period<sup>12</sup> and Silver includes them in his treatise for his students. He was always a strong advocate for a well rounded martial

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<sup>5</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.83-86

<sup>6</sup> In his *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence*, Silver discusses ten general rules that a fighter must follow in order to fight safely and truly. 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- 86

<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>8</sup> Open Fight: Similar to Marozzo's Guardia Alta Silver's Open Fight is a ward in which a fighter holds his sword over his head so that it is point straight up to the sky.

<sup>9</sup> True Guardant Fight: A ward in which a fighter holds his sword over his head but with the tip pointed down and angled towards the fighter's off hand side.

<sup>10</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.89-90

<sup>11</sup> Hand, Stephen. *English Swordsmanship: The True Fight of George Silver, Vol. 1.* (Highland Village, Texas: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2006) p.127

<sup>12</sup> Grappling techniques were taught by many masters of the Arte of Defense. Marozzo covers many wrestling techniques in his presas and Di Grassi addressed disarming techniques in the second part of his treatise concerning deceipts and falsings.

education<sup>13</sup> and this may help to explain why he includes a discussion of grips and the close fight in his treatise. Silver maintains that a fighter should not instigate grappling against an opponent unless they are fighting a completely inept opponent. Rather, grappling should be used as a defensive skill to gain advantage over an opponent who has closed with the fighter and attempted to instigate grappling himself<sup>14</sup>. Silver also cautions his readers not to try to close first, but to take notice of what their opponent is doing, take their best ward, and attack and grip him<sup>15</sup>. The grip should only be initiated after the fighter has performed a successful parry. The fighter will then close with his opponent in order to position himself close enough to his opponent to begin the grip taking care to use his sword to ward his hand as he begins the grip.

### **Initiating a Grip**

You can advance your grappling both when executing a cut and when executing a parry. When initiating a grip though it is important to use your sword to adequately protect your gripping hand. As you move forward to take the grip you want to keep your gripping hand behind the edge of your blade so that your weapon can provide protection to your hand. If you advance your hand past your sword too early you run the risk of your hand being cut by your opponent's sword as you attempt to take the grip.

### **Silver's Grips**

*1. "If he strike aloft at the left side of your head, and run in withal to take the close or grip of you, then ward it guardant, & enter in with your left side putting in your left hand, on the inside of his sword arm, near his hilt, bearing your hand over his arm, & wrap in his hand & sword under your arm, as he cometh in, wresting his hand & sword close to your body turning back your right side from him, so shall he not be able to reach your sword, but you shall still have it at liberty to strike or thrust him & endanger the breaking of his arm, or the taking away of his sword by that grip."*<sup>16</sup>

**Gaston:** Standing in open ward with his left leg forward.

**Rosalind:** Standing in open ward with her left leg forward.

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<sup>13</sup> Silver, George. *Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972.) p.23-25

<sup>14</sup> Hand, Stephen. *English Swordsmanship: The True Fight of George Silver, Vol. 1*. (Highland Village, Texas: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2006) p.127

<sup>15</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.101-103

<sup>16</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.101-103

**Gaston:** Attacks with a cut at the left side of Rosalind's head. He does to take the grip as he executes his attack by stepping forward with his right foot as he executes his cut.

**Rosalind:** Wards Gaston's attack with Guardant and closes, stepping forward with her right foot, keeping her left side close to Gaston's parried sword.

**Rosalind:** Begins the grip at the top of Gaston's wrist near his hilt with her left hand. To do this she should bring her hand over Gaston's guard, bringing the guard down to shoulder level.

**Rosalind:** Wraps Gaston's wrist with her arm, locking his wrist in the crook of her elbow and locking his sword arm under her arm pit as she steps forward and to the left with her left foot.

**Rosalind:** Once she has Gaston's arm gripped she should execute a strike to Gaston's face with her pommel as she steps back and towards her left side with her right foot. At she completes her step back she can also execute a cut to Gaston's head.

Rosalind needs to keep her sword side free and back so that she can attack Gaston with a strike or thrust without the danger of him gaining the grip of her sword side. She also needs to maintain her grip on Gaston's arm so that she can break it or take his sword if necessary.

2. *"If you are both crossed in the close fight upon the bastard guardant ward alowe, you may put your left hand on the outside of his sword at the back of his hand, near or at the hilt of his sword arm & take him on the inside of that arm with your hand, above his elbow is best, & draw him towards you strongly, wresting his knuckles downward & his elbow upwards so may you endanger to break his arm, or cast him down, or to wrest his sword out of his hand, & go free yourself."*<sup>17</sup>

**Gaston and Rosalind:** Bound together at the close fight, both in the Bastard Guardant Ward.

**Rosalind:** With her left hand, she grips the outside of Gaston's sword at the base of his sword hand (near the hilt).

**Rosalind:** She slides her hand up his arm to grasp the inside of his arm just above the elbow.

**Rosalind:** With a step forward and to the outside with her left foot, she pulls him towards her strongly, wresting his knuckles downward and his elbow upwards. This way you can break his arm, put him on the ground, or pull the sword out of his hand.

Silver's first and second grips offer several advantages. Like the other grips they offer the advantage of physical control over your opponent and his weapons. While this may seem simple at first it should not be over looked. Taking control over your opponent and his weapon lessens the danger that a fighter may face from them. If you do not take the time to gain control of your opponent and his weapon before beginning any sort of attack then you run the risk that your

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<sup>17</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.101-103

opponent will be able to avoid your attack. He will then have the opportunity to counter with an attack of his own, endangering you. Thus it is crucial that fighters be able to gain control over their opponent and this grip helps them to gain that control.

A fighter is also able to use the second grip to put his opponent on the ground. Being able to put your opponent on the ground places you in a significant position of power and control in the fight. Here your opponent is not simply going to the ground as if you took his legs in traditional SCA combat. With this grip you are binding up your opponent's arm and physically throwing him to the ground with force and aggression. By throwing him to the ground you deprive him of many of the techniques that he would normally use to protect himself or to gain advantage over you. Once he is on the ground he won't be able to move out of range and there will be several moments where he is stunned from the fall during which you will be able to easily attack. Thus you have used the throw to gain advantage and control over your opponent and to place him in a dangerous position.

The final advantage of both the first and second grips is that they facilitate the breaking of your opponent's arm. Breaking your opponent's arm offers a similar advantage to throwing them to the ground as it also places you in a significant position of power and control. By breaking his arm you prevent him from being able to attack you because he won't be able to hold his weapon. In addition, the pain inflicted on him by breaking his arm may very well end the fight all together because it is very likely that he will no longer want to continue the fight due to the pain of the broken limb.

3. *"In like sort upon this kind of close, you may clap your left hand upon the wrist of his sword arm, holding it strongly & therewith thrust him hard from you, & presently you may thrust him in the body with your sword for in that instant he can neither ward, strike, nor thrust."*<sup>18</sup>

**Rosalind and Gaston:** Bound together at the close fight, both in the Bastard Guardant Ward.

**Rosalind:** Grabs the wrist of Gaston's sword arm with her left hand.

**Rosalind:** Holding Gaston's wrist tightly, she pushes him away from her hard and aggressively.

**Rosalind:** Once she has pushed Gaston away she should attack him with a thrust. He will be off balance and unable to ward himself or strike. This makes him very vulnerable.

The advantage offered by grip three is that by pushing your opponent off balance you make him very vulnerable to your subsequent attack. If your opponent is off balance he is not able to protect himself as well as he would if his footing was still sure. Not only do you create new openings in his previously solid defense, he can not void his body out of line of your attack nor can he properly parry your attack until he has regained his balance again. Similarly, once you have

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<sup>18</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.101-103

pushed your opponent off balance his mind shifts its main focus to regaining his balance. This means that not only is he physically unprepared to defend himself he is also not longer mentally prepared either.

4. *“If he strike home at the left side of your head, & therewith all come in to take the close or grip of your hilt or sword arm with his left hand, first ward his blow guardant, & be sure to put in your left hand under your sword & take hold on the outside of his left hand, arm or sleeve, putting your hand under the wrist of his arm with the top of your fingers upward, & your thumb & knuckles downward, then pluck him strongly towards your left side, so shall you indirect his feet turning his left shoulder toward you, upon which instant you may strike or thrust him with your sword & fly out safe, for his feet being indirected, although he hath his sword at liberty, yet shall he be not able to make any offensive fight against you because his time will be too long to direct his feet again to use his sword in due time.”*<sup>19</sup>

**Gaston:** Standing in open ward with his left leg forward.

**Rosalind:** Standing in open ward with her left leg forward.

**Gaston:** Attacks the left side of Rosalind’s head with a cut and steps forward with his right foot to close to grip her hilt or sword arm with his left hand.

**Rosalind:** Wards Gaston’s blow with Guardant. She steps forward with her right foot and puts her left hand under her sword as she parries so that she can grasp the outside of his left hand, arm, or sleeve.

**Rosalind:** Grasps Gaston’s arm so that her hand is under his wrist with the top of her fingers pointing upwards and her thumb and knuckles are pointing downward.

**Rosalind:** Pulls Gaston strongly towards her left side. This will change his footing and as soon as she begins her pull she can attack him with a strike or thrust and then move quickly out of range because he will have to regain his footing before he can attack again.

The advantages offered by grip four are the same as those offered by grip four. The big difference between the two is that in grip four you are pulling your opponent off balance rather than pushing him.

5. *“Also if he attempt the close or grip with you upon his bastard guardant ward, then cross his sword with the like ward, & as he comes in with his feet you have the time of your hand & body, whereby with your left hand or arm you may put by his sword blade, which thing you must suddenly & strongly do, casting it towards your left side, so may you uncross & thrust him in the body with your sword & fly out*

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<sup>19</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.101-103

*instantly, for if you stay there he will direct his sword again & endanger you, this may safely be done, or you may uncross & turn your point up, & strike him on the head, & fly out instantly.”*<sup>20</sup>

**Gaston:** Standing in open ward with his left leg forward.

**Rosalind:** Standing in open ward with her left leg forward.

**Gaston:** Attacks Rosalind’s lower left side with a cut and closes, stepping forward with his right foot, to grip her hilt or sword arm with his left hand.

**Rosalind:** Parries Gaston’s sword with Bastard Guardant stepping forward with her right foot.

**Rosalind:** Beginning to step forward and to the outside with her left foot, she pushes his sword away strongly and quickly with her left hand. Continuing her step forward and to the outside with her left foot, she uncrosses her sword and attacks Gaston with a thrust to the body or a strike to the head. As soon as she attacks she must move out of range quickly because he will be working on bringing his sword back online. The chief advantage of this grip is the control you gain over your opponent’s sword.

Grip five is rather different from the previous grips that we have looked at. In this grip rather than grabbing your opponent’s arm or wrist you are placing your hand upon his guard or the fort of his sword and forcefully parrying the sword away. You want to maintain control of the sword while you attack by keeping contact with your hand until you begin your movement back out of range. You still want to maintain control of the sword while you are moving out of range but you will eventually have to remove your hand so that you are at a safer distance. In the discussion of the first two grips we talked about why controlling your opponent’s weapon was so important. To reiterate taking control over your opponent’s weapon lessens the danger that a fighter may face. If you don’t gain control of his weapon before beginning your attack then you run the risk that your opponent will be able to avoid your attack and counter with an attack of his own thus endangering you. Gaining control during the fight is crucial to a fighter’s success and dominating your opponent’s weapon can help you gain that control.

## Conclusions

Grappling tactics were common in Sixteenth Century combat although they may seem strange by today’s standards. These wrestling techniques gave a fighter the ability to gain a very physical advantage over their opponent and were often used to disarm or disable. Silver’s grips are very similar to many of the grappling techniques that were being used during the period and they offer a fighter the ability to physically use their opponent’s own body against them. For example, the bind used in Grip Two takes advantage of the physical structure of the arm to put one’s

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<sup>20</sup> Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.101-103

opponent on the ground or, if necessary, break his arm. Grips Three and Four can be used very successfully to pull or push one's opponent off balance. This allows the fighter to both gain advantage over his opponent and to create new openings through which he can attack. Silver's grips offer a student of the Arte of Defense a wealth of new opportunities to attack or disarm an opponent and can be used quite advantageously within Silver's system.

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