

George Silver's "Bref Instructions Upon my Paradoxes of Defense"

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George Silver is one of the most colorful characters of the Elizabethan martial arts world. The arguments he makes in his *Paradoxes of Defense* against his Italian contemporaries have made him one of the most well known and controversial figures of his time. But the problem with fame and infamy is that they can distort the truth and Silver's ideas and theories are often lost in the controversial nature of his arguments.

There is a lot to be gained from studying Silver's works and many of his theories and much of his practice are still quite applicable today. But to understand Silver and to learn how to apply his theories within the SCA we must first examine his works.

The bulk of his practice can be found in his *Bref Instructions*, which he wrote in 1599. Unfortunately, they were never published in his lifetime. It wasn't until the late 19th Century that a copy of the treatise was discovered by Captain Cyril G. R. Matthey, who printed the work in 1898. It is in this treatise that Silver discusses the bulk of his theory and techniques for fighting with the English broad sword and it is this treatise that we will examine.

Bref Instructions upō my pradoxes of Defence for the true handlyng of all Mann^r of weapons together w^t the fowr grownds & the fowr gov^rners w^{ch} governours are left out in my pradoxes w^tout the knowledge of w^{ch} no man can fight saf.

The Four Grounds

For Silver there are **Four Grounds**, or principles, that are the foundation of all true fighting. These four principles are **judgment, distance, time, and place** and it is these principles work together to keep a fighter safe. If a fighter has judgment, he uses his judgment to maintain his 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 and advantage over his opponent. Once he has gained the place over his opponent, he can attack or retreat safely.¹

The Four Governors

Once Silver feels he has fully explained the **Four Grounds** he goes on to introduce and discuss the **Four Governors**. These seem to be very similar to the **Four Grounds** and work with them to provide a more in depth foundation for fighting. The first governor is **judgment**. **Judgment** provides an understanding of when your

¹ 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

opponent is within your range and vice versa. It also gives a fighter and understanding of the pros and cons of his opponent's stance, the movements and attacks his opponent can execute, and what he is vulnerable to. The second **is measure** so that you can better understand movement and range. The third and fourth governors are included together and cover coming in for an attack. **Just as you are prepared to come in to attack, you must also be prepared to step out or back if you opponent does the same to you.**²

Certain general rules w^{ch} must be obsyved in y^t prfyt use of al kynde of weapons.

Once Silver has laid out what he feels is the foundation of true fighting, he moves forward to discuss **ten general rules** that a fighter must follow in order to fight safely and truly.

The first rule is 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 in your opponent's face.³ *By noting the layout of the ground, the fighter can note what areas might give him an advantage and which areas he should try to stay away from. He is also able to make notes that will allow him to use the field to his advantage. For example, if a particular spot of the field is uneven, it might be to his advantage for him to move his opponent to that area of the field, as the unevenness would add another layer of difficulty for his opponent.* Silver also suggests using the sun in a similar way. Moving so that the sun is in your opponent's eyes prevents them from being able to see you as well and makes defending against attacks more difficult.

Secondly, Silver stresses that a fighter should stand comfortably, constantly thinking about his opponent's stance and attacks. However, a fighter should take care to always maintain his distance from his opponent, keeping his head, arms, hands, body, and legs out of range so that if his opponent wishes to attack he must first advance forward. Once his opponent has advanced forward, a fighter has three options available to him. He may attack his opponent immediately as soon as his opponent has advanced, he may ward first and then attack, being careful to remember his governors, or he may step back, attacking his opponent as he steps out of range.⁴ Silver continues to stress that a fighter should take care to step back if his opponent advances on him in order to prevent his opponent from gaining the advantage and to give himself time to prepare to execute any of the options Silver discusses above.

In his third rule, Silver 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.⁵

² 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

³ 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

⁴ 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

⁵ 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

Silver goes on to explain in his fourth rule that when your opponent attacks he is almost always open to an attack on some area of his body or, at the very least, weak in his ward and that you should take care to strike at the nearest opening or weak area.

Similarly, he cautions his readers that when they move to gain an advantage over their opponent that they must always move in guard and remember their governors. If you opponent attacks you and presents you with an advantage then you should attack him as he advances forward. If he attacks you then you should ward his attack and counter with an attack of your own while moving out of his range.

Silver's sixth rule concerns fighting an opponent who is standing in the variable ward. If your opponent attacks you from the variable ward, then again you should take care to maintain your distance so that you are out of his range, attack the closest opening, and back up out of range.

Silver goes on to state that if two fighters are both fighting in the variable fight and both standing within range of the other then those fighters are in imminent danger of being wounded as they don't have the time and positioning to make the true cross in order to parry their opponent's weapon.

In rule eight, Silver continues to caution fighters to take note of how their enemy holds his weapon and when he moves, to position themselves into the ward that best fits their body and hand, and in this ward they should attack their opponent while keeping their governors in mind.

Rule nine deals with moving your opponent's attack offline. If a fighter can redirect his opponent's attack, either by parrying or voiding their body, then they will gain a distinct advantage over their opponent. Their opponent will have to move to bring his attack back online while you can attack immediately and move out of range during the time he is try to bring his attack back online.

Finally, in rule ten, Silver explains that if you ward an attack made to your right or left side, then you should move your rear foot circularly away from the side that was attacked. This will place you in a better position to make your own attack.⁶

Stance

While Silver discusses wards in his discussion of the **Four General Fights** (below), he does not directly discuss the placement of the feet. In his discussion of his general rules he does stress that a fighter should stand comfortably, constantly thinking about his opponent's stance and attacks⁷ but he does not directly mention the placement of the feet in his *Bref Instructions* so we are left to conjecture on how he would have had his students stand. *Of his contemporaries and predecessors, his fighting style and mindset seem to be most similar to that of Marozzo. They both rely heavily on cutting attacks but do not exclude thrusts. Their movements seem similar, and although Silver has far fewer wards, some of his wards bear a resemblance to those used by Marozzo, certainly more so than those used by some of his other contemporaries. Thus we can surmise that his stance is probably also fairly similar to that of Marozzo.*

⁶ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.84-86

⁷ 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

As with modern fencing the fighter wants to present as small a target as possible with their upper body. The front foot is also pointed at the fighter's opponent with the rear foot at a 60° to a 90° angle from the front foot. The feet and lower body are still spaced similarly to the modern stance with one interesting exception. Marozzo has his fighter's move their heels out of line apparently to provide a steadier stance (Fig 1).⁸



Fig 1: Note the alignment of the feet in the detail of Fig 1⁹.

A declaration of al the 4 generall fyghts to be used w^t the sword at dubble or syngle, longe or short, & w^t Certaine p^rticuler rules to them Annexed.

The sword play outlined in Silver's *Bref Instructions* revolves around the **Four General Fights**, or wards, for fighting: the **Open Fight**, the **Guardant Fight**, the **Close Fight**, and the **Variable Fight**.¹⁰

The **Open Fight** is 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.¹¹ *This description seems very similar to Marozzo's Guardia Alta (Fig 2). 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.*¹²

⁸ Rapisardi, Giovanni. *The Teachings of Marozzo*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/other/gr/>. p.2

⁹ Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.60

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.78

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.87

¹² Rapisardi, Giovanni. *The Teachings of Marozzo*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/other/gr/>. p.4-8

The **Guardant Fight** is made up of two main wards: the **True Guardant** and the **Bastard Guardant**. There are also two types of **True Guardant Fights**: the **Perfect True Guardant Fight** and the **Imperfect True Guardant Fight**. The **Perfect Guardant** is framed by carrying your hand and sword above your head, but with the tip pointed down towards your left knee.¹⁴ *You should hold your weapon so that the point is not too high or too low. If the point is too high your opponent could come in under your guard and if it is too low then they could force your blade against you, preventing you from warding with it.* If you hold your sword in this position, with the point held too high or if you stand with your sword held correctly but your torso or head leaning forward, then it is known as the **Imperfect Guardant Fight**.¹⁵ *Both of these imperfect positions put the body in danger of being attacked and place the sword in such a position to the body that it is difficult to defend against you opponent.* The **Bastard Guardant** ward is framed so that you stand with your hand and sword held below your head, but at chest level, and your tip is pointed towards your left foot. This ward is used primarily in close fighting when your opponent his coming in.¹⁶ *From his description we can surmise that **True Guardant** is farmed similarly to Di Grassi's **High Ward** (Fig 3) and that **Bastard Guardant** is framed similarly to Di Grassi's **Broad Ward** (Fig 4) except that the tip of the sword is tuned slightly downward toward your left toe.*



Fig 2: Marozzo's Guardia Alta¹³

¹³ Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.60

¹⁴ 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

¹⁵ 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

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.88



Fig 3: Di Grassi's High Ward¹⁷



Fig 4: Di Grassi's Broad Ward¹⁸



Fig 5: Di Grassi's Low Ward¹⁹

The **Close Fight** is when a fighter stands so that he **crosses** at the half sword either in the **Forehand Ward** (A stance in which the sword is held with the point pointing upwards and the hilt held low) or the True or Bastard Guardant. Silver also mentions that the **Close Fight** “is all mann^r of fyghts wherin yō have made a true Crose at the half sword w^t yo^r space very narrow and not Crost”.²⁰ *In some treatises, fighting at the half sword often refers to fighting with one hand griping the sword half way up the blade. For Silver, however, it seems to have evolved into close quarters fighting in which the fighters are standing within half a swords length of each other.*

The final general fight is the **Variable Fight**. According to Silver, the **Variable Fight** includes all stances not included in the first three fights. The most important wards of the variable fight, however, are the **Stocatta**, the **Imbrocatta**, the **Mountanta**, and the **Passatta**.²¹ All four of these “fights” are attacks taught by Italian teachers such as Vinciento Saviolo. However, it appears that Silver has taken these attacks and turned them into wards. The **Stocatta** is framed by standing with your right left forward, your sword held down by your right leg, and your point pointed at your opponent. You should hold your dagger in your off hand, held out towards the end of your sword, with your point pointed upwards and your sword held as far back behind your dagger as is comfortably possible. In the **Imbrocatta** is framed with your sword held over your head with your knuckles pointing upward and your point pointed towards your opponent's chest and head. The **Mountanta** is framed by standing with your pommel in the palm of

¹⁷ 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.18

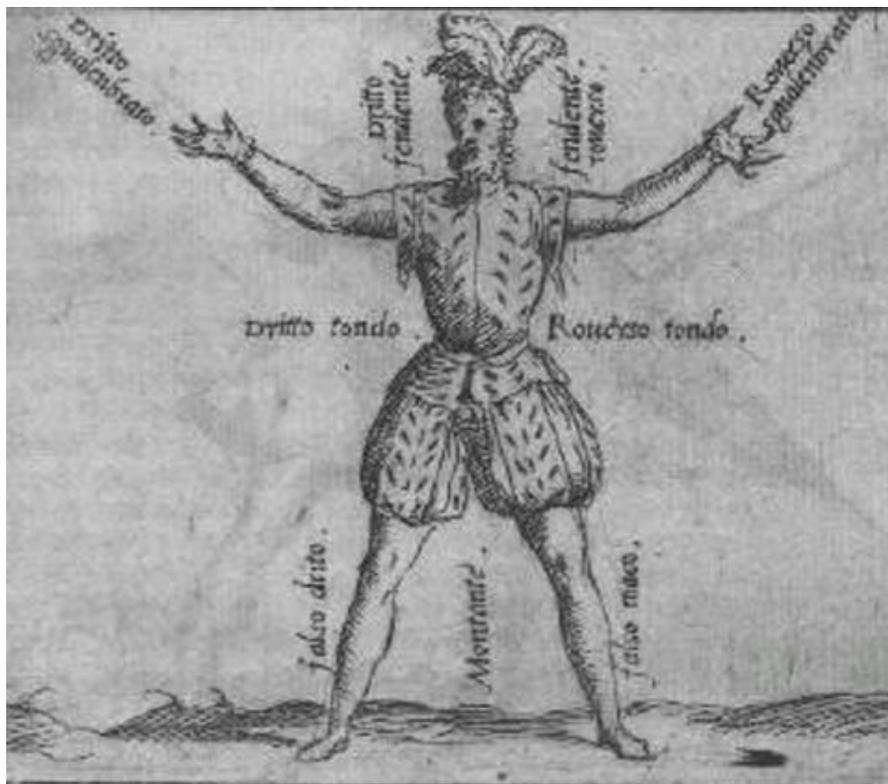
¹⁸ Di Grassi, Giacomo. *Di Adoprar si Curamente L'Arme Si Da Offesa, Come Da Difesa...Di Giacomo di Grassi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1570) p.19

¹⁹ 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

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.88

²¹ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.88-89

your hand, resting on your pinky finger and your hand holding the hilt of the sword up so that a fighter could thrust at his opponent's face, as if he were attacking from the **Imbrocatta**. Finally, Silver uses the **Passatta** to refer to two things. The first is simply as a movement, passing your opponent while in the **Stocatta**, similarly to the way Saviolo uses it. The other is as a ward framed with the fighter standing with his left foot forward, his sword held down at his right side and pointed at his opponent's belly. The dagger is held forward similarly to the way it is held in the **Stocatta** ward, but pointed also at your opponent's belly.²² *Silver uses these terms to denote wards while his contemporaries and predecessors used them to denote attacks. Interestingly, Silver frames many of these wards similarly to the way his contemporaries and predecessors framed their attacks and they may have developed out of those attacks. For example, Saviolo's Stocatta is an attack made under an opponent's weapon. Silver frames his 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. Similarly, Saviolo's Imbrocatta is an attack made over an opponent's weapon an attack Silver's Imbrocatta Ward sets up nicely. The Mountanta, an thrusting attack the centerline of the body made similarly to a high punta reversa²³, is a ward set up in a similar line to Marozzo's Montante cut, a vertical cut made through the centerline of the body (Fig 6)²⁴.*



²² 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

²³ Hand, Stephen. *English Swordsmanship: The True Fight of George Silver, Vol. 1.* The Chivalry Bookshelf. Highland Village, Texas. 200 p. 52

²⁴ Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi.* <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.76

Fig 6: A man illustrating Marozzo's cuts as they would appear on one's opponent.²⁵



On line AB:

Whole Straight Pace: C-D

Half Straight Pace: C-F

Whole Slope Pace: C-E

Half Circular Pace: C-G

Fig 7: Di Grassi's footwork demonstrating the Slope Step and Half Circle Pace²⁶

again in his discussion on movement. The first is that you must always take care to maintain your distance, staying out of range of your opponent. The second principle often mentioned by Silver 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 stresses using both in order to provide an extra level of safety from attack.

Movement

As with the placement of feet when standing in ward, Silver does not directly discuss specific movements as some of his contemporaries and predecessors do. Instead he expects his readers to learn moment from reading the practical advice on moving, defending, and attacking that he lays out in his weapon specific sections. 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^t you may take by strykinge frō yo^r warde at y^e sword fyght*; discussed below) direct evidence of the use of the **slope step** and the **half circle pace**, or **demi volte** (Fig 7).²⁷ There are two main principles that Silver stresses over and over

²⁵ Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.76

²⁶ 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

²⁷ 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

Of diu^rs advantages y^t you may take by strykinge frõ yo^r warde at y^e sword fyght.

Silver does discuss what we would call the parry and riposte. Most of Silver's parries, or **crosses**, involve using the sword or off-hand weapon to deflect an opponent's attack and redirect that attack off-line. Often he combines a parry with a body void, further moving the body out of the line of attack and opening new areas of attack on one's opponent.

If your opponent attacks the right side of your head and you are lying in **True Guardant**, then you should angle your sword so that you bring your hilt down and your point is angled up. This will bring the sword so that it crosses your face and will ward your head from their attack. From here you can attack your opponent either with a cut to his head or, if you angle your point down, with a thrust to the body. Also, you can strike with a cut to the outside of his right thigh, which will be difficult for him to ward if he doesn't retreat with his attack.

Additionally, if you are standing in the **True Guardant** ward and your opponent makes a cut to the left side of your head, you may strike at their head, angle your tip down and attack with a thrust to the body, or with another cut to the outside of either thigh.

If your opponent closes while standing in the **Open of True Guardant** ward, if you meet him in the same ward and maintain your distance while concentrating on warding your right side, you will be able to defend against any of his attacks. Furthermore, from this position, you can attack him with a cut to the head or a thrust to the body. However, if he attacks with a thrust to your face or body, then from your guardant ward you must parry his attack downward with your sword, moving your point strongly toward your right side. Once you have safely broken his attack, you may make your attack with a cut to the head or a thrust to the body.

If you are fighting in the **Variable Fight**, and parry and attack to our right side with the **Forehand** ward, Silver outlines several choices of offensive actions. You may attack with a cut to his right shoulder, thigh, or the right side of his head, you may make the same attack to the left side of his body, or you may attack with a thrust. However, Silver cautions that in this ward you should be doubly careful to maintain your distance and not fall for any feints or downward cuts to your head from your opponent's **Open Fight**. If you are within range it will be difficult for you to anticipate his attacks.

If your opponent prepares to thrust from the **Stocatta** or **Passatta** and you don't have another way to avoid his attack, you can use your sword to beat his point offline, making sure to maintain distance to protect yourself from harm.²⁸

Another option is to parry using the **Forehand** ward. You should watch for his thrust and then, standing in the Forehand Ward with your tip turned slightly upward, if he has his point mounted use your sword to ward your right side and parry or beat his sword out towards your right side. With his sword parried outwards, move your left foot circularly toward his right side. This will open his sword arm, face, and body to attack.²⁹ *This movement seems similar to Di Grassi's slope step (Fig 7). The difference is in the circular movement of the left foot. Di Grassi would have his readers move their left foot*

²⁸ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.98-100

²⁹ 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

*move their left foot in a strait line while Silver would have his readers circle their left foot into the new position. The final positioning is the same, but Silver's movement has his fighters rotate their body slightly as opposed to Di Grassi, who has his fighters move their body more linearly. Similarly, you can parry the attack inwards to your left side and at the same time move your left foot circularly behind the heel of your right foot. From here you can attack his head, body, or the inside of his sword arm while stepping back, as Silver often advises his readers to do.³⁰ This body void is often referred to by other masters as the **half circle pace**, or **demi volte**. Saviolo and Di Grassi both use this movement to take the body out of line of the attack while at the same time opening lines of attack on ones opponent. Silver also recommends these moments for sword and dagger, rapier and poniard, and sword and buckler.³¹*

The mann^f of Certaine gryps & Clozes to be used at y^e syngle short sword fyght, &c.

In this chapter Silver discusses closing with your opponent, “**close**” or **in-fighting**, and **grips**. Grips refer to actually grabbing your opponent during the fight and are very similar to Marozzo's *presas*.³² *These movements are generally used to gain a physical advantage over you opponent, cause personal harm (such as breaking an arm), wrestle his weapon out of his hand, or put your opponent on the ground.*

In Silver's first example, if your opponent attacks from above with a cut to the left side of your head and closes to take the **grip**, then you should ward his attack with the **Guardant Fight**. From here you should close on him and, keeping your left side to him, grab the inside of his sword arm at the forearm with your left hand, keeping your hand above his arm. Wrap his hand and sword up under your arm as he closes, keeping his sword arm close to your body and keeping your right side away from him. This will keep him from being able to grip your sword but you will be at liberty to attack him with a cut or thrust, break his arm, or take his sword.

Similarly, if you and your opponent are both standing in the **Bastard Guardant** ward and crossed in the **close fight**, grab the outside of his hilt at back of his sword hand with your left hand and grab the inside of his sword arm with your right hand, just above his elbow. Pull him strongly to you, moving his knuckles downward and his elbow upwards. By doing this you may break his arm, throw him to the ground, take the sword from his hand, and free yourself from your earlier crossed position. You may also grab the wrist of his sword arm strongly with your left hand and push him hard away from you. For a moment he will not be able to attack or defend and you can attack him with a thrust to his torso.

If your opponent tries to **close** or **grip** with you in the **Bastard Guardant Fight**, then you should cross his sword in the same ward and as he closes you should place your left hand or arm on his sword blade and strongly cast it outwards towards your left side. As you beat his sword away uncross your sword and attack him with a thrust to the body as you retreat out of range. Do not stay in range as he will recover his weapon and attack

³⁰ 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

³¹ 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

³² Marozzo, Achille. *Arte dell' Armi.* <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html> (1568) p.173-194

you. Another option is to uncross your sword, turn the point of you sword up and attack him with a cut to the head, again retreating out of range as you attack.

If your opponent closes in a **Forehand** ward then you should attack the left side of his head cut, turning your hand and hilt strongly, pressing his sword arm down, and hitting him soundly in the face with your hilt or pommel. In doing this you may break his face with your pommel and, tripping his heels with your left foot, throw him to the ground.

Silver does caution 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.³³

Of the short syngle sword fyght against the lyke weapon.

Like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, Silver divided up his treatise into different sections for each of the fighting forms he discusses. The first form he discusses is the simplest, the single sword.

If your opponent is standing in **Open or True Guardant** 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 and then closes in order to grip you, you can safely and easily grip him. However, if he attacks from this ward and doesn't close, then you should quickly uncross your sword from your parry and attack his head, retreating as you throw your attack. If you choose to stand in the **Forehand** ward, take care to make sure you ward his attack or maintain your distance out of his range. If you don't maintain range you are still in danger of being attacked. Returning to your opponent's original stance, if he is standing in **Open or True Guardant** and you wish to attack him, attack by thrusting, while rotating your knuckles downward, at his hand or arm, retreating while you attack. If you are standing with your sword held low in the **Variable Fight**, don't defend against his attack to your head by warding with the **True Guardant** as it will take to long to frame the ward. Rather, use the **Forehand Fight**, but continue to maintain your distance.³⁴

If both men choose to stand in the **Open Fight**, the first fighter to break his distance to attack his opponent's head greatly endangers himself. If his opponent attacks his head with a cut and retreats as he closes, his opponent's attack will ward his attack and by moving back his opponent is able to void his attack.³⁵

If you are fighting an opponent who fights in the **Guardant Fight**, or if he tries to close while maintaining only the **Guardant Fight**, then you should attack any and all openings that are closest to you, both by striking and thrusting, while remembering your governors. He will be in constant danger and often wounded because by maintaining the same ward he will always be a sure target for you but by constantly moving ad changing wards your position will always be unknown to him. He will also tire much faster because his body will be tired of maintaining the same position and his options for attacks will be much fewer than your because you have four options that you can use for

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.101-103

³⁴ 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

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.90

wards and attacks and he has only one. Thus, according to Silver, you should not restrict yourself to only one fight but use all four, moving from one to another fluidly.³⁶

Silver recommends that if your opponent is standing in the **Stocatta Fight** and attacks the right or left side of you head or torso then you should stand in the **Forehand** guard, otherwise the distance you will have to move your weapon across to defend yourself will be too great. If he chooses to stand in his **Passatta** then you should stand in your **True Guardant** or **Open Ward**. He will have to advance to make his attack. The time it will take you to make an attack from your higher guard will be less then the time it takes him to move, thus providing you and advantage.³⁷

If you have both chosen to fight in **Bastard Guardant** and you find yourselves with your swords crossed, if your opponent closes, then you should either use your **grips** as Silver discusses in that chapter or you should beat his blade strongly towards your left side with your left hand or arm, causing the blades to uncross, and attack with a thrust to his torso while retreating out of range. You may also quickly uncross your sword and attack with a cut to his head while retreating quickly out of range.³⁸

Silver closes this section with some general advice to his readers. First he reminds them that they should never try to close or **grip** with the short sword unless they are do so in a slower motion or when their opponent is disorganized in his fighting because if they close too strongly and their opponent is prepared they put themselves in danger. For a more detailed explanation he refers his readers to the section on **grips**. He continues on to advise his readers to ward with the **Forehand** ward when they are fighting in the **Variable Fight**, otherwise the distance they have to move their sword to defend in **True Guardant** is too great to defend themselves quickly. However, if they are fighting in the **Open of True Guardant Fight** then they should not ward with the **Forehand** ward because the space their sword has to travel to from a sure ward is too great again. Finally, he cautions his readers that if your opponent is standing with his sword over his head and his point turned down towards them, as in the **Imbrocatta**, then you should keep your point in close and attack as Silver describes earlier, but you must always remember to keep your distance in order to prevent your opponent from deceiving you with a feint or false attack or movement.³⁹

Of the short sword & dagger fyght Against the lyke Weapon

Silver begins this section of his *Bref Instructions* by reminding his readers that they should keep certain rules in mind when fighting with this weapons form. First, a fighter should remember to defend with his sword rather than his dagger. On the other hand, he may parry with his dagger if he can easily reach his opponent's sword either without moving or by simply leaning in. However, if his opponent attacks him with a thrust then he may use the dagger to forcefully beat the attack aside and attack with a

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.91

³⁷ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.93

³⁸ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.96

³⁹ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.97-98

thrust of his own. Similarly, if your swords are crossed, either in the **Forehand** or in the **Bastard Guardant Fight**, then you may transfer the parry onto your dagger and attack with a thrust or a cut while retreating out of range. If your opponent is foolish enough to close, you may ward his attack with your sword and attack him with a thrust from your dagger, retreating out of range in accordance with your governors. However, Silver cautions that is dangerous to defend with you dagger in any way that has not been mentioned because the amount of distance the dagger has to travel to be able to ward against both blows and thrusts is too great to defend in due time, a problem the buckler does not have due to it's circumference. One the other hand, Silver does advise using the dagger in addition to one's sword for defense. When a fighter on defends with his sword he must defend or attack. When he uses his dagger he allows himself to both defend and attack at the same time.⁴⁰

If your opponent extends his dagger out in front of him then you may alter your stance to match him, always taking care though to maintain your distance and to remember you **governors**.

If your opponent stands in his **Variable Fight**, then you should continue to keep your distance and slowly begin closing on him until you can cross his sword point with your own. At this point he is within range and you should attack immediately with a thrust of cut.⁴¹

Of y^e sword & Buckler fyght.

For Silver, fighting with the sword and buckler is the same as fighting with the sword and dagger with the exception that with the sword and buckler you can defend against both blow and thrust with either just the buckler or with the sword and buckler together. For Silver it is the best of the short sword weapon forms.⁴²

Of the single Dagger fyght against the lyke weapon

To my knowledge, Silver appears to be the only fencing instructor who discusses single dagger fighting in his manual. He begins by reminding his readers that there are no wards or grips for this type of combat; it is completely different form the other forms of combat discussed earlier. However, if your opponent is foolish and leaves himself open for and attack to his face or body, then you can push him aside with you left hand after you have stabbed him. You must move constantly, not allowing your opponent to close with you or **grip** you. By moving you will prevent him from gaining an advantage over you and, the more fiercely he closes on you, the more quickly he gives you an advantage over himself. Silver continues to explain that in your continual motion you must stay out of his range and attack his hand, arm, body, face, or any other area that is easily reached. If he manages to parry your attacks with his own dagger then you should

⁴⁰ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.103-104

⁴¹ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.104-106

⁴² Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.115

attack his hand. If he moves his right or left leg first you should attack that target as soon as it is in range, remembering you governors and moving constantly.⁴³

By keeping these things in mind and following Silver's advice, a fighter can greatly lessen the danger of single dagger combat.

Conclusions

In his *Bref Instructions*, George Silver outlines and thoroughly discusses the theories he mentions and argues in his *Paradoxes of Defense*. His practice shows us a completely different world than that of many of his contemporaries like Saviolo. While the foundations of combat within these styles are the same, the greater use of cutting attacks changes the look and feel of combat and harkens back to the style of his predecessors, Marozzo and Di Grassi. By studying Silver's theories and the differences between his theories and those of his contemporaries we are able to gain a closer insight into this combat of the period, the mindset of those who practiced this art, and the man that taught it.

⁴³ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*. ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.127

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