

Renaissance Rapier

“Technique and Tactics”

By

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This treatise was developed to share the art of Renaissance Rapier fighting, also known as Elizabethan Fencing, SCA fencing, and other terms. If you are interested in learning the art form, reading this treatise is a good place to start. If you’ve already picked up works by Saviolo, Di’Grassi and others, this treatise may shed some modern light on the historical writings. For those of you who are already fighting and are looking for more background, you will find some advanced tactics and techniques in the pages to follow. I would hope everyone who takes the time to read this finds something useful.

The aim of this treatise is to teach rapier tactics and techniques to be used in competitions through out the U.S. and wherever historical rapier is fought. In the U.S., the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) holds rapier competitions regularly. There are both large and small gatherings where tournaments and melees are held. In California there are numerous schools and organizations that compete in rapier and epee combat with historical techniques and rules. If you want to pursue the art of Renaissance Rapier, there is no shortage of venues.

Prior to beginning the basics, I thought I would share just a small bit of history to better understand why the rapier had its place in time.

Brief History of the Rapier and Small Sword

The Rapier is a long, thin, diamond or oval shaped blade with a sharp point. It was used primarily as a thrusting weapon. The thin blade focuses all of its energy in a very small area allowing for greater penetration. The deadliness of the rapier had a lot to do with the shortfalls in medicine during the time when it was most widely used. Deep, narrow wounds were much more difficult to treat than short long wounds, and many casualties of the rapier did not die immediately, but died later from internal blood loss or infection. Some rapier wounds were not immediately incapacitating, and fights continued until a combatant could no longer continue due to blood loss.

Unlike the broadsword or long sword, the rapier is not a cutting weapon. It may have sharp edges, but does not have the weight to be effective as a slashing or cutting weapon despite Hollywood’s depiction as such. Cutting wounds were primarily tip cuts to vital areas of the body. A cut above the eyes causing bleeding into the eyes may not be deadly, but would cause a combatant to be disinclined to continue a duel. A very minor

tip cut to either eye, would be enough to end a duel as well. Another type of cut considered effective, but not deadly unless delivered to a vital area is the draw cut. Draw cuts usually start from the tip and are accomplished by asserting pressure from the blade across an area of the body. Realistically, draw cuts are not heavy enough to slice through Tendons or through muscles, according to research on cadavers outlined by John Clements in his book, Renaissance Swordsmanship. If a draw cut is delivered to areas where vital arteries are near the surface of the skin such as across the front of the neck, under the arms or inner groin, the draw cut or tip cut could be a mortal wound.

The rapier was reported to have its origins in Italy in the early 1500's and gained prominence towards the middle of the century, eventually finding its way to England. As it gained popularity, so did the occasion for Italian Masters to make their living by teaching their art to English Nobles.

The popularity of the rapier was based on a principle outlined by several of the Italian Masters. That principal is that a quick thrust from a rapier is more effective than a slash of a long sword. The time it takes to raise an arm and slash your opponent is longer in duration than the time it takes to thrust straight into the vital area of your opponent. The bottom line is that cuts are slower to perform than thrusts. It is a simple matter of geometry; the closest distance between two points is a straight line.

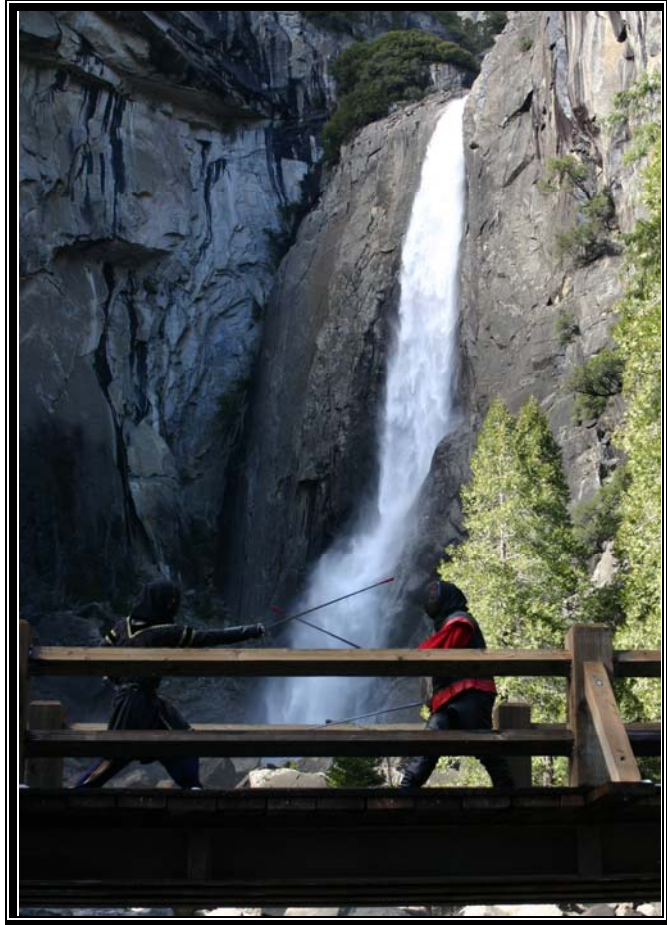
The rapier was worn as a side arm much as a pistol was worn in the old west. At court or in a city, gentleman did not wear armor on a daily basis, so the rapier was an effective weapon against unarmored opponents. Thus, it became the choice weapon for duels, and was used by both nobles and middle class gentleman during the renaissance period. It is doubtful that the rapier would be as effective against a fully armored knight, but during this era, the development of the English long bow and the musket had already rendered full body armor ineffective.

The small sword was an evolvment of the rapier in the sense that it used the same principles of straight thrusts and relied on quickness and dexterity of use to be effective. The small sword was still a thin long blade but lighter and thinner than its predecessor. It gained popularity in the late 1600's and maintained its prominence in court until the early 1800's. The modern foil and epee are closely related to the small sword in their design and length. While the rapier was often accompanied by what is called an off-hand weapon, the quickness of the small sword was so effective that reliance on off-hand weapons decreased and the small sword was used solely as a single sword. The difference in fighting styles also evolved from techniques used with the rapier accompanied by a dagger to a very profile, delicate, single sword style used today with modern Olympic weapons.

Dueling in the Renaissance Era

Duels were fought over many, many things. It is important to understand that dueling was reserved as the right of gentlemen and nobles to settle disagreements and satisfy honor. For many years it was a legal means of defending one's name, honor, country or family from a slight or slander by another gentleman or noble. A duel was considered either "judicial" or "non-judicial." A judicial duel was sanctioned and drew a large audience or non-judicial and fought in private with a second and just a few interested parties in attendance. Non-judicial duels were illegal and punishable by imprisonment or death.

It has been reported that as many as 25,000 nobles died in duels during a 30 year period in the 16th century, effectively decimating the ranks of noble families in Europe resulting in an outcry to end sanctioned dueling. Although, some duels ended with the first cut or first blood, many continued until one or both combatants lay dead or dying on the field. Many who survived the duel initially, died later from wounds or infection. Eventually, because so many nobles died from wounds in duels, the practice of settling disputes became outlawed and the duel continued, but outside the favor of the crown. In later centuries, the pistol replaced the blade as the weapon of choice.



I take this sport very seriously because of the seriousness of its origins. I train and teach my students to fight as if they were in a duel with their life on the line. I've always believed if you are going to do anything, give it your all. This sport is based on mortal combat and should be given the respect it deserves. With that principle as your cornerstone, the following pages will guide you into a very challenging, fun sport.

Preparing the Mind and Body

It's not enough to know everything there is to know about classical or modern fencing. If you read for the next twenty years and memorize every work by every famous fencer in history, you still won't be able to defend yourself in a duel. Mastering the art of fence is

the transfer of knowledge into action. It's about putting into practice what you read on the page. It's teaching your arms, your legs, your body what your mind knows.

Transferring knowledge into action is not an easy task. There is a term called "muscle memory" that means your muscles remember because they have been there before. Baseball players, basketball players, tennis players all rely on muscle memory to make the throw, the shot, the hit. Fencers rely on muscle memory to get their feet, hands, legs and body in the right position. What it all comes down to is training. You must practice and train everything you read on the page until it becomes second nature. You must master the techniques before you can move on to the mental aspect of the sport.

Once your body can be called upon to do as it is told, you are well on your way to becoming a good fencer. If you are beginning, find a school and a maestro to help you train and learn proper technique. With proper technique, the following strategies will become very helpful at taking you to the next level. And so, we begin.

The Four Governors of Rapier Fighting

Prior to engaging in the art of Renaissance Rapier, there are several principles and techniques that you should be aware of prior to picking up a rapier. First, you should understand the importance of time, measure, judgment and place. Next you should learn some of the historical terms related to fencing. Many historical terms translate directly to modern terms and hand positions, but it's good to know their historical origins. Throughout this treatise I will use both historical and modern terms.

TIME, MEASURE, JUDGMENT, PLACE

Time - Every action in a duel takes place in time. Time is also to be considered an action. Actions that take place in the same moment or simultaneously are considered to have happened in single time. Simultaneous thrusts (stoccata's) to each other's face resulting in a double kill are executed in single time. Subsequent actions are considered to have been executed in double-time or counter-time. A stoccata that is parried or voided followed by a counter thrust (riposte) are considered two actions. The first being the stoccata and the second the counter thrust. This phrase or sequence is considered to have taken place in double time.

Single Time - Making a defensive parry or move while simultaneously attacking. An example of this definition is parrying with the hand or dagger while delivering a stoccata to your opponent's face.

Double Time - Making a defensive movement (parry) then countering with an attack.

There are times when both opponents are inside each other's measure and the action takes place in single time with both combatant's attacking and defending at the same time. An example of Double Time is when one opponent has found his measure and initiates an attack while the other opponent chooses to parry and/or retreat followed by an attack as opposed to a simultaneous attack.

Time (timing) is critical to a successful attack. Surprise in fencing is a situation that exists or is created that favors a hit on an opponent. To fully take advantage of *TIME... judgment, place* and *measure* also have to be understood. Proper timing is created by tactics, a solid judgment of the situation and measure.

Initiating an action in (time) may lead to a positive or a negative situation for the scholar.

A positive situation is gained by surprise.

A negative situation is created by being surprised.

Measure (Distance) - There are two sets of measure or distance that the scholar should be aware of: your own measure and that of your opponent. Measure is considered the distance required to successfully hit your opponent by making an offensive movement. Measure (distance) is divided into separate areas that are described below.

You are well within your measure when you need only extend your arm to successfully hit your opponent. Your opponent has found his measure when he is close enough to successfully hit you. You have reached critical measure (distance) when you are so close to your opponent that you can extend and hit him without the time for a physical response. This is a situation that when it occurs, the winner will be the one who gains the initiative. There are four situations that exist concerning measure in a duel:

1. Both fencers are beyond measure (striking distance)
2. Both fencers are within measure (striking distance)
3. Your opponent has the advantage of being within measure
4. You have the advantage of being within measure

The key to success in this area is to control your measure in a way that keeps you from being at a disadvantage. If you are at a physical disadvantage in arm or blade length you will often find yourself in a situation where you are within your opponent's measure and out of your own. You need to be very aware of this. Your success depends on staying outside of your opponent's measure until you are ready. When you move in, move in decisively and strike.

Distances:

Following are terms describing different distances between you and your opponent. What I believe most important is understanding where you are in relation to your opponent. The terms are not important. What can happen to you at the described distances is what you must understand.

Closed distance - The opponent is so close you must withdraw your weapon to bring the point in line to attack.

Short distance - You are able to hit your opponent by a simple extension of the arm.

Middle distance - The scholar is able to hit his opponent by a simple lunge.

Long Distance - The scholar is able to hit his opponent by an advance-lunge (jump lunge), ballistra-lunge or fleching.

Out-of-distance - Out of measure or the ability to be hit or hit in single time.

Critical distance - The scholar is able to hit his opponent without the possibility of a parry or any reaction.

Advantages and Disadvantages concerning Measure and Distance

Blade length, arm length, hand and body position can affect whether you have the advantage of being within measure or vice versa. If you are using a 42" del-tin rapier and your opponent is using a 36" Schlager and both fencers have the same build and the same stance, you would have a 6" advantage of measure over your opponent. Because of this, there will be situations where you are within your measure and your opponent is not. Your fighting style against this opponent should be based on exploiting this advantage.

If you find yourself within your opponent's measure, you should retreat. Saviolo is very specific about the importance of retiring (retreating) as an honorable act. There is nothing dishonorable or cowardly about giving ground to take away an advantage by your opponent.

You should take advantage of moments when you have the advantage of measure and your opponent does not. Understanding your measure and your opponent's measure is critical. It is wise to stay out of your opponent's measure unless you are ready to defend or invite an attack. Allowing yourself to be within your opponent's measure should be a conscious decision. Moments when you find yourself within your opponent's measure that have been created by your opponent giving him "positive surprise" should be

countered by quickly retreating until you regain a proper ward and are prepared to defend.

Changing Wards or Stances - Always insure that you are well beyond your opponent's measure when doing this or risk a quick action. Conversely, if your opponent changes stance or ward within your measure, recognize any opening and quickly hit him.

Lastly and most importantly, do not hesitate. When you close distance you should attack. It is acceptable to take an initial action to gain an advantage such as a beat or a bind, but always take action.

Judgment - There are numerous aspects of a situation that the scholar must judge properly. The scholar must be able to properly judge measure, tempo, technical situations, timing, speed, movement and intentions. Proper judgment of a situation and execution of the proper response to the situation is what constitutes the successful end of a duel. Judging the speed, angle and direction of an incoming blade is required to successfully parry. Judging your own and your opponent's measure and judging whether your opponent is in a proper defensive situation or at a momentary disadvantage takes place constantly.

To judge a situation properly, you must be aware of everything around you. You should use your eyes, your ears, even your feet. You should watch your opponent for changes in posture, position and most importantly measure. The eternal question of what should I watch is simple. Should you watch his head, his arm, his blade, his torso, his legs, the tip? The answer is yes! You should watch everything and at the same time nothing. Don't concentrate on any particular thing for you risk missing something else. Watch and be aware of everything around you but don't get distracted. While you are looking at your opponent's feet, his blade will strike you. While you are looking at his blade, his feet will move to within measure and then it is too late. A common trick is to hold the rapier back to give a false sense of distance. So, let your eyes embrace your surroundings without focusing on particular aspect of it and you will see everything you need to see. Don't go out looking for it.

The bottom line regarding judgment is it takes experience. Wisdom is earned not learned. The decisions we make today may be different than the decisions we made 5 or 10 years ago. It is the same in this sport. In every bout we find ourselves in new and or old situations. If we've been there before, we have a good idea what will happen. An example of this I've seen on numerous occasions is a fencer will react to a thrust by counter thrusting. What happens? A double kill most of the time. So, the wise scholar after a few practice rounds of doing this will change tactics and begin to parry instead of counter thrusting. This is an example of wisdom or learning by negative reinforcement.

Knowing what will most likely happen based on the current situation and evaluating possible actions is where judgment comes in. The only way to be a better judge of situations is to encounter them. The answer is practice! Pick up your blade and find a

sparring partner, an opponent, a wall. Practice your technique and learn from your mistakes. Every mistake you make in practice is a blessing if you learn from it. Always try to be self aware in every aspect of your game. How you stand, your body position, your hand position, your sword position, your lunge, etc. Ask for feedback from your opponents, your instructor and anyone who can help you grow. In the end, your judgment will improve and you will be a better fencer.

Place - The place on your opponent that can be hit or that is unguarded needs to be identified by the scholar prior to initiating an attack. One of DiGrassi's five principals is "he that is nearest, hitteth soonest." The hand, the foot, the knee, the sword arm, the sword shoulder, the head may all be vulnerable at any one time depending on the ward, the position of the feet, the hand, arm, or angle of the opponent's blade. It is always best to strike the closest available target first rather than to close and place one's self in jeopardy of being hit. Take what the opponent gives you.

*DiGrassi's Five cardinal rules for rapier fighting (translated):

A straight line is preferable over an arc or compass: A thrust is better than a cut

He that is nearest, hitteth soonest: Keep your blade pointed at your enemy and don't let it get too far off-line.

A circle that goeth compassing beareth more force in the extremity of the circumference, then in the center thereof: Hit with the end of the blade because it has more force instead of the center.

A man may more easily withstand a small than a great force: This line relates to the mechanics of parrying. It means you should use your forte not your foible.

Every motion is accomplished in time: This is a principle element to tactics and strategy and should be understood.

Time, measure, judgment, place - Judge the situation, identify the place, find your measure, time your attack and end the contest. It's really that simple!

Understanding Terms and Mechanics

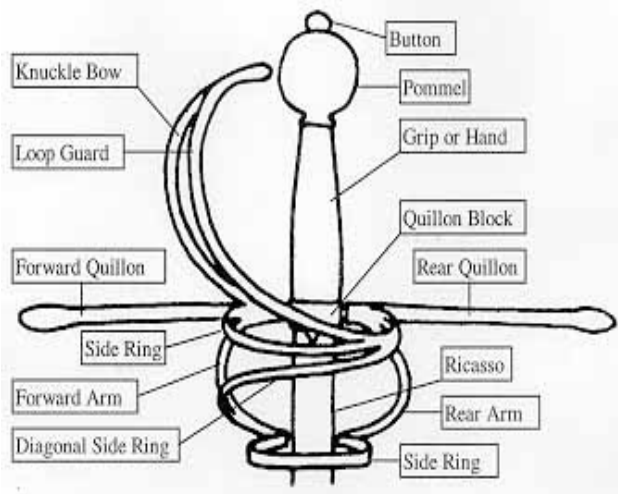
Prior to learning the tactics of Renaissance Rapier, the scholar must understand fencing terms and learn the mechanics of both attacking and defending with the rapier, dagger and other forms. Once technique is mastered, practiced and becomes second nature, the scholar will be able to think beyond executing fencing technique and begin the study of tactics. Below is a list of terms used by Saviolo and other Renaissance Masters of Fence. Each term is important in understanding the writings and strategy of the ancient masters. Additionally, I use many modern terms (in English) that will help the scholar understand proper technique and tactics.

For foil and epee, many terms used for rapier do not apply. Foil and epee bouts are fought in a straight line on what is termed a “Fencing Strip.” The strip is a rectangle fighting area that cannot be crossed. Foil and epee are Olympic sports. Renaissance Rapier is fought in the round. Fighters are allowed to circle (compass) each other to gain advantage. They are not required to stay in a straight line. There are boundaries that fencers need to stay within at times, but rapier fencing is not a linear sport. The Olympic sport of fencing is scored to a predetermined number of touches. The winner of the bout is the first person to score the required amount. In Elizabethan fencing, the first person to score a valid incapacitating hit with the point of the rapier is the winner of the match. Non incapacitating blows disable arms or legs and the fight continues, but there generally is no point system deciding the winner of a match. In rapier fighting, there are also various types of tournaments and scenarios depending on the organization. The SCA offers bear pit tourneys, last man standing tourneys, and many others.

The mechanics you will require to master the art of fence starts with the parts of the rapier, continues with proper stance and footwork, basic defensive techniques, offensive techniques, and finally strategy. You are encouraged to discuss the terms, mechanics and strategy tips with your maestro.

Parts of the Rapier

Illustration



The Blade is divided into three parts for purposes of parrying:

Forte - The stronger blade portion closest to the hilt (the bottom third)

Terzo - Middle of the blade (middle third)

Foible - From the point to the terzo.

Edges and tip:

The tip - Point of the blade

Top edge - trailing edge in a cut

Bottom edge - leading edge in a cut

Flat - either side of the blade that does not have an edge.

Grasp the grip/handle of the rapier as if you were shaking hands with your knuckles on the side of the forward quillon. The loop guard should also be on the same side as your knuckles. Place your index finger above the quillons and wrap it around the ricasso. Your thumb should rest and wrap around your middle finger.

HAND POSITIONS

Pronated - palm facing down, knuckles facing forward and right

Supinated - Palm facing up, knuckles facing forward and left.

ATTACKS - Thrusts, Slashes, Beats, and other terms

Thrusts are quicker than slashes or cuts and are the principle on which the Italian Masters based their rapier strategy.

Stoccata

The stoccata is a straight attack to the body or face of the opponent. It is the quickest type of attack that can be delivered with the rapier or dagger. There are no circular motions, just a direct line from point to target. It is completed by extending the arm in a straight line towards the target area of choice with the tip of the blade vertically in line with the arm or angled sufficiently to pass underneath the opponent's blade if necessary



Imbroccata

A thrust over the opponent's blade with the arm extended vertically and the palm held outward/forefinger would be down. This thrust is performed from the lower wards by making a circular motion with the hand and then extending the arm vertically until the tip of the blade passes the opponents guard.



At that time, you may thrust the blade straight in to the opponents face or thrust downward to defeat the parry.

Punta Riversa

An attack delivered from the reverse (riversa) or opposite side of the sword arm. This attack can be delivered from the Quarte guard straight with the knuckles facing inward

and your palm up. This attack is often initiated from the tierce guard by extending the arm and then disengaging underneath your opponent's blade to the inside line of attack with a circular motion of the hand and tip. It can also be used in the opposite direction around the outside of an opponent's blade by circling in the opposite direction around the parrying blade with the knuckles facing right and the hand down as an angled attack.

Stop Thrust

A stop thrust is delivered in time at the body of your opponent while he is in preparation for an attack. This technique was especially useful against cutting weapons raised back preparing for a slashing cut. A quick stop thrust could negate the attack or lessen the impact.

Riposte - An attack made in double (counter) time after parrying your opponent's attack.

Remise - A continuance of an attack when the first thrust fails to hit. A remise usually happens because the opponent fails to riposte after parrying.

Counter Attack - Thrusting against an attack instead of riposting.

Fein Attack - A Fein attack is a quick extension of the arm followed by a quick retraction to garner a response from your opponent. The fein is usually made to a place where you want your opponent to move his blade taking it out of line from the place of your true intent.

True Attack - A true attack follows a fein attack and is made with not just the arm but an advance or a lunge.

CUTS or Slashing Attacks - Although not as effective as thrusts, there are situations when a cut is necessary or more practical than a thrust. One situation is when two fencers are corps d' corps (close-in) and the blade cannot be retracted sufficiently to perform a thrust. Another situation where a tip cut is appropriate is after a thrust has been parried and the tip is nearly horizontal to the opponent. A quick flick of the wrist drawing the tip across the opponent's face is an effective way of ending a duel.

Mandritta - A forehand cut with the leading edge of the weapon from right to left (outside in)

Riverso - A backhand cut, performed with the tip of the blade striking your opponent from left to right. Again, with the (bottom or leading edge of the weapon).

Fendente - A vertical cut straight down -

Stramazone - A cut performed with the tip of the blade by laying it on your opponent when an actual thrust cannot be completed and then pushing it across the surface of the opponent with adequate pressure to cause bleeding.

Beat - A beat is a quick tap of your opponents blade used to knock it out of line or invite a counter movement. The beat should be done by a quick movement of the wrist and should normally be done with the leading edge of the blade. Beating with the false edge is not advised for the beginning scholar. Do not beat with excessive force or you may miss and find your blade way out of line and unable to quickly recover. Also, if you beat and your opponent disengages and you miss, your opponent will have a momentary advantage. Beat with caution, and beat to surprise. You can also use a beat attack to set up your opponent or lull your opponent in to believing that you are going to beat, but instead you deliver a quick stoccata.

Bind or Take - Taking of the blade - is a strategy used to control your opponent's ability to parry or attack. It is executed by maneuvering the dagger or rapier to a position that will prevent the opponent from executing a parry, completing a thrust, or attacking in single time. A Bind is executed in a semi-circle that takes the opponent's blade from one line and moves it to another.

Disengagement - Disengaging or avoiding your opponent's blade is a very important aspect of the art of rapier combat. Disengaging and changing lines of attack are performed by making circular motions of the blade. These motions can be outside in or inside out. They can also be done under the opponent's blade or over the opponent's blade.

Cavatione - A circular move of the tip of the blade and the hand. Disengagements can be done by circling over or under the opponent's rapier or dagger. Proper use of disengaging your blade from that of your opponent's will open new lines of attack and may be used to deceive your opponent at a critical moment.

Counter-disengagement - avoiding an opponent's change of engagement. Deceiving an opponent's counter-parry by changing lines.

Derobement - avoiding an attempt by your opponent to beat your blade or take your blade. Both beating and taking of the blade are techniques used to gain an advantage in time.

LINES of ATTACK and DEFENSE

The body is divided into 4 areas or lines or four quarters. The inside and outside lines are separated by a vertical line down the middle of the body. The outside line is considered the side holding the sword. The inside line is the side holding the dagger or other parrying device. The high and low lines are separated by a horizontal line dividing the lower torso and legs from the upper torso and head.

High outside - Sword hand side above the waist.

High inside - Off hand side above the waist

Low outside - Sword hand side below the waist

Low inside - Offhand side below the waist

Lines of Attack - Lines of attack are broken into four areas. Lines of attack are areas of the body that you and your opponent attack. The challenge of attacking is to hit an area of your opponent that is unguarded. The different wards described below close lines of attack as do parry's delivered from a ward.



High outside - Sixte (6) and Terza (3) - the Tierce ward closes this line

High inside – Quarta (4) and Prime (1) - The Quarte ward and Prime ward closes this line.

Low outside - The Octave (8) or Seconda (2) closes this line.

Low inside - the Septime (7) closes this line

Movement - Compassing or moving sideways in Elizabethan fencing sets it apart from modern Olympic fencing which is performed in a straight line (linear) on a fencing strip. Compassing allows you to close a line of attack and open new lines of attack that your opponent is forced to close by moving accordingly. The reason for compassing is to gain a momentary advantage if your opponent is slow to respond or to avoid being hit by moving out of the line of attack.

Incartata - A step forward and to the right with the left foot to move the body out of the line of counter attack.

Half-incartata - A Step with the left foot to the right behind the right foot to move the body out of the line of attack. Also known as (quartata) - The left foot should be centered behind the right foot on completion of the movement.



Fleche - A crossover of the back foot in front of the leading foot and continuing crossover - a running attack.

Note - fleches are not allowed in most sanctioned rapier events.

Void - A void is dodging of the blade. A void can be anything from a lean, a fade, a backward or side step, or a shift of the shoulders to give a more profile position. Voiding is a very good skill to practice and should be used in conjunction with a parry.



Volto - Is a rotation of the body, pivoting on the front foot 90 degrees while moving the rear foot to the right. This move is used to counter a charge or fleche by your opponent.

WARDS - Positions of the hand and the blade in the on-guard position. There are four basic wards that we will use.

Prima (Prime) - High Ward. When drawing your blade from your scabbard, you immediately are in the high ward or Prima. Your knuckles are up, palm facing outward or to the right. The point of your blade is facing at an angle downward or straight at your opponent's head or body with your elbow bent.





Seconda (Seconde) - Broad Ward . The hand is held with the knuckles to the right and the palm down. The blade is held outside to the right. It shortens the distance between the tip of your blade and the opponent to give the impression that you are not as close as your really are. The blade is extended toward the opponent's right shoulder or face parallel or slightly above parallel to the ground.

Terza (tierce – the 6 ward for foil/pee) - Low Ward. The hand is held a fist length from

your leading hip in an offensive stance with knuckles down, palm to the left. The tip is in a horizontal position in line with the arm preventing an available target to the enemy. The tip may also be pointed at the opponent's face, right shoulder or held low. The hand and blade are slightly angled to the right rather than being completely straight up and down. This allows for a quicker transition to Quarte or the 4 parry.



Quarta (Quarte) - Low ward with knuckles to the left, palm up closing the inside line of attack. It is the opposite of tierce (3) and the hand is held in the same position as a punta reversa to the inside. The tip of the blade is pointing at your opponent. This ward closes the inside or off/hand line.



Stance, Parries, Form and Footwork

Proper Stance

The most critical element of a proper Elizabethan fencing stance is to have your weight evenly distributed and balanced between your feet at all times. Your center of gravity will be slightly forward because your opposite hand is held loosely in front of your torso in a ward position or holding a dagger. This is different than Olympic fencing where your opposite hand is behind you. Your feet should be close to shoulder length apart. Your forward foot should be pointing directly at your opponent and your trailing foot should be almost at a right angle to your opponent, but slightly forward. Never let your feet point backward beyond 90 degrees. Your front foot doesn't have to be exactly straight, but very close. There is no exact right way to place your feet, but the more your front foot deviates from a straight line to your opponent, the greater chance there is for catching the side of the foot on an object on the ground or misjudging your true direction. Ground conditions are always different and the field of battle is not always your choice.

Rocks, grass, holes and uneven ground challenge a fencer's balance and alignment. Pointing the front foot at the opponent helps to keep the fencer properly in-line.

The knees should be slightly bent, effectively lowering your center of gravity. Do not bend so far to cause additional fatigue; yet do not stand so straight to require a downward weight shift prior to moving. Arm and hand placement are entirely dependent on the form you are using. We will discuss 6 fighting forms later in this segment.

There are other wards where your feet may be in different positions, but the beginning scholar should master these first before trying variations or more obscure wards. The above stance is based on Italian teachings of DiGrassi and Saviolo. The body position including head and torso may also lean in different directions. When inviting an attack to the head, the scholar would lean forward with the head. When inviting a leg attack, the front leg may be farther out than normal. These variations of the stance should not be attempted without great skill and knowledge.

The offensive Stance - The offensive stance is when the leading foot and the sword arm are on the same side. A right hander with his right foot forward and his rapier in the right hand would be considered to be in an offensive stance.

The defensive stance - The defensive stance is when the sword arm and foot on the same side of the body are not leading. The opposing foot to the sword arm is in the leading position and pointed at the opponent.

Parrying with Rapier and Dagger

Each ward is also a parry, so by moving your guard to a different ward, you are performing a parry.

Critical elements of parrying:

Never parry further than necessary to safely deflect the blade from hitting you.

Always keep the tip of the blade in line with your opponent, or as close as possible while still safely performing the parry.

Always parry with the forte of the blade - The forte is where you have the most power and the foible is where you are weakest.

Always parry with the leading or bottom edge of the blade. The false edge or top edge of the blade is much weaker than the bottom and can result in you being disarmed.

Do not parry straight down or you will be pushing the point into your belly.

Do not parry up or you risk pushing the tip into your face.

Normally, you do not want to parry inward with your dagger. There are wards and exceptions to this rule.

When parrying with the dagger, do not let the weight of the thrust carry your arm backward or you may not recover in time to parry against a sustained attack. Keep your arm extended and use hand movements and wrist movements to parry. Do not retract the arm. The elbow is your pivot point for dagger parries as well as sword parries.

Unless your opponent attacks and you judge it to be short, the parry should also be accompanied by a retreat and a counter attack in double time, also called counter-time. On the occasion that you have found your opponent's blade or your opponent misjudges his measure, you should parry and counter attack in single time.

When in the tierce ward or parrying to the 6/3 position, never move the tip of the blade out of line with your opponent. If your opponent is attempting an angulated attack, move to the broad ward, but keep the tip in line. Note - this is one of the biggest mistakes beginners make. An attack to the outside of the sword arm with a disengagement underneath the blade is an easy kill if the scholar attempts to move the blade out to parry it. The proper response to an outside attack or feign is to shift the wrist to meet the blade with the bottom edge of the rapier. If your opponent disengages underneath, then a 4 parry is easily accomplished. If the scholar goes out for the blade and the opponent disengages, the 4 parry (quarte) is much harder to accomplish in time.

Parry (positions)

Quarta (parry 4) When in the Terza Ward, to parry 4, you simply move your hand to the left and strike the incoming blade with the leading or bottom edge of your blade.

Terza (parry 3/6) This parry begins in the Terza/Tierce ward and is made with a simple turn of the hand to a pronated position with the leading edge of the blade facing the outside line. When in the Terza ward, the outside line is closed, but the trailing edge of the blade is facing the outside. In order to gain a firmer parry, the leading/bottom edge of the blade is turned outward. For foil, this is the parry 6 position. But, unlike foil, rapier needs a stronger parry.



Seconde (parry 2) This parry can be accomplished easily from Prime, Seconda, or Terza

by turning the hand over so the knuckles are facing forward and the palm is to the outside in a sweeping manner and your elbow is pointing up. The opponent's thrust is swept to the outside (your right). The key ingredient in this parry is to make contact with the blade and pivot sweeping it out. Do not push it down! The most common mistake by beginners is not completing the parry and pushing the opponent's blade down resulting in a leg wound or a wound to the lower body or groin. This is also an excellent technique for sweeping an opponent's blade out of line when using "Brace or Case" and when attacking passato with the dagger.



Circular parry - a circular parry is completed by dropping the tip of your blade under that of your opponent as he is thrusting to your inside line. After dropping your tip, you move it to the left in a circular motion counter-clockwise until you make contact with his blade. Once contact is made you sweep it to the right. You should end up in the ward you started in, normally tierce or broad ward. I normally complete this parry starting in tierce and ending in a broad ward or Seconda. The reason for this is by ending in broad ward, I have my opponent's blade outside and I can make a quick stoccata or imbrocatta to my opponents face or neck. Remember once you make contact, do not sweep with the false edge of your blade. We are not using foils, so after you make contact, rotate your palm down and knuckles forward.

(Quinte) Parry(5) and Reverse 5 - Simply raise the hand above the head with the blade slightly angled downward yet still forward as to not take the blade too far out of line. The knuckles should be pointing up and angled the same as the blade. The palm is facing

your opponent but slightly to the right. You should have the arm far enough up and in front of you so that the impact of the blade doesn't push your arm down far enough to still hit your head on a cut. On a cut from a heavier blade, it is advisable to take the tip out of line and parry with a greater angle to deflect rather than block the blade. If parrying a high thrust in this manner, try to catch the blade early enough to prevent the tip from reaching you in time.



The Reverse 5 is the same as five only your hand is completely opposite. The sword is held with your palm facing inward, your knuckles up and your hand held high in front and to your left side. It achieves the same thing as a Parry Quinte (5).

Septime (parry 7) - From Quarta you simply drop your tip sufficiently to ward the incoming blade. From Terza, you would rotate the hand to Quarta while dropping the blade. The palm will be facing up and your knuckles to the left with the tip of the blade pointing slightly downward.



“Attack to the Low Line – Parry Septime (7)”



“Parry Septime (7)”



Octave (Parry 8) – From Terza you simply drop the tip of the blade sufficiently to ward the attack. Your hand will be pronated with the palm facing down and the knuckles facing out. This will move your leading edge to the outside.

Parrying with the DAGGER

Parries with the dagger are the same as with the rapier except accomplished much quicker. When holding the dagger, (see figure #) for the grip, but hold it out in front with the tip slightly up. Normally your hand should be in the same position of the broad ward with your palm down and your knuckles up. Occasionally when in the tierce with my rapier, I will hold the dagger with the tip higher.

Seconda (Parry 2) - Rotate your dagger tip down sweeping the incoming blade to the outside. Again, the key is to make contact with the blade and sweep it out, not down.

Terza (Parry 6) - Protects the head from high line attacks. Catch the opponent's blade and sweep it up and out. Do not over rotate the dagger. Your parry should stop once the blade is vertical. If you have the blade cleanly contacted, you may continue to push the blade outward to knock it out of line by the turn of the wrist, but be aware of a disengagement underneath your dagger. If your opponent disengages, you should then parry 2 again and find his blade.

Parry 5 - Keeping your dagger far out in front, simply intercept the blade and push your arm up and out so the opponent's tip safely passes above your head.

Quarta/Cross Parry - It is better when fighting another right hander to always parry the blade away from your body either down or up and outside. However, there are occasions when the cross parry is not only necessary, but advantageous. This parry is completed against high line attacks the same as a quarte or 4 parry. Your stance must be more square than profile to effectively intercept the blade and parry it to the inside over your blade and past your right arm. If you are fighting with a left handed opponent or you are left handed fighting a right handed opponent, this is a very effective parry because the rapiers are on the same side and are often attacking from the outside and high. Probably the most important aspect of this parry is it allows you to counter attack underneath your opponent's blade in single time while tying up his rapier.

Proper Footwork

Advance - An advance is made by raising the front of your leading foot as short a distance off the ground as possible and stepping forward. When the foot comes to rest, the heel hits first and the front follows. It is important not to raise the back of your foot first and land with the toe. Remember - toe up, glide forward, heel down, toe down.

The next portion of the advance may seem obvious, but here it is. The ball of the back foot is actually pushing off while the front leg is extending forward. Once the front foot lands, the back leg needs to close the identical distance the front foot traveled to maintain the exact distance between the two legs that existed prior to the advance. A common mistake by beginners is to move and end up with the feet too far apart or too close together. Practice by taking small steps and checking your distance after each step then checking yourself for proper balance.

If after an advance, the legs are farther apart or closer together than shoulder width apart, the fencer must make an adjustment while centering his body weight and returning to a slightly bent knee position with his hands in the proper position or ward.

It is very important to remember not to move the back foot forward first. This causes a very narrow center of gravity requiring a great time to move. Slow movement may be fatal.

Retreat - The retreat is done by pushing off with the heel of the front foot and slightly raising the back foot off the ground and extending backward. Once the back foot has moved the proper distance, the front toe is raised slightly and the front foot glides back into position with the heel coming to rest first, followed by the toe. Again, proper distance of the two feet needs to be maintained and the center of gravity needs to be equal.

Compassing - Compassing is one of the key elements that sets Elizabethan Fencing apart from Olympic Fencing. You and your opponent are not restricted to a rectangle fencing strip. You can move to the side and continue moving in a sideways direction. As you and your opponent move, you will be moving in a circular direction. When you or your opponent move in a circular manner, openings can and will occur in your guard. It is paramount to maintain a proper ward while compassing.

Compassing to the Right - Move your leading foot about 4" at a time and rotate the front foot to point at the opponent. Move the back foot to the right the appropriate amount to regain your proper stance. You will now be facing a slightly different direction, and facing your opponent. If your opponent is slow, you will have opened lines of attack.

Compassing to the Left - Move your back foot to the left and slightly forward a comfortable distance. Follow by moving your front foot to the left and pivot the front foot so it again points directly at your opponent.

Note* You can move your front foot first, making your very profile to your opponent, but it may feel slightly awkward. Practice this move insuring you maintain a proper guard.

Lunge - The lunge is similar to what we see in Olympic fencing without the use of the opposing arm for counter balance . The offside arm and hand should be kept in front and used to sweep the opponent's weapon to the side. The key in lunging is extending the leg far enough to hit your opponent while doing two other key things. KEY: The arm

movement should always precede the leg movement. At your full extension, your center of gravity should be slightly behind your leading leg but allowing enough setback to quickly recover. The second very important aspect is to keep your parrying arm forward while lunging. If your arm or dagger does not



go forward, you risk a riposte (counter attack) in single time. Note - never let your forward knee go beyond the tip of your foot in a lunge. Keep your back foot on the ground to allow for a quick recovery. Do not roll your ankle or let your back foot leave the ground.

When you lunge, your leading knee will be bent more than slightly. You should always keep your body and head as straight as possible while lunging. You will be slightly forward, but if you go too far you invite a quick stop thrust to your head. If your center of gravity is over extended, your recovery will be slow. The trade off you must accept is to gain the extra distance on the lunge, you may sometimes not always be as straight as you like. Just remember to get the arm out first.

Ballistra - A quick hop where both feet are moving simultaneously forward. The back foot does not trail or follow after the front foot advances, but pushes off and moves simultaneously. Do not jump up. Jump forward. A ballistra-lunge is when you ballistra followed by an immediate lunge to quickly close the distance between you and your opponent. Properly performed at the right time, this move is very effective at catching your opponent off guard.

Common mistakes while lunging:

The head leads giving your opponent an easy target

The center of gravity shifts too far forward not allowing for a quick recovery

The body and head lead before extending the sword arm presenting your opponent an easy target.

The dagger arm trails instead of staying out in front to take the opponent's blade or parry an attack in single time.

The knee passes the front of the foot creating a center of gravity too far forward to properly recover.

Weapon Forms

Single Rapier - Normally fought in the offensive stance. This form utilizes one rapier and your opposite hand for defense. The hand would be considered to be covered with a chain mail or leather gauntlet.

Rapier and Dagger - May be fought in the offensive or defensive stance.

Rapier and buckler - Fought in the offensive or defensive stance. The buckler is considered a small shield that is used to parry incoming attacks.

Rapier and a rigid parrying device - A rigid defensive device would be a baton or cane or some other available item such as a stool or mug. This form can be either in the offensive or defensive stance. Note - it is better to have something rigid in the hand to deflect a blade than to have nothing if an armored gauntlet is not available.

Rapier and soft parrying device - The cloak is a classic soft parrying device, but a shirt, hat or other similar item could be utilized in much the same way. Utilizing the defensive stance is questionable because although the hand may be covered by the cloak. The cloak is still not protection from a thrust to the hand and may be taken easily by a skilled opponent.

Two rapiers - Referred to as a Case of Rapiers because wearing two swords was a bit cumbersome, so they were carried in a case. Another term for two rapiers is "BRACE" and yet another is Florentine. Each of these terms means the same thing, two rapiers.

Basic Strategy Tips for Each Form:

Later in the book we will look at advance tactics. For now, learn the basics of each form.

Single rapier:

Keep your off hand in front but not too far out. Do not hold it too close to be ineffective, but do not give it away as an easy target to your opponent.

It is of great importance in single rapier to not over parry. Keep your parries small, compact, concise.

It is just as important to not let your tip wander too far from in line.

Use pressure techniques against an opponents blade followed by a disengagement. When disengaging underneath your opponent's blade, a good tactic is to (grab if legal) or bind the blade with your offhand and thrust a stoccata to the low-outside or inside line.

Use a "time-hit" to deflect the opponents thrust. A good example is a punta-riversa thrust that intercepts the opponent's stoccata. This is an advanced technique that should not be attempted until you are very good at parrying.

Beat attacks in single rapier can be very effective if performed properly. Do not try to over power your opponent with a beat. If he is well trained, he will avoid your blade. A quick beat followed by a lunge is very effective. If you beat properly, your blade will still be in line while your opponent's blade sails out of line.

Always parry with the front or flesh of the hand. Never parry with the back. It will hurt! While practicing, keep your fingers and thumb together unless you are well protected. Use your hand to parry to gain the advantage of attacking in single time. However, don't rely on your hand. Use it as a second line of defense when the opportunity arises. Hands are easily fooled on attacks. Use your primary blade first and your hand to bind or lock out as you attack.

Grasping the blade is legal in some areas, and can be very effective. If you are in an area or believe you might be fighting in a tournament where it is legal, practice this.

Fein Attacks, beat attacks and bind attacks are all ways to make an opening for a successful attack. Use them if necessary, but always remember that closing measure followed by a quick thrust is the best way to win.

Options:

- Beat attack followed by a stoccata
- Bind in (2) followed by a thrust to the leg or abdomen
- Fein low/attack high or fein high/attack low

Rapier Dagger:

Whether in an offensive or defensive stance, using the dagger to catch and hold or sweep your opponent's blade is the key to success. Whether you are parrying or lunging, you should always be looking for your opponent's blade.

Do not lunge if your opponent is in good position to give you a stop thrust.

Always keep your dagger out in front while lunging and ready for a counter attack in time.

Always attempt to make contact and sweep your opponent's blade while lunging, once you are within reach of the blade. It is always better to have contact with the opponent's rapier with your dagger while executing a lunge. Unless you have some advantage in measure and time, do not attack hoping to catch the blade. At the very least, you should place your dagger in a position to block out your opponent's blade. Refer back to single sword strategy.

Do not attack unless you have gained an advantage of measure.

Be patient! Keep your opponent from gaining the advantage by using good footwork and good judgment of his measure.

When you close and attack, be decisive, be committed and be quick about it. Once you gain the advantage, exploit it and do not hesitate. If you take the time to think about it, do not attack. If you see the opening and recognize it, seize the moment and strike.

If your opponent is holding his dagger too high, close and strike with a quick stoccata to his bellie. If your opponent is holding his dagger too low, close and strike with a quick stoccata to the face. (Saviolo)

If your opponent is quick or premature with his parries and catching your blade early, make a feint either above or below his dagger and follow it in with a true attack. He will more than likely parry himself out of line and you will be able to quickly follow it up with a straight stoccata.

Use voiding techniques with your parries. Don't just expect your parry to save you. As your opponent is thrusting to the inside low line, execute a parry 2 with your dagger while rotating your torso to more of a profile position and less of a target. If your opponent thrusts a stoccata at your head, execute a parry 6 with your dagger while tilting your head to the right and leaning to the right as well without losing your balance. An inch can save your life. Utilize footwork as well in voiding. A step to the right and behind (see half-encarta) with your left foot is very effective for removing you from the point of attack. This allows you to counter thrust in single time.

Do not parry low attacks inward with your dagger. Use the cross parry against high line attacks only.

Use the dagger to your advantage if your opponent does not have one. If you opponent has a buckler, no offhand weapon or a cloak or some other non offensive parrying device, tie up his rapier with yours by parrying 2 and stepping in. If you can successfully sweep your opponent's rapier with yours, it is very easy to perform a crossover step and hit with your dagger. You should practice this and become proficient prior to attempting it in a tournament or duel.

Rapier and Buckler:

Use the buckler to deflect the opponent's attack to the outside or high. Hold it at a slight angle to the outside. Not so much that it greatly reduces the surface area, but enough to where the blow bounces outside, not inside.

Do not hold the buckler in front of your face. This will only serve to blind you.

After moving the buckler to block an incoming thrust, quickly return it to your on guard position. A buckler in the wrong place will only serve to hamper your movement or your site.

In the defensive position with shorter, schlager blades, you can actually obscure your blade from your opponent. Practice this technique prior to using it in a tournament. It is simple, but you don't want to be the one confused by it.

When fighting against a buckler, you can thrust hard to the inside and even if your opponent blocks your thrust initially, you may still hit on the deflection. A deflection is still a valid hit in most cases.

Rapier and Cloak:

When choosing a cloak for competition, insure it doesn't have any metal on it. In many areas, you are disallowed from throwing it at your opponent if it has metal.

You may use the cloak in a flowing sweeping motion by making a figure 8 with your hand. This is used to distract your opponent while creating the opportunity to tie up his weapon.

If you throw the cloak at your opponent, throw it from your outside so as to obscure his vision and not yours. In preparation or at the beginning of the throw, you are actually giving him the advantage prior to gaining it. Throw the cloak in a manner to minimize your blindness and maximize that of your opponent. Also, throwing the cloak is more of a last resort or a trick. It is better used in your hand than on the ground after a failed attempt. Actually, it is better to not use a cloak if you have an option.

Rapier baton/cane:

The baton or cane can be effectively used the same as a dagger. The major difference between a dagger and a baton is the lack of hand protection and in modern rapier, you can't pelt your opponent with the baton – unfortunate, but true. Do not hold the cane or baton as far in front of you as you would a dagger or you could lose the hand. Normally, it will be longer than your dagger, so this is not a real issue.

Be careful not to cross the tip of the cane or baton while parrying downward. Like “Case of rapiers,” the baton will get caught on your primary weapon if you're not careful. Practice with it first and know your limitations. Sometimes utilizing the broad ward with a cane is more effective than tierce in minimizing the interference between cane and rapier.

Use the cane to hook your opponent's blade. If your opponent is not familiar with fighting a cane, it can be very intimidating. You can also make a feint to trap the blade, and the opponent will withdraw it to protect it. When he does that, stoccata to the inside line and he will have a hard time getting the dagger or buckler in position to effectively parry.

Both the cane and the baton can be very effective tools to beat your opponent's blade. Use them in that way.

Utilize distracting techniques with the cane and baton. Beats and feints will throw your opponent off guard. Identify momentary advantages and close for the kill. Just be prudent so that your movements don't take you out of line and give your opponent the advantage.

Defense against cane or baton:

- (1) Take the hand as a strategy. Without protection of a cross guard or quillons, the hand is vulnerable.
- (2) Be ready to make a disengagement when the cane attempts to sweep. If your opponent plans an attack expecting a disengagement, you will have the advantage.

Case of Rapiers:

The biggest advantage of this form is the ability to effectively sweep your opponent's blade and attack with a very long dagger. Sweep with the leading blade from either the terza, prime, or broad ward while keeping the trailing blade out of the way. Once you have taken your opponent's blade, step forward with your back foot and stoccata to an open area.

If you fight in an offensive stance, you must not attempt a parry seconda unless you are well versed in the form. You will only cross up your blades. Make sure you have one blade guarding your high line and one guarding your low line. Use quarta (4) parries by both blades alternatively to ward your opponent's thrust. Practice alternating parries while avoiding blade contact.

If you fight in the defensive stance, parry 2 with the leading blade and riposte by stepping over. After the riposte, immediately step back. Do not get in tight or corps d' corps against an opponent fighting with rapier and dagger. You will lose. Maintain the proper distance to keep the advantage.

Be very aware of your tips! Crossing them will be disastrous.

Do not attempt to use two rapiers until you are well schooled in rapier and dagger.

Defense v. Brace:

(1) Look for the sweep with the front blade. Disengage and thrust a stoccata to the bellie in the outside line when your opponent attempts to sweep. Your counter attack will be ahead of any attack from his following rapier. Be prepared to parry the following rapier. If your opponent successfully parry's your counter attack, you miss, or your blade is tied up, parry the second attack and retreat out of distance and regain your proper ward.

(2) Use compassing techniques to keep his back blade from being effective.

Winning Strategy

(1) Be patient - The first attack may seem like the best defense, but don't attack just because your opponent hasn't. The first opportunity is what you are

looking for. Don't attack into a solid defense. Either create the opportunity and attack or control measure and tempo until your opponent makes an attack then exploit it.

(2) After each Attack, recover properly before pursuing another attack. Make a new attack only if the measure and timing are positive. If one attack fails, and you continue without an advantage, you are giving your opponent the advantage.

(3) Continue the attack if the first attack has gained advantage by causing your opponent to be off balance or out of line. A retreating opponent is at a disadvantage. If your opponent is retreating continue the attack while maintaining proper measure.

(4) Use any psychological condition to gain the advantage. Never overestimate or underestimate your opponent. Use any over estimation or underestimation by your opponent to your advantage. If your opponent doesn't know you or your prowess, do not give it away. Use his lack of knowledge to your advantage.

(5) Recognize your opponent's intentions and conceal your own. Use tactics to mislead and confuse your opponent.

(6) Gain surprise by beating, by feining, by changing tempo, by movement to cause your opponent to lose balance.

(7) Seize the moment - "scelta di tempo" When you have your opportunity, don't let it pass.

Basic Tactics

1. Keep your sword in-line

- a. When parrying, keep your tip as close to your opponent's middle line as possible. I.E., don't let your tip get too far from center. At the same time, you should not present your tip for your opponent to easily bind or beat.
- b. When beating or any other movement, do not let your point drift too far from center.
- c. When at the ward, always keep your point aimed at your opponent. You may break this rule to avoid your blade being taken, but remember there is a price to pay in time for every inch away from your opponent you keep your point.

2. Know your Measure

- a. Always understand your measure/distance and that of your opponent.
- b. Close measure quickly on the attack.
- c. Create greater measure when on the defense.
- d. Fight inside on opponents with longer reach than you.
- e. Fight outside on opponents who have less reach than you.

3. Know your Opponent

- a. If your opponent is faster than you, use trickery and deceit. This means you should convince him that you are actually slower than you are and counter attack when not expected. Utilize beats, binds, feints and misdirection to your advantage.
- b. If you are faster than your opponent, use your speed to your advantage. Stay out of measure and quickly close as opportunity presents itself.
- c. If your opponent is an inside fighter, don't play his game and v. versa. This begins prior to choosing weapons.
- d. If your opponent is more skilled than you, use trickery and deception. Use your opponent's confidence to your advantage.

4. Tempo

- a. Set the tempo of the match.
- b. Change tempo to your advantage.
- c. Understand when your opponent is trying to change tempo. Many fighters will take numerous pot shots at your hand and forearm to lull you into believing that's where their next attack is headed. Don't play this game. Move your guard out of reach and make them play a different game. This is an example of controlling the tempo.

5. When to Attack

- a. Don't attack a well defended position.

- b. Close measure/distance to attack.
 - c. Counter attack an unsuccessful attack.
 - d. Attack in single-time if possible.
 - e. Use timing attacks for surprise.
6. Continue the Attack
- a. When you've gained an advantage on your first attack, don't let your opponent off the hook.
 - b. If your opponent is retreating rapidly, normally they are not in a position to counter. Judge if this is the case and press. When doing this maintain a distance between you and your opponent that gives you the advantage. Do not run headlong into your demise, but press at a speed and distance that maintains your advantage.

Advanced Tactics

Rapier Dagger

There are really two primary differences between modern fencing and Elizabethan fencing. Modern fencing is a linear sport whereas Elizabethan fencing takes place "In the round." In Elizabethan fencing you are allowed to compass your opponent to gain advantage.

However, the use of the dagger as an off-hand weapon is what really sets the two genres apart. The dagger is mostly a defensive weapon, but with proper timing and strategy, the dagger may become a very potent offensive weapon. Knowing when to attack with the dagger is the key to using it to its highest potential.

The primary thing to remember is the division of defensive responsibility between the rapier and the dagger. The dagger will normally guard half of the body or one line. However, by changing the defensive responsibility of the dagger, you are able to counter attack quickly. So, you must first decide where your dagger will protect.

If you are in an offensive stance, the dagger should be used to protect the high and low lines of the off-hand side of the body. By holding the dagger in the terza ward with the tip slightly up, you are in a good position.

Below are three general principles in regards to defending with your dagger in the offensive stance:

1. Make sure your dagger and your rapier are sufficiently apart in both high/low and left/right wards. There should be enough room between the rapier and the dagger to perform a parry seconda (2) without the dagger hitting the rapier during the parry.
2. You should hold your dagger high enough in the ward to guard the high-line of your body in the offensive stance because your back leg doesn't need protecting whereas your head does. This is your default position. Your dagger's primary responsibility is to ward off head and upper torso attacks. Attacks to your lower off-hand line are much harder to accomplish. Don't hold the dagger so high as to not be able to parry an attack to your lower-line, but don't expect to use your dagger to ward off attacks to your leading lower leg or feet. Use your rapier for those areas or void by moving your feet.
3. Parries with the dagger are exactly the same as parries with the rapier. When parrying seconda, don't drop the tip more than necessary. When parrying to the outside line, make contact with the bottom edge of your blade and do not carry the parry further than necessary.
4. Attack with the dagger when the opportunity presents itself. When fighting baton, buckler, soft parrying device, use your offhand weapon offensively. As soon as you are able to bind your opponent with your primary, go in for the touch with the dagger.

Defensive styles vary from opponent to opponent. You should learn to distinguish between them. By understanding what your opponent is doing on defense, you will have an easier time figuring out how to beat the defense. Here are several defensive styles that you may use as your defense. The right/left defense is the most common. Many fighters also like to fight in a defensive stance and generally rely on their dagger as their primary defense. Lastly, the high/low defense you may find useful at times. Practice with each defense and learn to recognize defensive patterns in your opponents.

Defensive Styles

1. Forward Stance right/left defense

In this style, you draw a line down the center of your body. The dagger is responsible for the off-hand side and your rapier is responsible for the primary side. Attacks to your dagger side are parried with your dagger whether they are high or low. Attacks to your rapier side are parried with your rapier.

The advantage of this style is it is easy relatively easy to learn. Dagger parries to the head are swept up in a terza (3) parry. Low attacks are swept down in a seconda (2) parry. Outside attacks to the rapier side are parried with a terza, ocatave (8) or seconda parry and inside attacks are parried with a quarte (4), seconda (2), or septime (7) parry.

The difficult part of this defense is deciding what to do with attacks down the middle. You have to make a judgment call whether to parry with your dagger or your rapier. Many fencers tend to parry with their dagger well into the rapier side line. The end result is your dagger catches on your rapier blade and the parry fails. To avoid this, when in doubt, quarte parry with your rapier and riposte in double time. You may lose the advantage of a single-time riposte, but you are less likely to tie up your dagger in the process.

When should I break the rules? While using the right/left defense, you should break the rules when your opponent does not expect you to. As an example, if you have parried quarte and riposted in double-time on maybe two or more occasions, your opponent could expect another rapier parry. That may be a good opportunity to parry with the dagger and riposte in single time. This is an example of changing tempo. Remember, “time=tempo” is one of the four governors of fencing. By changing from a riposte in double-time to a riposte in single time, the tempo changes and you gain a momentary advantage. You should always look for opportunities to change the tempo.

While fighting an opponent who is the opposite hand as you, the dagger may be used very effectively on the rapier side for high line attacks. This is a quarte (4) parry and also known as a cross parry. By using the dagger to parry across your body against lefties/righties, you are able to riposte under the sword arm while engaging the rapier with your dagger. Remember, when you parry across your body, the dagger arm parry quarte is above your rapier arm. Once the parry is successfully made, the counter attack follows to the lower outside line or under the blade arm where the opponent’s dagger will have trouble parrying.

2. *“High/Low Defense”*

The separation of duties instead of right to left is high to low. The dagger should parry every attack to the high line, and the rapier should parry every attack to the low line.

Because the dagger has to parry the outside line rapier side attacks, the scholar must take a much squarer stance. Unfortunately, this provides your opponent with a bigger target and goes against traditional thinking regarding modern

fencing stances. However, it is still a very effective defense because of its simplicity and the ability to counter attack in single time against all high line attacks.

The two parries used by both the rapier and the dagger are parry quarte (4) and parry seconde (2). Your guard should close both outside lines so you only have to parry inward. The quickest parry for either weapon is parry quarte. However, there are times when you would choose parry seconde. I normally parry seconde when I am going to make a dagger attack or as a beat parry to take the opponent's blade out of line.

All attacks to the high line will be inside attacks and you would use the cross parry with an immediate riposte. All low attacks you would parry quarte with the rapier and riposte in double time.

When should you break the rules? Just as in the left/right defense, when your opponent doesn't expect it. Quarte parry with your rapier a couple of times, and then when an attack comes to your dagger side low, parry with the dagger instead of the rapier and riposte in single time.

3. *Defensive Stance – Dagger Defense*

In the defensive stance, the dagger is the primary defensive weapon. Because the dagger is now responsible for protecting the front leg, it should be held slightly lower but not as low as you would hold your rapier. Additionally, the dagger now guards the body as if it were a single sword with the rapier poised to counter attack once the opponent's blade is parried.

The defensive stance is a counter punching stance. It is not wise to attack with the dagger as a thrusting weapon against much longer blades, so you rely on the ability to take your opponent's weapon and crossover lunge with your rapier.

Should you use high/low defense in the defensive stance? No! You can, but when you parry four with your rapier in the defensive hand, you are attacking in double-time instead of single-time. It doesn't gain an advantage and you must present a squarer target without the ability to riposte quickly.

What about the left/right defense? Yes! Attacks to the rapier side can be parried by the rapier, but again, you are crossover attacking in double-time to no advantage.

So, what you should do against rapier side attacks is use footwork, voiding, and parries as your defense without unnecessary ripostes. Do not riposte and take an invitation that gives you a disadvantage. In the defensive stance, wait

for your opportunity to seize the opponent's rapier with your dagger prior to riposting.

The key to defense in rapier & dagger combat is practicing your defensive style. Olympic style fencers who are using rapier & dagger for the first time have difficulty knowing when to use the dagger and also have difficulty not crossing the tip of the dagger over the rapier on downward parries.

You should work on knowing the distance between the rapier and the dagger during the dagger parry seconda. You should also work on the position of the dagger arm.

The dagger arm should be extended but not locked. The idea is to parry as far in front of your body as necessary while maintaining flexibility to cover all lines of attack. If you hold the dagger too closely, you may parry late. If you hold your arm too straight, you lose the ability to bend at the elbow. Your dagger should be an extension of your arm with your elbow being the pivot point, not your hand. Many parries will be executed by merely turning your hand over, but others require the use of the elbow. The higher or lower the attack, the more arm movement is required.

You should always attempt to immediately recover to the proper ward position after every parry unless you are riposting. When riposting, your dagger needs to be ready for the next attack by your opponent.

You should be aware of the lines you have closed with your dagger on the riposte. Here is an example:

You parry seconda with your dagger and immediately riposte to your opponent's inside line. However, your opponent sweeps inside with his dagger and parries seconda. Now, you are extended with your rapier taken. Your dagger is still in the seconda position. What this means, is your opponent is preparing for an attack with the low outside line closed.

He may either withdraw or attack over your dagger to the high outside line. If he attacks you have two choices. One, you can riposte with a terza (3) parry as he brings his blade over the outside of your dagger. Or you can retreat as you terza parry and open up other lines. If you don't retreat, you may only attack high over his seconda parry to the outside. Which gives you more of an advantage?

In this case, unless your opponent is sloppy and you have gained the advantage, once your blade has been parried, retreat and look for your next opening. You may wish to trade high low outside parry ripostes in single time, but there is no advantage. This is tantamount to trading punches with an inside boxer. Don't do it unless you are the inside fighter.

Attacking with Rapier & Dagger

The advantage of rapier and dagger is the ability to counter-attack in single time. In single sword fencing, if an opponent attacks, you must first parry the attack prior to reposting. In rapier and dagger, when an opponent attacks you are able to parry with the dagger while at the same time riposte with your rapier. Riposting at the same time is what is meant by single time.

At every opportunity when you know your parry is successful with the dagger, you should immediately counter with a stoccata (thrust) from your rapier. That being said, you should always be prepared for your rapier to be parried with an immediate riposte from your opponent. The pace of rapier dagger is much different than with single sword. Instead of the phrase going “attack, parry, riposte, parry, riposte,” the phrase goes attack parry/riposte in single time, parry/riposte in single time, etc. It is a much faster pace with simultaneous parrying and counter attacks.

Initiating Attacks with Rapier/Dagger

The same rules that govern single-sword and other forms govern rapier/dagger. Use time, measure, tempo and judgment to determine when to attack. However, with rapier dagger, your off-hand has now become a weapon as well as a defensive tool. Use it!

With an outstretched dagger, you are able to do something new during an attack that you have not been able to do before. You may now seize your opponent’s rapier during the attack. You may also be able to anticipate a counter-attack during your attack and be able to parry a stop thrust while you are attacking.

To do this, you must choose your time and place of attack, and make your attack. With your rapier arm extended as you lunge forward. Unlike modern fencing, your dagger arm does not trail behind. It remains extended in front of you as you lunge. The tip remains slightly up and extended. As you lunge forward, you will reach your opponent’s extended rapier with your dagger. If the rapier is in a low ward, you simply parry *seconda* or *cross* as you are attacking resulting in his blade being taken. If your attack is successful, the bout is over. If not, you have two choices. Because you took your opponent’s rapier during the attack (single-time), his choice was to parry with his dagger. Against the same handed opponent, you both control the inside line with your daggers. If you have the initiative after the engagement, you may choose to follow-up with a dagger attack to his rapier side line or a *redouble* with your rapier. This is risky, but can be effective. The other option is to retreat or to continue the attack if your opponent retreated.

Initiating an attack is a very tough decision. You never want to initiate an attack into a well defended opponent without some type of advantage in time or measure. But, remember, if you don’t attack, you won’t hit. The best course of action is to set your

opponent up changing tempo and moving in and out of measure. When the timing and/or measure is right, the best attack is a straight, swift stoccata.

Counter Attacking

Because the dagger provides a very big advantage against other forms such as single sword rapier, rapier buckler, rapier rigid defensive device, and rapier cloak, the scholar should understand the advantage and use it.

The key to success with the rapier dagger is the seizing of the opponent's blade. Once the opponent's blade is parried, there is a momentary advantage, especially against forms that do not have two weapons. Seizing on that advantage is paramount to a successful outcome of the duel.

There are several approaches to attacking with rapier dagger. First is counter attacking after a successful parry with the dagger. Secondly is stepping over with the dagger after a successful parry with the rapier. Yet another is seizing your opponent's blade with your dagger during an attack.

When counter attacking with the rapier, you will be more successful if you attack areas that are harder to parry with the dagger. The inside line below the opponent's parried rapier is difficult to defend with the dagger because the dagger has to sweep down and parry very close to the rapier. By delivering a punta reversa on a same handed opponent after a successful parry, you increase your chance of success. Also, by attacking the opponent's forward leg after a successful parry, you increase your chance of success because the dagger is not as long as the rapier and may not as easily parry a low attack.

Attacking the inside line (dagger side) is tantamount to handing the advantage back to your opponent. First, it is farthest away, and second, it is a very easy parry. Attacking the head is also an easy parry with the dagger. So, attack under the blade and attack the low line. It doesn't mean you should never attack the head. You may successfully attack the head if your opponent is not expecting it. Some fencers have a tendency to lower their dagger arm due to fatigue or not paying attention. If you find the dagger arm slightly low, don't hesitate to take advantage. After several attacks to the low line or inside line, you may feign an inside attack and go high, or feign a low line attack and then attack the head. However, as a rule, always attack the most difficult area to defend first.

Taking advantage of other forms

When fighting other forms such as rapier buckler or rapier baton, you may find it very successful to use a crossover step with the dagger. The reason that this may be successful is because when you parry your opponent's rapier with yours and close distance, the opponent has to withdraw his blade prior to attacking. During the time it takes for the opponent to do that, you should be able to successfully make a touch with

your dagger. Additionally, with other forms such as buckler, baton, cloak, dead chicken, your opponent has one weapon whereas you have two. When you tie up his only weapon, you still have a free one to hit with.



Dagger Attacks

In an offensive stance against rapier/dagger (same handed opponent), the best place to attack with the dagger is to the outside line of the opponent's rapier arm. You perform this by parrying *seconda* with your rapier and compassing to the left with your back foot. You would make your thrust with the dagger to the outside line of your opponent. To defend this, your opponent needs to make an opposite compass. If he fails to compass in time, you have an opening and will be successful. If you are fighting against rapier buckler, cloak or baton, do not hesitate to make this move. If your opponent is foolish enough to give you his blade, take it and end the bout.

Against an opposite hand opponent, you will find your daggers on the same side. It is much tougher to attack with the dagger in these situations, because although it is easy to defeat a dagger with a dagger, more often than not, you will be trading dagger thrusts to no avail. However, if you time it properly, and with surprise, your opponent will attempt to parry your dagger and will more than likely fail. A good time to step-over with a dagger attack against a leftie is when they have attacked decisively and you have successfully parried with your rapier. You would be at close enough distance to step-over and extend your arm for the touch. You shouldn't attack with the dagger when you are required to make a long lunge with the crossover.

Crossover attacks with your Dagger

Bind in Prime Crossover

Start in Terza, Seconda or Prime ward. Parry the incoming blade across the body with prime, step over with the back foot with the dagger arm extended under the sword arm. Use the prime ward to lock out the opponent's blade while you move in for the touch.

Compassing Crossover

The first crossover attack with your dagger should be a follow up attack after a good parry with your primary weapon. Start in the Terza ward and wait for a high or low line attack to your inside. Sweep the attack with a Seconda (2) or (8) parry and compass at a 30 to 45 degree angle with your back foot to the left front. While doing this, attack your opponent's high outside line with your dagger.



Brace Fighting

Introduction

Brace, case, Florentine! Each of these terms are used to describe fighting with two rapiers in a duel. I use the term "Brace" mostly when addressing this particular form. If used properly, Brace is a very effective style to take advantage of your opponent and unless he is very skilled in the style, you may actually use it as a choice to your advantage for several reasons.

If you are a skilled at Brace and your opponent is not, then the best choice for him is to choose another form during your duel. If he hasn't practiced Brace and doesn't fully understand the style, but chooses it to match your choice, it may actually work to his disadvantage.

Brace in its simplest form is more complicated than single sword, sword and dagger, or sword and any soft or hard parrying device. At its most graceful, Brace is dance with each rapier being a partner. Each rapier must know its steps and each step must be in concert with its partner. If executive in time and measure, the deadly dance of two rapiers is unrivaled by any other form.

The below style was developed during the years 2000-2002 while teaching fencing at Merced College and at the Crimson Rose Academie in California and were used effectively in ten or so tournament victories. My first encounter with Brace was during 1998 by a most excellent fencer, Justin Dixon, who I had a very difficult time defeating because of this style. He had the ability to take away your primary weapon in a sweeping motion as he attacked with a crossover attack with his offhand weapon that was very effective. At the time, most of his opponents fell easily to his style and some of the techniques I will describe are directly attributed to him. Many others I developed and improved as the style evolved. I describe it as the "Crimson Rose Brace" style and I have taught it to probably 30 or more period fencing combatants since then. Several have used it effectively in California Regional competitions and at the SCA Estrella War. If you learn it, understand when to use it, and practice it, you will be a better fighter.

Beginning Brace as a DEFENSE

The most important thing to remember in Brace fighting is to not cross your tips. Many scholars who decide to pick up an additional rapier instead of a dagger find out quickly that the extra length of the rapier can be difficult to wield. The first inward parry with the offhand rapier finds the steel of its partner instead of the steel of its opponent. This is a deadly mistake that if made in a duel, will never be made again.

So, how does the scholar master the difference between the length of an offhand rapier and that of a dagger? Practice! The scholar must start slowly with a fellow that will practice lunge to his high (offhand) inside line and his low (offhand) inside line. With each lunge, the scholar must concentrate on not crossing his blades. The inside downward parry *seconda* is the most difficult parry with Brace.

There are a couple of other techniques that may assist the scholar in not crossing his blades. But first, let's consider the guards:

Primary hand – *Seconda* or *Terza* with the tip pointed at the opponent's bellie.

Offhand – *Terza* with the tip pointed at the opponents head.

Terza, in my opinion is the best guard for both the primary and the offhand. The reason I prefer Terza is because it is quicker and more confusing to the opponent. Seconda is wider in nature and is a good ward to help keep your blades from getting tangled, but the scholar has further to travel to parry quarte (four). It also requires a greater distance to travel and makes timing hits harder to accomplish.

Terza is also the best ward for the offhand. I will describe several techniques utilizing Terza in the offhand that will allow the scholar more options on counter-attacks.

Separating Areas of Defense:

Using Terza or Seconda for the primary hand and Terza for the offhand, the scholar comes on guard with the primary hand pointing at the opponent's bellie and the offhand pointing at the opponent's face. To avoid confusion and crossed blades, I have simplified the Brace defense. In a nutshell, the primary hand guards the lower half of the body both inside and outside. The offhand guards the high line both inside and outside.

How is this accomplished? Very simply! The low line is defended by the primary weapon on the outside with a simple flick of the rest and a six parry, while the low inside line is parried with a simple four parry. Both of these parries are very easy and quick to perform and are the simplest of parries. Next, the high outside line is parried with a simple six and the inside line is parried with the offhand equivalent of a four, a cross parry.

The key to the cross parry is to go against common sense and become more square and less linear, but the advantage if executed properly is in the ability to immediate riposte with the primary weapon underneath the arm and to the lower inside line of the opponent. Because the cross parry catches the opponent's primary weapon and the attack is started in the outside line and finishes barely to the inside line of the primary weapon, it is very



Cross parry with a stoccata underneath the arm.

difficult to parry whether against the same or different stance. In my experience, the danger of the squarer stance is more than compensated by the advantage on the riposte. In fact, the cross parry is a dominating advantage when fighting someone with a different primary hand than you.

What is most beautiful about the high/low separation of defense is its simplicity. It actually eliminates the inside downward parry that sometimes arrives late and/or crosses your other blade.

Using the high/low separation as a basic starting point for a defense is a good technique for beginning Brace fighters to use. First, it does eliminate the crossing of blades until the scholar gets more accustomed to two blades. Secondly, it really is quick and easy.

Practice:

Two scholars should square off, each with a case of rapiers on guard. Each scholar takes turns aiming for different lines. The first practice should consist of simple parrying with a one step retreat and then a recover for each line. Subsequent drills should contain changing lines during attack and parry riposte drills. Each drill should include the taking of turns initiating the attack. As the scholars become more proficient at attacking and riposting to different lines, each phrase should be lengthened to four or even six consecutive engagements to challenge each scholar's form.

Executing the Seconda (two parry)

Once the high low defense is effectively mastered, the scholar may begin parrying inward from high to low (seconda). The two parry from the offhand in a sweeping motion is very effective for a couple of reasons. First, it takes the blade out of line in a very strong fashion causing the opponent a great loss in recovery time. Second, if executed properly, it is very hard to disengage during the parry. The key in the seconda parry from the offhand is to not drop your hand during the parry and to maintain contact with the opponent's blade.



If you do make contact with the parry, other than withdrawing the blade, your opponent may try to circle over your hand to your outside line. Indeed, this may be the intention of your opponent from the beginning. To defeat this move and to execute your parry properly, once you find the blade, keep aware of its position. If suddenly you do not have the blade, **merely raising the parrying hand** while maintaining your pronated position will stop your opponent from circling over the outside of your hand. However, if you drop your hand too low while making the parry, your opponent may easily circle over and hit your high outside or inside line.

The other critical point of parrying (seconda) is to not allow your point to go too low. Remember, the farther your point moves from target, the longer it takes to find its way back. Practice the seconda (two) parry with the offhand and ensure the point never drops lower than your opponent's foot. If you can successfully parry and have it higher than that point, I applaud your control.

Avoiding your Primary Blade

A very simple technique while in the Terza ward to avoid crossing blades during a seconda offhand parry is to rotate your primary guard from Terza to Seconda (broad ward). You only have to move your guard a couple of inches, but that's all you need. If

you move it too far, you invite disaster because of lost time. If you do not move it far enough, you may end up crossing blades, which in itself is a disaster, so practice.

The movement to seconda with your primary weapon is actually a precursor to a riposte with the primary hand after successfully parrying the inside attack. A very simple and easy riposte is to continue rotating the primary hand as you extend and attack the opponent's high inside or outside line while you have his primary weapon engaged. Because you have his primary weapon engaged, his only option is to retreat or attempt a parry with his offhand weapon and is a momentary advantage.

The other simple way of avoiding crossing blades is to simply begin with a wider primary guard. Whether you choose a wider Terza or a normally wide Seconda guard, merely starting wider and knowing where your blades are located at any given time will keep you from crossing your blades.

When NOT to Parry Seconda

It is very easy to defeat a beginner and you should never train to defeat a novice or an amateur. Tricks that work on one opponent may not work on another. Keeping that in mind, one of the first things an opponent may do when encountering Brace is to let you be your own undoing. Simply put, your opponent being a knowledgeable fencer will undoubtedly attack to your primary inside high line hoping that you will attempt a seconda parry and cross your blades allowing for an easy touch. Do not parry seconda with your secondary weapon unless you have practiced clearing your primary.

Windmill Parries

Once you learn when not to parry *seconda* with your offhand, you may realize that when not to parry *seconda* with your offhand may be a very good time to parry *seconda* with your primary hand. Using *seconda* as a parry from either side in succession is the beginning of the windmill technique. Attacking with a windmill technique is equivalent to “Blitzkrieg” coined by the Germans at the beginning of the Second World War. Blitzkrieg by definition means “lightning warfare” and its value is that of SHOCK.

When you attack an opponent with a blur of rapiers in a windmill fashion you are gaining the advantage of time, measure, surprise, and SHOCK. Many opponents will begin to retreat and continue in that retreat until they are not able to riposte. At that point, you decide when to come out of the windmill advance and into a direct attack. You will find if you execute the windmill properly, with each windmill *seconda* parry you will have the opportunity to attack instead of parry.

To perform a windmill advance, the key is the first



Step one: Take the opponent’s blade out with a *Seconda* (2) parry and bind it with the primary weapon.

Step two: Extend your secondary weapon and cross over with your back foot and thrust home. If you miss with your first attempt due to a disengagement over the top, parry across with the secondary and attack underneath with the primary. If your opponent retreats, go to step three.

Step three: With your secondary now forward, attempt another bind with a two parry on your opponent’s primary blade. If successful, attack with your primary using a crossover step. You are now in your original position. If your opponent continues to retreat, go to step one.

engagement of the opponent's blade. When you advance, instead of lunging, you perform a basic two parry with the primary or offhand weapon depending on your stance. If you start with the primary weapon, you execute a two parry to the top of the opponent's extended blade. If your opponent avoids that parry, you follow it up with a two parry with your other blade. Again, if the opponent avoids that parry, you again attempt a parry two with your primary weapon and continue until you have made contact and held it. Once you have your opponent's blade, you may attack with your free blade.

There are two types of windmill advances. The first and the safest is to advance without crossing over. This type of advance is slower in nature than crossing over, but it is safer and it allows for a quick withdrawal if your opponent somehow seizes the advantage. The second type of advance is a crossing over or fleche advance that is very quick and suited with a retreating opponent, but leaves the scholar a bit more vulnerable to a sudden counter attack.

Windmill Attack with the Primary Blade Forward

The first and most common windmill attack begins with the primary weapon. It is then followed up by a crossover step and the offhand weapon then becoming the primary weapon and continuing with another crossover step until a clean parry and engagement of the opponent's primary weapon allows for an attack to the body. However, if your opponent knows this is your primary means of defeating your him, he will expect it, and will bait you into the maneuver. Once you commit to it, he may begin disengaging as you begin the maneuver and follow the disengagement with a very decisive riposte over your parry. This move takes a skilled opponent and good timing, but it works and will defeat a one-trick-pony brace attack. That is why you have more than one offensive posture and attack.

Windmill Attack with the Primary Blade Withdrawn

This technique is very deceptive and allows the scholar to begin the sweep with either the primary or offhand weapon. To execute the technique, you must first have the proper guard. Where you would normally have your primary blade much closer to the opponent than your offhand rapier, in this case you withdraw your primary weapon to your hip while extending your off arm as far as possible without locking the elbow. At the same time, you square up your shoulders. Now, your offhand weapon should be either even with or in front of your primary weapon. I normally use a 42" blade in my primary hand and a 36" blade in my offhand. Using blades of the same size if they are shorter is fine, but when using Schlager or DelTin 42" or longer blades, to effectively use this style, the offhand weapon should be shorter. The technique can be accomplished with two longer blades, but it should not be attempted without a lot of training, skill and experience.

Once you are in the proper stance, you will also be deceptively close to your opponent. Because your primary weapon is withdrawn, your opponent may not realize that you have actually closed measure. Even if he does, because your shoulders are more square and your offhand arm is extended, your opportunity to seize your opponent's



Step one: Sweep the primary blade with a two parry from your secondary.

Step two: Compass left with a crossover as your opponent is retreating to maintain contact with his blade while delivering an imbrogata to the high outside line beyond the dagger's ability to parry. This also works very well against buckler.

primary weapon with an offensive parry is greatly improved. Now, instead of your opponent being able to lie in wait for the technique he knows is coming, he must be ready for either blade. By starting the windmill with your off hand, if he avoids it or disengages, you will have time to see his reaction and act accordingly. This is a good way to test the waters without totally exposing yourself. If he manages to disengage the first parry, your primary weapon is ready to find his blade on the second go. Again, as before, you have two options. One, you can cross over with your off hand or now, you can not cross over, but merely close distance and extend with your offhand and hit your opponent at the right opportunity.

Ending a Windmill Attack

If you begin a windmill attack and you fail to find your opponent's blade because of constant retreating or continuous disengagement moves, you should come out of the windmill by merely ending the whirlwind and settling into a normal high/low defensive guard. From this defensive guard, you may perform many counter attack combinations. It is always best to recover if you have contact within three attempts. Practice doing two windmill motions then recovering to your normal guard. Once you master that, practice three consecutive windmill seconda parries then returning to your guard. After you are comfortable there, increase the number until you can perform any number of parries with a successful return to a high low defensive posture.

Remember, a successful windmill attack is the result of catching your opponent's blade then hitting with your other hand. Once you make the move out of the technique and then into an attack, all fencing rules apply. Timing, measure, surprise all come in to play. Just because you successfully caught your opponent's blade using this technique it does not mean that you should foolishly impale yourself on his outstretched dagger or offhand rapier. Catching the blade is merely the beginning of the exchange. After that, you must cleverly defeat his dagger or his offhand rapier.

Defending a Disengagement

To properly defend an opponent who reads the windmill attack, quickly disengages and lunges at your highline, you must be ready to perform a cross parry with your offhand.

While you are performing the first engaging parry, your offhand is ready for a second attempt. At this time, you must decide to either continue with the windmill attack or reverse to the high low wards. If your opponent guesses well and quickly ripostes to

the high line over the outside or circles below the inside, you must not attempt to seconda parry that riposte because normally you will be late. If he is at a safe enough distance, you will probably defeat the riposte, but if he is closer, use the cross parry and then follow up underneath the cross parry at a place on your opponent that is difficult to parry with the offhand.

The key to success in the transition between the windmill and the high low defense is knowing the measure at which to change. This of course takes practice.



In this scenario, the attempt to take the primary blade has failed by a disengagement with an imbrocatta over the top outside line and an attack to the exposed arm. The proper technique as soon as you realize that your bind has failed is to move your primary to the terza (3) position while cross parrying with your secondary to avoid losing the arm. (Left v. Right offensive stance)

Exploiting Buckler

If your opponent is wielding a buckler, you have a very large advantage that you should capitalize on when the opportunity presents itself, or when you create the opportunity. The first thing you need to do is close measure with your primary held in a position to come down on any attack to your low line. Make a parry seconda while advancing into your opponent. Crossover with your back foot in a compass left while attacking the outside high line. This is a very quick way to end a duel or to move on to another adversary in meleé.

Attacking in High/Low Defense

One of the best aspects of the high low Brace defense is its counter attacking capability. If your opponent attacks either side, you have the capability to counter attack in single time (simultaneously). Whenever your opponent attacks the high line, you have the opportunity to riposte in single time. The simplicity of the inside/outside parry allows for a very quick response. The safest method is to parry with a slight retreat and then



quickly riposte while maintaining contact with your opponent's primary weapon. At times, if your opponent makes an attack from sufficient distance, no retreat is required and a quick riposte in single time will be very difficult to defend. Learning and knowing your measure are the keys to success in this endeavor.

If your opponent attacks your primary outside line or your low inside line, your first responsibility is to parry with a retreat. With the simple four or six parry, you may then riposte in double time, and wait for the proper advantage. However, anytime your high line is attacked, you should immediately counter as quickly as possible.

Engaging and Disengaging

Engaging and disengaging are done in circular motions. In Brace fighting this practice is very important. In other forms, measure and timing are paramount and many duels are won or lost on those principles alone. Although Brace fighting requires all of those ingredients, the ability to engage and disengage becomes as important. Why is this so? Because when you have the ability to catch an opponent's blade and hit him with your offhand weapon without totally committing to closing on him, the ability to do so is a great advantage. On the contrary, the ability to disengage from the technique becomes just as important. The scholar should practice in a stationary position numerous engagements and disengagements using circular motions until it becomes natural to avoid an opponents sweeping motion and pick up the position and or direction of each possible continuation.

Practice

Fighting Brace is not an easily mastered style. In fact, it is the most difficult style of any I have learned. However, it should be the most effective and dominating style a fencer may use in competition or group melee. At Estrella War and other large rapier melees, fighters with two 42" and longer rapiers are the most feared. Both for their range and their ability to effectively defend and counter attack on either side, Brace fighters are the most effective soldiers in group melee. To become a good Brace fighter, the key is practice and experience. Experience you gain from competition, but practicing the techniques in between competitions is the best way to improve.

Closing

The "Crimson Rose Brace" style can be very simple in its beginnings and very advanced and complicated by advanced users. The high low defense is a good way to get started and can be immediately effective. The windmill techniques are not advised for use by beginning scholars and should be undertaken first in practice and drilled until sufficiently mastered. It is my hope that this treatise as an addition to my basic fighting manual will help both beginning, intermediate and advanced fighters. Before beginning brace techniques, the scholar should be very comfortable with all aspects of the manual and be very comfortable with rapier and dagger. If you follow the techniques described in the

fencing manual and apply them to the Brace fighting concepts described above, you will be very satisfied at the success you will achieve. Good luck and remember, “always observe the rules of chivalry, that is unless your life is on the line; and, never, ever, give away your honor. It is the one thing that can never be taken away.

Melee Tactics

Fighting more than one opponent and fighting in melee is a bit different than fighting a single adversary. There are many theories on how to best fight multiple opponents, but the one that suits me best is a combination of several of them. One theory will not always work and most theories I’ve seen don’t work at all.

Analyzing the situation as it changes is first and foremost the most important thing you can do to stay in the battle. Are you being attacked from the front, the side, from behind? Know where your enemy is located! Next, minimize your exposure. Do not let yourself get enveloped. This requires maneuver. That being said, try to maneuver with several things in mind. Don’t unnecessarily waste energy by constantly trying to reduce your odds to one on one. The circling theory only works for a short time. Eventually, you will find yourself enveloped. Maybe if there were only three combatants on the field this would work. Unfortunately, that is rarely the case.

You should maneuver to reduce the number of fencers who are within striking distance at any given moment. However, that’s not all you should do. You should also make attacks both true and false to freeze opponents while you dispatch their allies. A fighter who believes he is about to be hit is much less likely to attack. Sell that belief! While one is immobilized, take out the other(s).

Be decisive! If you have three enemies approaching, don’t waste time with the first one. Close and send him home before the others get close enough to make your situation more difficult.

Dictate the fight! Take the fight to them instead of them to you. You choose the when and where. Use surprise to your advantage. Three fighters approach you and expect you to retreat. You quickly advance and set them on their heels. Fein right and attack left. Fein to one fighter to elicit a response from his ally. He won’t expect you to respond. He will believe he has an easy kill and suddenly you parry and riposte. His partner won’t be ready.

Line Battles – If you find yourself on the front lines there are ways of making a difference. First and foremost is teamwork. If your team mates attack, guard their flanks. There are several ways to do this. As they attack, make a feint at the guy to their left/right. This should keep that person from taking a flank shot. Even more effective, if the fighter to your left/right attacks the fighter in front of him, attack the same fighter. This principle is as old as the “Art of War” and is a term called “Mass.” By massing your attack at a given point, you gain an advantage. The adversary will have a more difficult time defending and your side will eliminate fighters on their line one by one

eventually creating a gap in the line. By coordinating efforts/attacks, you will defeat a larger and/or more talented force. Teamwork wins battles.

Roll the Flank – As a commander you should send your best squad(s) to one flank or another. Your best meaning your most lethal and mobile. This is the way cavalry has been used for centuries. Use your elite troops to defeat the enemy on the flank where they then will be able to attack from the flank and kill from behind.

Break the Line – Hold a group of very good fighters in reserve behind the front line. Look for an opportunity to insert them behind another unit. Have the front unit make a hard push to weaken the opposing line and reinforce them with the reserve unit. The idea is to break the enemy line at a point where you can then break into their backfield causing havoc.

These are very basic melee tactics. Every situation dictates a unique response. The main thing to remember in melee is work as a team.

Tournament Etiquette

To compete in Elizabethan fencing, you must understand the rules and etiquette. There are numerous schools and fighting organizations in the U.S. and around the world who may have different rules, but there are many basics that I will outline below. You may also be required to pass initial competency tests prior to being allowed to compete. The first thing you should do is learn the requirements, weapons, rules and etiquette of the organization holding the competition.

At the beginning of a fight the scholar needs to acknowledge his opponent by saluting. The marshal will ask each opponent to salute each other, salute the crown (if present or appropriate), salute the one they fight for, and salute any appropriate dignitaries or someone who's favor you bare. These are traditions and you should find out the traditions of the arena you are fighting in prior to beginning your first bout.

The marshal will then ask each fighter if they are ready. Both fighters should verbally say yes. The marshal will then tell each fighter to come on guard or say "Lay On" or "Alle." The fighters will then fight.

Target Area SCA rules: (Note – these are different in every Kingdom and this is merely a guide for those who aren't familiar with the style)

For Rapier Fencing, the entire body is a target. If the hand or arm is hit, the fighter will no longer have use of the arm or the hand. If the hand is hit, the fighter must drop the weapon in that hand, but can still use it to parry but not grasp. If the arm is hit, the fighter can not use the arm whatsoever. If both arms are lost, the fighter must acknowledge defeat and the bout is over.

If the leg is hit, the fighter must drop to one or both knees. The non-injured fighter is not allowed to move more than 120 degrees beyond the fighter. It is also proper etiquette not to compass to gain an advantage.

Incapacitating blows:

Any hit to the mask, head, torso including groin, back are considered killing blows and the bout is over. The torso is anything inside the seams of the shoulder extending below the waste. The triangle from the hips to the bottom of the groin is considered torso. The upper leg, outside the groin, below the hip is a leg wound.

A draw cut is delivered to the body, head, neck or groin that is a push or pull of at least 8" of the blade with continuous pressure. It is a killing blow if delivered to the head, throat, groin or under arms (because of arteries).

Ending a bout:

If you are victorious you should always shake the opponent's hand. If you are hit, acknowledge the blow call hit or hold. Wait until your opponent recognizes the blow and then shake your opponent's hand.

Report your results to the List Mistress (the score keeper)

Understanding terms:

Hold – stop all movement – place tip of blade on ground after your opponent acknowledges hold.

Alle' - Fight

Lay on – Fight

Beware of your ground – you or your opponent is approaching the edge of the battle area and a safety issue is about to occur

Accepting a touch – A touch is made if you can feel the tip of the blade hit your body. The blade needs to have bent or you feel pressure from the tip that would pierce the skin. When you feel a touch, you need to call hold or say hit and point to the area. Many Kingdoms fight to the lightest touch...i.e., if you know your

opponent touched you and it would have touched skin through your clothing you accept the touch.

Garb – you say garb aloud when a touch hits your garb, but is not valid

Flat/plaque - You say flat or plaque' when the flat of the blade hits you.

Passe' – You say passe' when the blade makes contact with you and passes beyond you to let your opponent know there was not a hit.

Fighting while on the ground:

If your opponent is on the ground certain courtesies apply. Ask your opponent if the sun is acceptable. Ask you opponent if he is ready. If you are on the ground, it is not acceptable to come off the ground to lunge. In SCA, you are to kneel with your butt on your legs. You are not allowed to lift off with your legs forward. (note: this rule may be different depending on the SCA Kingdom)

Controlling Your Blade

Do not hit hard! If both you and your opponent are close, do not hit through your opponent. When your blade makes contact, pull your hit. Try to touch to make contact. There will be occasions where your opponent is retreating and you continue your attack. Try to judge distance to not hit hard. Expect the unexpected, and let your wrist break whenever you get too close. If your opponent charges and you charge at the same time, stuff happens. Apologize and try to control yourself.

Do not throw your arm forward full speed and jam your blade into your opponent. Extend your arm while lunging. Your arm extension should be complete prior to hitting your opponent, and the touch should come from your lunge. It should never be a punch.

Do not slash your opponent. We do not cut or slash with rapiers. If you are delivering a draw cut, lay the edge of the blade on your opponent and apply pressure while drawing. Do not wack your opponent and then draw. Give up the opportunity if you must slash to engage the body.

HONOR

Rapier fighting is an honorable sport. You are expected to take hits and be aware of hits. Some rule sets and organizations have marshals. If you are not sure if you were hit, call hold and ask your opponent, "Was that a valid hit my lord?" If you are in a tournament, be honorable. Ask a marshal if they saw a touch on your person. If so, keep your honor and accept the touch. No touch is worth losing your honor over.

Do not take touch if it is so light that you do not feel it through your clothing. It is suppose to be to the lightest touch, but you need to feel the touch through your garb. Common sense dictates that a touch that would only cut a garment would also be too light to inflict any actual damage. However, if you're not sure, it is usually best to accept the touch and learn from it.

The next section is an outline breaking down techniques into small bites. It may be used as a building block. I used this method for several years successfully and it may serve you as well.

REQUIREMENTS, PRACTICE and DRILLS

The following outline may be used by the Maestro to instruct and promote the student through a set of skills and strategies to be able to compete in Elizabethan Swordplay in the SCA and outside tournaments. The maestro should explain each technique, demonstrate each technique, have the scholar perform each technique and then drill until proficient. The maestro should do a short review of the prior day or two training and insure that the scholar has mastered the mechanics of each area prior to moving forward.

Basic Scholar Requirements

Stance

- Salute
- Offensive Stance
- Defensive Stance

Footwork

- Advance
- Retreat
- Lunge
- Recover

Grip

- Grip the blade
- One finger in Ricasso
- Two fingers in Ricasso
- Thumb on back of grip (Dagger)
- Gripping the dagger

Wards

Prime
Seconda
Tierce
Quarte

Parries - Learn and Practice

Parry 4
Parry 6
Parry 2
Parry 7
Parry 8
Parry 5

Lunge

Lunge recover
Lunge advance
Ballistra lunge

Attacks

Stoccata
Imbrocatta
Punta Rivversa

Cuts - Note* For purposes of teaching competition Rapier Fencing - Slashing is not legal in the SCA but may be used by other schools and rule sets. These attacks should be learned as tip cuts.

Mandritta
Riverso
Stramazzone
Fendente
Draw Cut

Disengagement

Cavatione
Counter-Disengagement
Derobement

Advanced Scholar Requirements

Attacking Lines

Attack by thrust or tip cut to the High-Outside Line
Attack by thrust or tip cut to the Low-Outside Line
Attack by thrust or tip cut to the High-Inside Line
Attack by thrust or tip cut to the Low-Inside Line

Advanced Movement

Advanced Footwork

Compassing
Ballistra
Fleche
Ballistra Lunge
Jump Lunge I
Incartata
Half-Incartata
Fleche
Void
Counter

Advanced Attacks

Beat Attack
Fein Attack
Attack changing Lines of Attack
Fein Attack Changing Lines of Attack

Wards

Dagger parry to the High Outside Line - Cross
Dagger Parry to the Low Outside Line
Dagger Parry to the Low Inside Line
Dagger Parry to the High Inside Line

Advance Parrys/Attacks

Parry Ripost
Circular Parry
Stop Thrust
Parry Ripost with opposition
Defend Fein Attacks

Disengagement Attacks

Attack by Disengaging and Changing to a different Line
Double - Fein to one line, Change and then reverse disengagement

Journeyman Requirements

Measure, Timing, Place, Judgment Practice

Identify and gage your measure
Identify and judge your opponent's measure
Move within and out of measure - Identify and gage correctness
Attack at close, short, middle and long distance

Attack while opponent changes wards, judge openings
Move into measure and attack
Attack and ripost in single time
Attack and ripost in double time

Identify open targets as your opponent makes minor hand, foot changes
Identify open lines of attack

Techniques and Strategy

Single Sword:

Parry ripost practice
Fein attacks
Off-hand parrying
Compass for advantage

Rapier Dagger:

Dagger parrys – priorities, working on dagger recovery
Riposting in single time.
Cross parrys with ripost in single time
Rapier Dagger in Defensive Stance

Rapier Buckler:

Parrying with Buckler
Buckler in Defensive stance
Riposting in single time
Counter Attacking

Rapier Hard parrying device:

- Proper cane parries
- Cane – Strategy with cane
- Cane in Defensive stance – taking the blade/not losing the hand

Rapier Soft parrying Device:

- How to hold the cloak
- Cloak technique for obscuring vision
- Cloak parrying
- Cloak in the defensive stance

Case of Rapiers:

- Wards and not crossing over
- Parrying with two rapiers
- Sweeping the opponents blade
- Crossover attacks

Ground Fighting:

- Fighting while on the ground
- Fighting without off hand
- Fighting with opponent on ground

Drills

There are many drills that can help tune a fighter's skills. Each maestro should develop drills for different areas of fencing including footwork, bladework and strategy. Below are five examples that I find helpful:

Drill 1 – Parry Drill

Two scholars should face each other and gauge their measure. They should gauge so they are able to hit their opponent with an extension of the arm and a simple lunge.

Alternatively, each scholar will lunge at his opponent. The opponent will parry and attack the opponent in single time or double time. This process should start

slowly at 50% speed. After each engagement, slowly speed up until you are going at almost 90% speed. After two or three engagements at this speed, hold and back away. Rest, and repeat the process.

Each scholar should make direct attacks and then make attacks changing lines. Do not make feign attacks.

Drill 2 – Double Hit Drill

All scholars will form a line in front of the maestro. The maestro will hold out two targets, one forward and one back. One at a time, each scholar will set up within measure to the forward target. At the maestro's command, the scholar will execute a lunge at the first target followed by a lunge at the second target. The second lunge should happen without hesitation and without retracting the sword arm.

Drill 3 – Compassing Drill

Two scholars should face each other. One scholar will attack while the other parrys. On the parry, the defending scholar should compass to the left or right and riposte. The defending scholar will in turn, parry and compass in the same direction either counter clockwise or clockwise. Repeat this until each scholar is facing the opposite direction from where he started. Repeat in the opposite direction.

Drill 4 - Footwork Drill

Scholars should line up horizontally or in formation facing the maestro. The maestro will call out the following terms. Advance, retreat or lunge. The maestro will then take a stop in the opposite direction of the call. The scholars will execute the proper footwork keeping distance with the maestro. This drill will continue for a determined duration.

Drill 5 – Advanced Footwork Drill

Two scholars should face each other. One will attack and the other will move with the attack. The first scholar will:

Step once and lunge - repeat this several times

Step, lunge, lunge - defender retreats

After the attacker completes his last lunge, the defender becomes the attacker and lunges repeating the same process.

That's about it. There are many books on the market that may be helpful and a lot of my style and teaching is based on the historical references combined with modern experience. Read what you can from this treatise and every other you can get your hands on. Use what makes sense for you. Toss out what doesn't work. That's what I've done. As you practice and learn more, you will find that the journey to being a good or even great fencer is a life's pursuit. Never stop learning and never stop enjoying the journey. And lastly, pass on what you have learned so our sport survives and so others may enjoy this historical pastime. Good luck to you!

If you have any questions on the techniques described in this treatise, feel free to contact me at blayde@blacktigers.us.