



## From Source to Competition: Nymphs & Satyrs—The Dynamic/Static Interplay in the Bolognese Style

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### Introduction

Antonio Manciolino perfectly captures the interplay between dynamic and graceful movement and structural stability in his metaphor of nymphs & satyrs. We will deal with both sides of this coin and take it from the sources, via exercises, to the application in sparring and competition.

### Background

#### Gioco Largo—“Nymphs”

"Since they who do not take delight in stepping in tempo, and in the way that I will teach them and have taught them, can never report of grace nor of victory in fencing. Indeed not, because of as much ornament as are the sumptuous garments that adorn the charming and lovely nymphs that sport upon Mt. Menalo or in the Lycaean, so is graceful stepping of ornament to the blows of the gleaming sword, which, if it were deprived of proper footwork, would bear such disgrace that it would be as if the serene night were to be widowed of the twinkling stars.

And how can a competitor be victorious if he lacks genteel grace? Thus, neither can we reasonably say that one has won if he were to win through luck, nor would he who has done his proper duty be held to have lost because some frenzied blows were to be thrown at him by some coarse peasant, as it is held

by men of understanding to be a more praiseworthy thing to lose graciously than to win by luck, in the absence of any grace; and that just as sometimes in cowardly disgrace good luck holds sway, likewise does longed-for victory always reside in overwhelming grace. Thus, one concludes that the gracious man can never lose, even if, through misfortune, he were hit." (Swanger 2021, p.79)

### **Gioco Stretto—"Satyrs"**

"Far more delightful than our fencers' assaults are those conducted on written pages by shaggy satyrs upon huntress nymphs. So fine does that topic appear to writers that smooth words seem to compose themselves in a sweet and fluid style; and while they prepare themselves to discourse upon the wooly limbs of the half-goat gods, or their horned brows, licentious movements, or simple and rustic sorties, they do so, not in writing, but showing, as if painted, the breathless goddesses in the lengthy pursuit: some lifting their purple robes above their snow-white knees, with their blonde tresses falling upon their soft shoulders, or parted, and fanned by gentle breezes; others casting themselves into pellucid and flowing streams, judging to flee thereby the treacherous hunters of their virginities, consecrated to Diana; while some, overcome by profound lassitude, take shelter, hidden behind dense shrubbery, panting, and in whose faces we see rosy dawn with the appearance of the sun, as with the slender fingers of their pale hands they dry the crystalline drops of their perspiration." (Swanger 2021, p.93)

### **Multi-Purpose Movements in Bolognese Fencing**

No matter how wide the guard is, or how big the movement—in Bolognese fencing, every motion in a sequence always satisfies these three purposes:

1. Pose a threat to the enemy—either hit or keep him from attacking
2. Defend an attack—either blocking/beating his blade or missing
3. End in a defined guard—either a counterposture or an invitation for attack

So every trajectory from one guard to another can be considered "atomic"; we follow through without changing the course mid-travel. We trust the multi-purpose motions.

## Exercises

### Stepping in *gioco largo*

- With your feet together, lift your center of gravity, stand upright; when you separate your feet, drop your weight and lean forward slightly;
- In a wide stance, the weight is on the front foot; in a narrow stance you can easily transfer the weight to either foot.
- You should stay on the balls of your feet as much as possible.

### Stepping in *gioco stretto*

- In a wide stance you are solid, you can stringer and press the enemy with gathering steps. (this equals a kind of proto-rapier fencing)

### Transition between stepping in these two modes

- To get things more fluid, start moving in the “*gioco largo* mode”, then suddenly switch to “*stretto* mode” and back.

### Offenses in *gioco largo*

Of course you could use smaller movements too, but to amplify the difference we will use wide motions here. The goal is to get the enemy to move and give a tempo that we can exploit.

Note, depending on the opponent’s moves and distance if you:

- just safely moved from one guard to another
- beat the opponents sword aside
- hit the opponent (most probably on the sword-arm)

1)

- A: Guardia Alta, right foot forward in a narrow stance
- B: Porta di Ferro Alta, right foot forward
- A: Cut two tramazzoni, ending in Porta di Ferro Larga, while stepping forward with the right foot

2)

- A: Coda Lunga Larga, left foot forward
- B: Porta di Ferro Alta, right foot forward
- A: Cut a false-edge mandritto tondo to their left temple while passing forward with your right foot

3)

- A: Guardia di Lioncorno, right foot forward
- B: Porta di Ferro Alta, right foot forward
- A: Thrust forward, then down into Porta di Ferro Stretta with an increase of the step

### Offenses in gioco stretto

1)

- A: Porta di Ferro Stretta, right foot forward
- B: Porta di Ferro Stretta, right foot forward
- A: Press the opponent with gathering steps to elicit a tempo
- A: Beat a rising falso into his sword
- A: Pass forward with your left foot (so he can't perform a *gambata*), while making a half turn of the hand and extend a punta dritta (2nd) thrust to the opponent's face
- B: Raise sword hand to parry
- A: Either presa to sword arm, or a redoubled mandritto traversata to his sword arm while stepping right with your right foot, ending in Porta di Ferro Larga

2)

- A: Porta di Ferro Stretta, right foot forward
- B: Unstated

- A: Press the opponent with gathering steps to elicit a tempo
- A: Tramazzone to sword/sword hand
- A: Pass left with your left foot and cut another tramazzone to the opponent's head or sword hand, ending in Cinghiara Porta di Ferro Larga

### **Transition between *gioco largo* & *stretto***

- Exit
  - With gathering step + falso
  - With a jump
  - With a tramazzone
- Enter
  - With a half turn of the hand and pushing with the true edge
  - With a feinted thrust to the face
  - With a false edge beat

### **References**

Swanger, Jherek W., ed. (2021). *How to Fight and Defend with Arms of Every Kind, by Antonio Manciolino*. lulu.com.