

Silver's *Gryps* and *Clozes*

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Intro

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

About the Grips

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ distance: The physical distance between two opponents.

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

Now that we understand of the roll distance plays in Silver's practice we can use that knowledge to gain new and better insights into how and when grappling should be used. Silver maintains that highly skilled practitioners of his fighting system will not need to come to grips to prevail over their opponent.¹¹ However, while that may be true for highly skilled fighters grappling was still a common occurrence during fights of the time period¹² and Silver includes them in his treatise for his students. He was always a strong advocate for a well rounded martial education¹³ and this may help to explain why he includes a discussion of grips and the close fight in his treatise. Silver maintains that a fighter should not instigate grappling against an opponent unless they are fighting a completely inept opponent. Rather, grappling should be used as a defensive skill to gain advantage over an opponent who has closed with the fighter and attempted to instigate grappling himself.¹⁴ Silver also cautions his readers not to try to close first, but to take notice of what their opponent is doing, take their best ward, and attack and grip him.¹⁵

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

⁶ Silver's General Rules:

⁷ Silver, George. *Bref Instructions Upon My Paradoxes of Defence. Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals.* ed. James L. Jackson. (Delmar, New York: Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972) p.84

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The grip should only be initiated after the fighter has preformed a successful parry. The fighter will then close with is opponent in order to position himself close enough to his opponent to begin the grip taking care to use his sword to ward his hand as he begins the grip.

Silver's Grips

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

Geoffrey: Attack with a cut at the left side of Rosalind's head and close to take the grip

Rosalind: Ward with Guardant and close keeping your left side close to Geoffrey's parried sword.

Rosalind: Begin the grip at the top of his wrist near his hilt with your left hand.

Rosalind: Wrap your left arm around Geoffrey's sword arm as he closes and wrap his hand and sword under your arm.

Rosalind: Once you have his arm move your right side back and away from Geoffrey so he can not take your sword. You want it free so that you can attack him with a strike or thrust. You want to maintain your grip on Geoffrey's arm so that you can break it or take his sword if necessary.

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

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

Rosalind: With your left hand grip the outside of Geoffrey's sword at the base of his hand (near the hilt).

Rosalind: Slide your hand up his arm to grasp the inside of his arm just above the elbow.

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

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

Rosalind: Pull him towards you strongly, wresting his knuckles downward and his elbow upwards. This way you can break his arm, put him on the ground, or pull the sword out of his hand.

Silver's first and second grips offer several advantages. Like the other grips they offer the advantage of physical control over your opponent and his weapons. While this may seem simple at first it should not be over looked. Taking control over your opponent and his weapon lessens the danger that a fighter may face from them. If you do not take the time to gain control of your opponent and his weapon before beginning any sort of attack then you run the risk that your opponent will be able to avoid your attack. He will then have the opportunity to counter with an attack of his own, endangering you. Thus it is crucial that fighters be able to gain control over their opponent and this grip helps them to gain that control.

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

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

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

Rosalind and Geoffrey: Both crossed in Bastard Guardant as before.

Rosalind: Grab the wrist of Geoffrey's sword arm with your left hand.

Rosalind: Holding Geoffrey's wrist tightly, push him away from you hard and aggressively.

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

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

The advantage offered by grip three is that by pushing your opponent off balance you make him very vulnerable to your subsequent attack. If your opponent is off balance he is not able to protect himself as well as he would if his footing was still sure. Not only do you create new openings in his previously solid defense, he cannot void his body out of line of your attack nor can he properly parry your attack until he has regained his balance again. Similarly, once you have pushed your opponent off balance his mind shifts its main focus to regaining his balance. This means that not only is he physically unprepared to defend himself he is also not longer mentally prepared either.

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

Geoffrey: Attack the left side of Rosalind's head with a cut and close to grip her hilt or sword arm with your left hand.

Rosalind: Ward Geoffrey's blow with Guardant. Put your left hand under your sword as you parry so that you can grasp the outside of his left hand, arm, or sleeve.

Rosalind: Grasp his arm so that your hand is under his wrist with the top of your fingers pointing upwards and your thumb and knuckles are pointing downward.

Rosalind: Pull Geoffrey strongly towards your left side. This will change his footing and as soon as you begin your pull you can attack him with a strike or thrust and then move quickly out of range because he will have to regain his footing before he can attack again.

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

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

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

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

Geoffrey: Attack Rosalind’s lower left side with a cut and close to grip her hilt or sword arm with your left hand.

Rosalind: Parry Geoffrey’s sword with Bastard Guardant.

Rosalind: Push his sword away strongly and quickly with your left hand. Uncross your sword and attack Geoffrey with a thrust to the body or a strike to the head. As soon as you attack you must move out of range quickly because he will be working on bringing his sword back online. The chief advantage of this grip is the control you gain over your opponent’s sword.

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

Conclusions

Grappling tactics were common in Sixteenth Century combat although they may seem strange by today’s standards. These wrestling techniques gave a fighter the ability to gain a very physical advantage over their opponent and were often used to disarm or disable. Silver’s grips are very similar to many of the grappling techniques that were being used during the period and they offer a fighter the ability to physically use their opponent’s own body against them. For example, the bind used in Grip Two takes advantage of the physical structure of the arm to put one’s opponent on the ground or, if necessary, break his arm. Grips Three and Four can be used very successfully to pull or push one’s opponent off balance. This allows the fighter to both gain advantage and over his opponent and to create new openings through which he can attack. Silver’s grips offer a student of the Arte of Defense a wealth of new opportunities to attack or disarm an opponent and can be used quite advantageously within Silver’s system.

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

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