



From Source to Competition: Proper Cuts in Rapier

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Introduction

Even though all rapier sources prefer thrusts over cuts for their safety and deadliness, there are some sound applications of cutting. We will look into those with single rapier to start, but with rapier & dagger, there are more options available.

Background

Salvator Fabris on cutting (Fabris 1606, p.7):

"si che tutti li taglij sono longhissimi, & chi ferisce di taglio non lo potrà mai fare nel tempo che para (intendiamo con la sola spada) doue l'altro hà sempre comodità di saluarsi, & anco di fare un'altra ferita nel tempo che il primo hà uoluto parare, è ben uero che neld.°parare questi può mettere l'auerssario in seruitu togliendoli il potere fare qualunque cosa, & anco ferirlo prima, che si salui mà ci riserbiamo à parlarne, quando tratteremo delle difese, & offese, & perche questo ferire di taglio non è molto utile noi non ci stenderemo se non tanto, quanto che saremo sforzati per difesa di essa punta & offesa del taglio, pure è buono lo saperne dell'una, & dell'altro; nelli taglij si ricerca maggior forza, perche sono molto scomodi, & la spada quando non troua incontro si disordina, il corpo ancor lui tal uolta si trasporta, ne può rimettersi così facilmente, si che porta l'huomo maggior pericolo in questo, che nel ferire di punta oltre l'essere di minore offesa, talche per tutti

i rispetti il d.° ferire di punta è più uantaggioso, & anco più mortale, con la detta punta si ferisse più di lontano, con più prestezza & si può anco più facilmente rimertersi, & in somma tal modo di ferire uiene ad'essere più nobile, & più eccellente per trouarsi in esso tutte le sottilità delle armi, doue che per opposto nella raggione dè taglij non si troua non solo il contratempo, mà ne anco il tempo, perche il più delle uolte si fanno dui tempo longhissimi"

English translation by Tom Leoni (Leoni 2005, p.11):

"In general, all cuts are quite slow. If you use the cut, you can never counter-attack while parrying (I am referring to sword alone) without giving the opponent ample time to step back into safety and to even deliver you a blow while you parry. It is however true that as you parry, you can always put the opponent into obedience, preventing him from planning any attacks and possibly wounding him before he manages to defend. However, I will talk more of this in the chapter about defenses and counters, and here I will not say too much more about the cut, since it is not a useful technique anyway. The need to talk about it is only proportional to the need to expand on the techniques of the cut and the thrust, since it is necessary to know about both.

Performing the cut requires more strength than the thrust, because it is very awkward and because when a cut does not encounter resistance, it will upset your form and drag your body into disorder. The recovery is also slow, which is why cutting involves more risk and is less effective than thrusting. In all respects, thrusting is more advantageous and deadlier than cutting. With a thrust, it is easier to strike quicker and from farther away, and to recover afterwards. Thrusting is a most excellent and elegant attack, since it embodies all the subtleties of fencing. Cutting, instead, makes both the contratempo and the tempo unavailable, since it involves two rather long motions."

Types of Cuts

Circular from the shoulder

A powerful mode of cutting, but slow and leaves big openings during the motion.

Circular from the elbow

Similar to the first type, but less strong and a bit more covered. This is the staple cut of many saber schools.

Circular from the wrist

Circular cuts from the wrist have less power, but offer better cover during the cut. They are called “tramazzone” or “mulinello” in 16th c. treatises.

Linear from the shoulder with a stiff arm

Just lifting the arm without turning it and letting it descend onto the target with the help of the body and the feet. It has more power than the wrist cut, but is less flexible & more rigid.

Cuts that don't work well in rapier

Because a Rapier is a longer and heavier single-handed sword, cuts are slower. This is why cuts

- from the elbow, like in saber
- from the shoulder, in an arc
- from the wrist, but *under* the blade

don't work well. In all cases we move the forte away from the retta linea and our targets, which allows the opponent to thrust in this tempo with a quick cavazione.

Cuts that deviate from the vertical plane also don't turn out well, because we create openings above the blade when our forte angles sideways to a certain degree.

Exercises

Fabris Plate 30.

Cutting from the wrist: Fabris plate 30, (Fabris 1606, p.57)

Start one step out of wide measure.

- A: Find the opponent's blade on the outside

- B: Step forward and push their blade outwards
- A: Cut a *mandritto tramazzone fendente* from the wrist over the blade to the opponent's head.

Feinting a thrust, but delivering a cut

Start in wide measure.

- A: Stringere of the opponent's blade in 1a on the outside
- A: Feint a straight thrust to the face in 1a
- B: Parry
- A: Cut a *mandritto tramazzone fendente* from the wrist over the blade to the opponent's head.

N.B.: This is intended to be done with rapier & dagger (Fabris 1606, p.86), but works too in single rapier.

Feinting a cut, but performing a body void

Fabris plate 40, (Fabris 1606, p.68)

Start in wide measure on the outside

- A: Stand in 3a outside
- B: Move to find the opponent's sword
- A: Mandritto to the head from the wrist
- B: Turn to 4a to defend the head and pass forward with the left foot to counter in tempo
- A: Before the blades touch, turn to 2da, lower your point under the opponents hilt and lunge or pass forward

References

- Fabris, Salvator (1606). *De Lo Schermo Overo Scienza D'Arme*. Henrico Waltkirch.
- Leoni, Tommaso (2005). *Art of Dueling*. Chivalry Bookshelf.