



Nicoletto Giganti

Scola, ovvero, Teatro: nelquale sono rappresentate diverse maniere, e modi di parare, e di ferire di spada sola, e di spada, e pugnale; dove ogni studioso portrá essercitarsi e farsi pratico nella professione dell' Armi.

Venice, 1606

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This document is a work in progress, a sampling of chapters I have translated from Giganti's treatise on swordplay. My copy of this treatise was supplied by the British Royal Armouries in Leeds during a research trip. The plates and text from the treatise may be viewed at the following url:
<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/manuals.html>.

Nicoletto Giganti - Venician

School, that is, Theater: in which I have represented diverse manners and modes of defense and of striking with single sword, and with sword and dagger; where each scholar brings to exercise and becomes practiced in the profession of Arms.

Guards and Counterguards*

Any wishing to advocate the science of arms, it is necessary they know many things. To give these my principle lessons, we wish first to speak of the guards & counterguards, or we mean positions & counterpositions of the Sword. Because if by accident of chance you have a trouble, it is necessary to know first to assure power to defend yourself. To desire therefore to be put into guard one has to observe many things, like you are shown in these my figures; be firm above the feet, that is the base & foundation of all the body, in a proper footstep, & sooner narrow than long, for the power to close distance¹. Hold the sword, & the dagger firmly in the hands: the dagger high at times, at times low, at times extended; the sword at times high, at times low, at times to the right side always in action of defence and attack, you wound the enemy, either with point or cut, it is possible to defend & wound in one time. Do this with the committed center² especially, because lacking the commitment, & the promptness of that, it will be an easy thing for the enemy to bring you disorder, either with a cut from the right, or with a little reverse³; or with a thrust, or in another manner. Do so with strength because defending weakly keeps you in danger. Be advised the dagger guards the enemy's sword; because the enemy aims for the same one; & that the sword aims always at the uncovered part of the enemy; he that aims for the rest strikes the enemy⁴. This applies to all the arte of this profession. Moreso you should notice that all the motions of the sword are guards you should know; & all the guards you cite are good; as to the success for whomever doesn't understand that any motions are guards; & whoever doesn't know their use, they will not do well. This profession does not seek anything other than science & excercise, & this exercise gives the science. He who proceeds like this discovers in guards there is art, & this is so because the enemy attacks you in disorder & remains in danger. Also setting in cover is artful because by stringering the enemy it is possible to wound; in every way that you may understand that every guard serves he that

* A few words from this chapter are obscured by an ink blot, and my thanks to Christian Vivo for his translation of the French from a later edition to assist me in filling in those gaps.

¹ Place the feet closer together (contraction) rather than apart for the ability to expand the body and close distance for the attack.

² 'Center' is an anatomical reference to the hips.

³ Cut from the left.

⁴ Aim your attack to the enemy, not his sword.

knows & understands; and to he that does not understand, & know, no guard is valid; & this it is for the guards. As for the counterguards be advised, that for one to have recognition of this profession, you will never set in guard; but you will try to set counter to the guards; & wishing to set counter to the guards, be advised of this; that it is necessary you set out of measure, namely in distance with the sword & the dagger high, strongly with the stature, & with the firm step, and a gathering. Then consider the guard of the enemy; for afterwards go to it smooth & even with the sword stringering to the security of his, that is lean the sword almost into his, covering yourself, because it is not possible for him to wound you if he does not disengage the sword. The reason is this, that extracting it makes two effects: first the disengage; here is the first time, then he wounds in the second; while he disengages in the long time he could remain wounded in many manners, like will be shown in the figures of this book: in the first you have time to wound; if he changes guard for the counterguard it is necessary follow him with the sword before, and with the dagger long always assuring his sword, because he is always in the first time⁵, there to disengage the sword, I have to remain to wound him, hence it is possible he never strikes if not with two times; give him what your defence will always make an easy thing: & this is as for the guards and counterguards.

Time And Measure

Knowing how to set in guard or counterguard, how to launch a thrust, an imbriocata, a mandritto, or a riverscio; knowing how to turn the wrist, to carry the center well, and the good governs of the sword does not mean you know how to cover & to wound: but knowing time & measure does. Whoever doesn't know, although he covers & although he wounds, he is not able to say he knows covering and wounding; because in the covering as in the wounding he may err & incur a thousand dangers. Having therefore dealt with guards and counterguards, we remain deal with time & measure in order to learn when one is due to cover and wound. Measure therefore is understood when with the sword you are able to reach the enemy; & when you are not able to, you are understood be out of measure. Time is known in this way: if the enemy is in guard you need to set out of measure, & go to his guard assuring yourself from his sword. Remember as he will take action: if he disengages, in the disengage he is wounded, and this is time: if he changes from guard, while he changes it is time: if he turns, it is time: if he stringers in order to come into measure, while going & before he arrives into measure it is time to wound him: if he launches, cover and wound in one time, also this it is time: if the enemy remains firm in guard in order to wait, proceed to stringer him, and smoothly into measure extend, whence he is uncovered it is time; because in each motion of dagger, of sword, of foot, & of center, as changing guard, is time. The way that all these things are times is because they have diverse intervals within; & while the enemy will make one of these many moves, it is without doubt necessary that he remain wounded; because while he moves, he isn't able to strike. And this is necessary to know for the power to wound & cover: that which most distinctly I shall be demonstrating, as you must become my figures.

The Method of Launching the Thrust

Now that I have dealt with guards & counterguards, of measures, and of times, it is necessary for me to demonstrate & give understanding of how to carry the center in order to launch the thrust & save oneself. To learn this art it is necessary for you to first know how to carry the center & launch the long thrust, as you see in this figure: & all that remains in launching the long thrust, quickly, strongly, & immediately withdrawing back out of measure. To launch the long thrust it is necessary you set forth with a correct

⁵ He is always in the act of disengaging his sword from yours.

footstep: strong, sooner narrow than wide for the ability to carry the center; & in launching the thrust to extend the sword arm, & inclining the knee as much as you can. The true method to launch the thrust it is that since you have set in guard, you need first extend the arm, & then extend the body at once forward, so that the thrust arrives as the enemy is not aware. If first the center is brought forward the enemy may perceive this, & since things (movements) are slaves of time, he may be able to cover & strike you in one time. Withdrawing back you need first bring the head, after bringing back the head the body follows, & then the foot. He who first brings back the foot and leaves behind the head & the center forward, they remain in great danger. To learn this art well you need to first practice launching this thrust. He who knows how to do this will easily learn the rest, however for the contrary he who does not know how to will not. Be advised gentlemen readers, that this method of launching the thrust is referred to many times in my latter lessons with regard to time: this I do in order to aid in understanding the lesson, which it cannot be said that I recite a thing many times.

Why I Commence With Single Sword

In this my first book of arms I have proposed to deal with only two sorts of arms; that is of single sword & sword and dagger, reserving to deal with any other that please you Sir, I will send in light as soon as possible of each sort of arms. Because the sword is most common & most used weapon of all the others, I will commence with it: since whoever knows well the play of sword will also know how to manage any other sort of arms. But since it is not common in each part of the world to carry the dagger, the buckler, or the round shield; & needing many times to fight to sword alone; I persuade each to first learn the play of single sword. With all the questions that one has of the dagger, or the buckler, or the round shield; as it happens, like many times advised to decline the hand of the dagger, buckler, or round shield, it is possible for a man to cover & wound the enemy with only the sword. Since you exercise at the play of single sword you will know well how to cover & wound, likewise when you hold the sword & dagger.

Guards, Or Positions

Many are the guards of single sword & many still the counterguards. In my first book I won't teach any other than two sorts of guards & counterguards; of which any will serve for each lesson of the figures of this book. First then which I want you to remember, you must go to stringer the enemy outside of measure assuring yourself from his sword with the placing of yours upon his, so that you cannot be struck if not with two times, with one he will extract (disengage) the sword, & with the other he will wound you. In this manner you arrange to counter all the guards, either high or low, according to how you perceive your enemy settled. Regarding this, be always advised of the following: take heed not to give opportunity & occasion to the enemy, that you can strike only in one time; & this will become warned: that the point of his sword is not to the middle of your center, to that purpose if he pushes his sword quickly & strongly forward it is not possible for you to be wounded. Therefor cover yourself from the enemy's sword with yours, as you see in this figure, that the enemy sword is pointing outside of your center, & it is not possible for you to be wounded if he does not disengage his sword. Accommodate yourself with strong feet, a gathering with the body, with the sword arm extended & strong for covering & wounding, as you are shown in the figure. If you perceive the enemy in a high or low guard & if you do not set yourself counter to his guard, you will not be assured from the enemy's sword; you would be in danger even if your enemy has less knowledge & is less practiced than you. You could make the encounter & wound yourself twofold: either he could set covered, either in false obedience or by disengaging the sword, or other things could happen. If you are assured from the enemy's sword, as I

have said concerning this, he won't move or make any action of moving that you are not able to perceive & and easily defend. These illustrations that are herein will be two guards with the sword forward, & two counterguards covering the sword. One is made by going to stringer the enemy from inside path & the other going from outside, as you see in these figures & as I will be showing you in the following lessons.

To Clarify Striking in Time

Note this figure to wound your enemy when he disengages his sword. This you will do by going to stringer the enemy outside of measure, placing your sword above his from inside by the way you are shown the figure by the first guard, one that he cannot strike you if he does not disengage the sword. You then in the long single time that he disengages in order to strike you, thrust your sword forward, turning the wrist, that you will wound him in the face in the same time like you are shown in the figure. If by chance you cover & afterward wound, you would not succeed since the enemy will have time to cover & you yourself would be in danger. Instead if you, in the time that he disengages his sword, enter at once forward with yours, turning the wrist, you will cover⁶; the enemy discommoded will take refuge. Having done this, he is wounded or he is not the enemy⁷. To assure yourself return back out of measure with your sword above that of the enemy, don't abandon it ever⁸.

And if by chance the enemy doesn't disengage his sword in order to strike you, I want you to stringer it from out of measure & at once launch him a thrust whence he is uncovered; returning to back out of measure, supporting your sword above his.

The True Way of Going To Stringer the Enemy and to Wound Him While he Disengages the Sword

You learn from this figure that if your enemy should be in a guard with the sword high or low to the left side, going to stringer from your outside with his sword out of measure, with your sword above his, so much as to punish the touch with a proper and strong footstep; with your sword acting in cover & wounding as soon as you perceive this, like you see in the second figure of the guards & counterguards. And you staying accommodated in this way, your enemy will not strike you with the thrust if he does not disengage the sword; & while he disengages, you turn the wrist & at the same time launch him a thrust, as you note the fourth figure. Having launched this thrust to him, immediately in the same time return back out measure keeping your sword above his so that if he desires to make a new disengage, you will return to him by launching the same thrust turning the wrist as above & returning out of measure. As many times that he disengages you, as many others, use the same method of turning the wrist & launch to him the thrust. To make this play well it is necessary to practice much, since you are taught from this how to cover & wound with dexterity & great speed. Be advised to always stay contracted with the body & to cover strongly with the strong of your sword; since if you wound the enemy strongly, you cover strongly, & he will stay disconcerted. This, owed to be the first lesson which one is due to learn single sword; since from this rise all the others that I have placed in this book; & knowing how to do this to time, you note to cover all the stabs & all the determined points that could come for head, like I will teach of hand in hand in the following lessons.

⁶ By turning the wrist as you extend the arm you will bind the enemy's sword between your ricasso and quillion, covering yourself while wounding your enemy in one motion and time.

⁷ If you wound in this manner, you will succeed.

⁸ Maintain control of your enemy's sword even after wounding him - retreat out of measure safely.

The True Way of Disengaging the Sword

In these two figures, we have put herein of above, I have taught you to wound the enemy while he disengages his sword. And because this doesn't remain in the latter my lessons, which cannot be more clear, I wish to demonstrate to you the way of knowing how to disengage the sword. However you notice, that your enemy is accomodated in the sort of guard he wishes, & you have gone to stringer him, he launches a thrust when you are uncovered: & if he will know how to as much, as you, you will always be with the sword of cover. But I wish that you now disengage the sword under the enemy's hilt, turning the wrist quickly and launching a point in the same time, when you to devise him uncovered⁹. This is the true & secure way of knowing how to disengage the sword & wound in one time. Which if you disengaged your sword without turning the wrist, you give time & occasion to the enemy to wound you; your excercise & proovings will show this very well. And if the enemy covers, you return to disengage in the way told above, turning the wrist always. And how many times he will cover, as many other disengages in the way of above, which is secure, & then launch to him the thrust in the same one time that you disengage. And this way of disengaging is not less necessary for that, which I have taught in the declaration of the counterguard figures of the way to know how to cover; since this is the principal thing which one seeks in the know how to wield the sword alone¹⁰. Every one whom I persuade to excercise themselves well in these two things, after getting into measure counter the enemy, like being time to disengage the sword, he knows how to disengage quickly & well; & like being time to cover, knows how to cover similarly well.

The Counterdisengage Inside the Sword

In this Figure I represent & demonstrate another way of covering & wound by way of counterdisengages; which you get yourself in this way, that you have covered the sword of your enemy, one that if he wants to wound you it is necessary he disengage; I want that while he disengages, you disengage again, one which your sword returns to it's first place, covering yourself from the enemy; but in the gaining which you will do, serving yourself for the time, you will launch him a thrust when he is uncovered, turning the waist a little toward the right side, & holding the arm forward extended, that if he comes to wound you, he will be wounded from his position; & having launched your thrust, you return back out of measure.



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⁹ As you move to stringer, your enemy launches a thrust (before you've completed your action). Abort your action, disengage under his hilt and launch your own thrust. Turn your wrist quickly when doing so as his point is already on the way toward you.

¹⁰ Knowing how to cover via the disengage is not less important than knowing how to cover as previously described.