

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.
 - mostly due to his arguments against the “rapier men” (Saviolo, Bonettis)
- However, if we look more closely at the arguments Silver lays out in his *Paradoxes of Defense*, 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 rapier.
- Many of his theories seem quite similar to the teachers he railed against.
 - We can even 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.

Introduction

- 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" combat there is still a great deal of his theory that can be applied to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat.
 - 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.

The Four Grounds and Governors

■ *Bref Instructions :*

- The *Four Grounds* are *Judgment, 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 and advantage over his opponent. Once he has gained the place over his opponent, he can attack or retreat safely.

The Four Grounds and Governors

■ *Bref Instructions :*

- Four Governors: very similar to the Four Grounds and work with them to provide a more in depth foundation for fighting
 1. The first Governor is Judgment
 2. The second is Measure.
 3. 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 you opponent does the same to you.
- 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.

The Four Grounds and Governors

- The Concepts:
 - 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.
 - 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 Volta), or to know when your opponent has created an opening you can attack through.

The Four Grounds and Governors

■ The Concepts

- 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.
 - The Illustration of SCA "A", "B", and "C" range using fighters A & B
 - 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 range and distance. 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.

The Four Grounds and Governors

■ The Concepts

- 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.
- 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

- In his *Bref Instructions*, Silver outlines **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*.

Silver's 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 in your opponent's face.
 - 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.

Silver's General Rules

- 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.
 - 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 Fights, 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 attacks.
 - So we are left to conjecture on how he would have had his students stand.
 - Of his contemporaries and predecessors, Marozzo is the most similar to Silver.

Stance and Movement

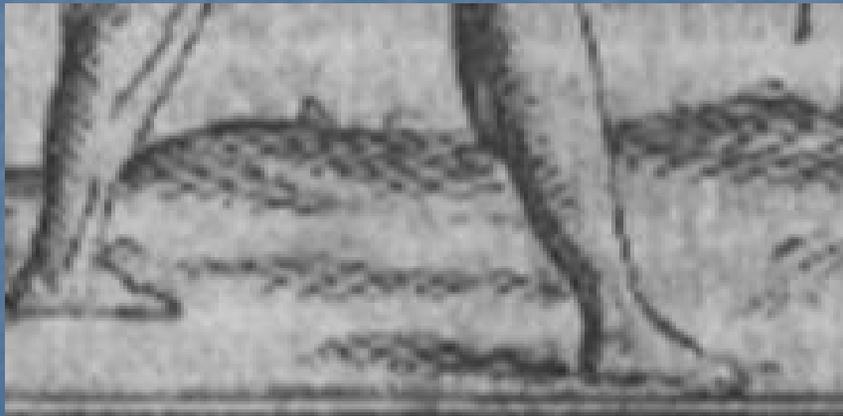
- Why Marozzo?
 - They both rely heavily on cutting attacks but do not exclude thrusts.
 - Their movements are similar, and although Silver has far fewer wards, some of his wards, like the Open Fight, bear a resemblance to those used by Marozzo, certainly more so than those used by some of his other contemporaries.
 - Thus we may conjecture, based on these similarities in their fighting styles, Silver's stance was probably quite similar to that of Marozzo

Stance and Movement

- The Stance:
 - presented the smallest possible target to the 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

Stance and Movement

Fig 1: Note the alignment of the feet in the detail of Fig 1. (Marozzo, p. 60)



Stance and Movement

- 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.
- 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.

Stance and Movement

- Advantages to Silver's Stance:
 - 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 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 voids, 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.

Footwork

- 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 the section on parrying in his *Bref Instrcutions (Of diuers advantages yt you may take by strykinge frō yor warde at ye sword fyght)* direct evidence of the use of the Slope Pace and the Demi Volte, or Half Circle Pace.

Footwork

- 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) 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 from the danger of his opponent's 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.

The Importance of Range and Maintaining Your Distance

- Silver stresses throughout his *Bref Instructions* that during a fight you must always take care to maintain your distance, staying out of range of your opponent.
 - 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.
 - These basic techniques are used by Silver to provide an extra level of safety from attack and are integral aspects of his overall technique.

The Importance of Range and Maintaining Your Distance

- 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" blows on their opponent.

The Importance of Range and Maintaining Your Distance

- By **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.

The Importance of Range and Maintaining Your Distance

- 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.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

- 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.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

- 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.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

- 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.
 - Rather he maintains that the advantage lies in having true pace, time, and space in the fight whether he is attacking or defending.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

- 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.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

- A fighter who only fights defensively often never learns to control the bout.
 - He's too busy defending his opponent's attacks and reacting to his opponent's movements to learn how to influence his opponent's fighting with his own attacks.
 - 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 one's 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.

The Advantages of Attacking or Defending First

- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.

Conclusions

- Two 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.
 - 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.

Conclusions

- 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.
 - 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.

Questions?

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