

DISCOURSE OF ARMS AND METHOD TO PROPERLY FENCE WITH THE SWORD AND DAGGER

BY SIEUR DANCIE

Translated by Rob Runacres and Thibault Ghesquière
Edited by Reinier van Noort

Acknowledgements

Translation from a transcription of the original manuscript by Olivier Dupuis. The translators are indebted to Reinier van Noort for his editing and input on interpretation; Dr Fabrice Cognot and the members of De Taille and D'Estoc who gave their advice and support in this translation, and to Serafina Runacres for her assistance in clarifying some of the passages.

References

Cotsgrave, R. 1611 *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*

Translators' Note

This is a draft translation of François Dancie's manuscript *Discours des armes et methode pour bien tirer de l'espée et poignard*, written prior to 1617, a precursor to his published work of 1623 *L'Espée De Combat Ou L'Usage De La Tire Des Armes*. The translators intend to publish both works in a single volume once translation of this later treatise has been completed.

Italics have been used where the original French has been retained, for example in the guards *seconde*, *tierce* and *quarte*. Where applicable, Italian fencing terminology has been used to explain certain actions; a full glossary will be provided in the final translation. Where English has been added to clarify, the words have been placed in square brackets.

Any errors are the translators' own.

Please note the following:

Copyright 2013 by Rob Runacres and Thibault Ghesquière. Subject to Fair Use. Users may, without further permission, display, save, and print this work for personal, non-commercial use, provided that the copyright notice is not severed from the work. Libraries may store this material and non-commercially redistribute it to their patrons in electronic or printed form for personal, non-commercial use, provided that the copyright notice is not severed from the work. Commilitium Historical Fencing - www.dancingwithsteel.com

Translated by Rob Runacres and Thibault Ghesquière

Discourse of weapons and method to properly fence with the sword and dagger

Coming into presence in front of the enemy, one must step with the left foot, with the sword advanced and crossed from the right side to the left to cover the whole body. And the dagger back and in adjusting it, advance the right foot and bring the dagger forward and put it in guard, in measure and in front of one's enemy, nevertheless simply keeping the steps slow to have the more sober judgment to stop the enemy, in case he wants to surprise you in your steps and actions.

And when you have gained this advantage on your enemy, being in measure in front of him and stopped on your feet, with a common step, the body bent and resting on the left leg, to the end that the right leg is free to advance when you see it is time, you will make an extraordinary step [lunge], carrying the foot and hand with all your strength to strike at the enemy between his two weapons in *quarte*, withdrawing the dagger to the rear so that the body is in a straight line to avoid, by the means of this evasion, the same tempo of the enemy.

Having given thus to the enemy, you will first remove the body, leaving your sword on his [the enemy's] own in order to offend him in the part that he will uncover as he advances by disengaging his sword from the inside to outside in order to offend you to the right shoulder. Then, leaning on the left side, parry with the dagger and strike him under his sword in the right side and, especially since it is natural to man to overheat himself and enter in fury when he is wounded, the enemy might lift the sword to offend you to the head when you withdraw, parry with your sword on the outside of his own, holding the hand low and the point high for more strength, and at the same give him an opportunity to try to seize your sword with his dagger. Doing that, step with a common pass backwards and parry low with your dagger, offending him below his, leaning on the right side to clear the part of your body which the enemy wants to offend.

And conversely, if the enemy returns after being offended, seize his sword and stepping with an extraordinary step, offend him to the throat over all his weapons by leaning on the left side, and seizing his sword with your dagger, which you will not withdraw so long as he obstinately withdraws or advances, always offending him to the part of his body which he uncovers.

Both returning to guard and to measure, which is to be close enough to offend the enemy by carrying the foot and the hand and stepping with an extraordinary step, make a feint to him under the dagger hand; as it is lowering, offend him above, and that done withdraw the body and the bending of the knee [i.e. straighten the knee], parry with your sword on his own, when he wants to disengage, make the above actions whether the enemy advances or retreats.

After this feint, return to measure and adjust the point of your sword between the two weapons of your enemy and, with a turn of hand, feint a blow to the head on the outside

of his dagger, which will force him to parry; doing that, offend him below, parrying always when withdrawing your sword and bringing your dagger forward to secure it to the place where it will be needed.

The enemy holding the dagger advanced, adjust your sword to the inside and, with a turn of the hand, make a circle of the point to him [*cavazione*], carrying the foot in an extraordinary step, offending him with a thrust to the right shoulder, the hand in *quarte*, and retiring, parry with the sword on his own, which will force him to advance on you or to go back. Doing that, make the aforementioned sequences as above, which are under his sword or dagger. And all his gestures and movements will make the opportunity arise, which you will take with speed and determination.

Your enemy still placing himself in the same posture with the dagger advanced, as being natural to one of a course and falling back to what to him is his own [natural], you will again readjust the point of your sword to the inside of his dagger. And carry the right foot with half an extraordinary step, the hand in *quarte* to force the enemy to parry. Doing that, offend him with a thrust over his dagger by making the whole extraordinary step and the hand in *seconde*, which is in a word from *quarte* to *seconde*, parrying always and bringing your sword on that of the enemy and making the same sequences or retreats as above to play the more sure.

In the same posture of the dagger advanced and placed that you may be between two weapons in *tierce* guard, feint to strike him between two weapons in the same posture, and as he is going to the parry with his dagger, carry the foot and the hand, offending him with a blow of a *seconde* over his dagger, and withdrawing with great speed, parry with your sword, because it must respond to the defence of the body as many times as it is advanced.

The same blow can be executed on the same posture of the advanced dagger over the point and on the outside, making there a tempo from high to low, doing that in *seconde*, which will force him to parry, [and] doing that with an extraordinary step and turning the hand in *quarte*, offend him to the right shoulder, never forgetting the parry of the sword that you use to hold your enemy clamped, who is a furious animal when he is injured.

If the enemy advances the sword and forms a posture of an open *tierce*, making space over his dagger, place yourself in measure before him and cross your sword on his in a half *seconde* to force him to retreat or to advance, [and] so he cannot do without disengaging his sword from inside of yours to the outside; then if he retreats, offend him with a blow of *seconde* by bringing the left foot forward with the dagger to seize the enemy's sword which you will find below yours: and if in disengaging, he strikes over your sword, lean down on the left side and, parrying with the dagger, offend him beneath his sword, the hand in *seconde* and [if] the enemy stubbornly offends you, cover yourself with your sword and your dagger and offend him to the nearest part by voiding the body, a play very necessary to this exercise.

Against the same posture, you will lodge your sword on the outside of the enemy's dagger and, making a half step, feint to strike him in *seconde* to the left eye, which will force him to parry and by parrying will uncover the left side, which you will offend by carrying the foot and hand in a thrust of *quarte*.

After giving this blow, lodge your sword right at the left eye of the enemy and to the outside of his dagger, being in that posture with the sword advanced, and carrying to half [the distance to the enemy] the foot and the hand, feint to strike him below with a blow of the *quarte* and running to the parry, attack him to the right shoulder with a thrust of *seconde*.

And if instead the enemy has the sword advanced and makes space to the outside, adjust against his own and, carrying the foot and the hand a half [distance to the enemy], feint to strike him to the right eye and, as he goes to parry with his sword, give him a blow in *quarte* under his sword, seizing the enemy's sword with your dagger from within to where the tempo you have made will deliver it, and [if] he advances on you to offend you beneath your dagger and parries with his own on your sword, retreat a step backwards, closing down with your dagger and offend the enemy with a blow of *seconde* over his, always making the parries to which your enemy forces you, whether with the sword or dagger.

In the same posture, turning the hand and carrying the sword from outside to inside of the enemy's, make a circle at the point of the enemy's dagger, offend him to the right shoulder, carrying the foot with an extraordinary step and the hand in *quarte*, seizing the enemy's sword with your dagger from the inside, you stooping a little on the right side, and, withdrawing, parry with the sword to force the enemy to follow or go back.

Putting yourself back in guard, attack the sword of the enemy on the outside holding your dagger firm, the body slightly bent on the left side to force him to strike you under your sword on the right side. Doing that, and parrying with the dagger, offend him over his own in *seconde* or underneath in *quarte*, depending on the action of your enemy, who will direct you to the nearest part which he uncovers to you by the motion of his dagger [when] wanting to seize your sword.

Attacking the sword of the enemy from the inside with yours to force him to change to the outside when parrying yours, and carrying the foot and the hand, offend him with a blow of *quarte* below his dagger, and retreating if he advances, parry with the sword assisting it with the dagger where needed.

Against the same advanced sword, feint to seize it with the dagger which is a parry-feint to force the enemy to change above or below; having done that with the false parry, redouble your parry and carrying the foot and the hand, offend him on the right side with a blow of *quarte*.

The enemy continuing in the same posture of the advanced sword, attack him from the inside [firmly]. And coming to change to the outside, enter with the left foot, seizing his sword with yours to give it to your dagger. Which holding [the enemy's sword], offend

him to the right shoulder and as he retreats, offend him above and below his dagger, still holding the enemy's sword with yours.

And if you press the enemy in such a way that he places himself into guard on the left foot [with] the dagger strongly advanced at you, making play at the inside of his weapons, strike him a blow in *quarte* between his two weapons, letting him parry your sword to force him in parrying to pass on you on the outside thereof. Doing that, and you leaning over the left side in parrying with your dagger, offend him with a blow of *seconde* below his sword. This blow is properly called an 'appel coup fort', assured against this posture.

The same appel is made against the said posture when the enemy makes space above his dagger, over which you will make the appel in *seconde* and [he] lunging [with a passing step] to parry and to strike, you will lean on the left side and, parrying with the dagger, offend him with a blow of *quarte* beneath all his weapons, and after you will withdraw by parrying with your sword on his own, which can be before the enemy, offended, has resumed his judgment that the blow that one gave him was a tempo taken from him.

Against the same posture of the left foot, which we call the retreat of the ignorant, adjust in measure on the outside his dagger, the point of your sword right to his hand and in guard of a tight *tierce*, and then, carrying the foot with an extraordinary step and raising the point of the sword over the point of his dagger, offend him to the head or to the throat with a blow of *quarte* which is bringing the hand from *tierce* to *quarte*. Retiring, parry with your sword as above for fear of easy profit [being made of you].

The enemy continuing to stay in the same posture of the left foot, you will feint by carrying the foot and hand in *quarte*, striking at him between the two weapons right at the head which will force him to parry with the dagger. Doing that, offend him below thereon with a strike of *seconde* by withdrawing the dagger far back and, retiring, parry in fifth with your sword until you are out of measure and then return to guard to wait and stop your enemy's design.

If the enemy lunges wanting to pass over you, desiring to seize your sword from the outside with his dagger and offend you with his over yours with a blow of *seconde*, lean until touching the ground with the left knee and, carrying the hand in *tierce* and strong on the outside, offend him under his dagger, parrying with yours on the inside of his sword. And if he advances having received [the blow], you will grab his left leg and carry him to the ground to avoid his fury, which often makes one lose at fencing.

If instead, the enemy passes on you to offend you with a blow of *quarte* under the dagger by seizing your sword from within with his own, make a *cavazione* and offend him with a blow under his dagger, parrying underneath with yours, leaning on the right side to void the part that he wants to offend.

Drawing the enemy between your two weapons, parry with your dagger and, carrying the foot and the hand, offend him with a blow of *seconde* to the right shoulder. If he retreats, step with the left foot, still holding his sword with your dagger, [and] offend him

over the point of his with a blow of *seconde* and, further retreating and parrying, offend him beneath with a blow of *quarte*. The same occurs against the enemy when he advances.

And if the enemy feints you on the inside and strikes you on the dagger, parry with yours and, carrying the foot and the hand, offend him with a blow of a *quarte* to the right shoulder, always engaging his sword with yours, giving him as many blows as you can, since a tree does not fall with one blow of an axe.

The same riposte occurs when the enemy strikes below the dagger and the same sequences of parries and binds both with the sword as with the dagger.

For the execution of all the plays described above three things are needed. A good judgment to place oneself in measure; a great courage to undertake each blow in tempo and place, and a great swiftness in stepping to carry it out. The judgement is used to dispose the body to the place where one must be placed, and to which side one must adjust the point of one's sword. From there with courage and speed execute the blow on the enemy where one judges the easiest, and to the closest and most uncovered part of his body, with no further discussion than the resolution to strike because we are in a measure. The judgment serves to go to the attack on the enemy's sword and to the counterguards. Such as when the enemy carries his sword high or low, retired or advanced, to bring yours to inside or outside that of the enemy to force him to retreat or advance. And when you take the tempi which are described above and offend him in the place where his action will lead you. It is also used when the enemy carries the dagger advanced in order to test it by some movement of your sword, to sound out if he should parry or not. If he parries, you will do him such blows in, over, [or] under, which are described to you and most proper for you. And if instead he strikes, you will make the tempo with the turn with the dagger's tip and strike him in the right shoulder or make appels, in short that practice will place you in front instead. Farewell, guard the sight.

Discourse of fencing with the single sword

When you will come in presence in front of your enemy in stepping to offend him, make common or extraordinary steps depending on how far you are away from him, always carrying the sword advanced to defend the body, with the left hand near the head. And entered into measure, support the whole body on the left leg, in order to leave the right side ready and free to advance when the action of the enemy makes a tempo arise, which must be taken with all kind of speed and at the same instant that he moves his foot. Doing that, we hold to an infallible rule that whenever one strikes at the enemy to stop him, banish any kind of fear when lunging to strike at your enemy.

Being in measure and providing the sword crosses that of the enemy, to wit that if he covers the inside of his body from the outside and if he covers the outside from the inside¹, which is called properly going to the counterguard, and covering himself on the outside, slowly bring your sword on his own and to within to force him to change and strike. Doing that, carry the right foot with an extraordinary step and, following the straight line of your sword which you have formed in attacking that of the enemy, offend him with a blow of *seconde* to the right shoulder turning the hand outside and leaning on the left side, with your left hand extended backwards along the lower thigh and closed to balance and counterpoise the action of your body and serve him as a wing² and support.

The enemy continuing in the same posture, make the same counterguard and you want to force the sword on the outside and pass, taking the tempo when he steps and, leaning down to the ground on the left side, offend him below his sword with a blow of *tierce*. If, stung by this blow, he retires the foot and the hand and wants to offend you with the edge on the right side of the head, close your sword against his when raised to you, and the enemy disengaging from outside to inside, offend him with a blow of *quarte* to the right shoulder and, withdrawing, parry with your sword and subject that of the enemy in order to prevent him offending you or to offend him if necessary when withdrawing or advancing on you.

Against the same posture, pretend to strike under your enemy's sword hand to force him to go to the parry; doing that and stepping with the left foot, offend him to the outside with a blow of *seconde* while withdrawing your sword from his body; seize the guard of his own [sword] with the left hand to offend him and to be master at your ease.

And, since it is common for the ignorant to persist in his habits, your enemy returning to the same posture, make the same counterguard to him, crossing your sword on his on the inside and, pressing it, force him to retreat or change [guard]. And if he retreats without changing, approach the left foot to the right to be better prepared to offend your

¹An interpretation here is that upon pressure, the enemy performs a cavazione from inside to out and from outside to in. Another interpretation is that the enemy is holding his guard similar to the *coda lunga stretta / porta di ferro stretta* described by the 'Bolognese' Masters such as Marozzo and Manciolino

²The original word '*d'eele*', as copied from the manuscript, is unknown; Dupuis has interpreted this as *d'eele*, itself a form of the word *aile*. Cotsgrave (1611) notes the word *aele* as a variant of *aile*, which would be therefore consistent with this interpretation.

enemy and then, beating your sword on his and carrying the foot and the hand, offend him to the right shoulder and parry, offending him always until making him yield.

On the other hand, the enemy placing himself in posture before you, his sword crossing his body from the right side to the left, adjust your sword on the outside of his own to force him to make a *cavazione* from outside to inside; doing that, offend him with a blow of *quarte* to the right shoulder.

The enemy continuing in the same posture, feint to strike him to the head on the outside of his sword, which will force him to parry; doing that, offend him in *seconde* under his own by leaning on the left side, or better in *quarte* by volte the body a half to avoid the counter tempo.

Readjusting his sword on the outside of that of the enemy by a *cavazione* from within, feint to strike to the head in *quarte*, which will force him to parry. Doing that, rotate the hand in *seconde* and, leaning on the left side, offend him to the right shoulder.

If, of fury, the enemy comes to pass on you by beating your sword on the outside, take the tempo in which he moves his foot and volte the body, make a *cavazione* below his sword and offend him with a blow of *quarte*.

Returning to your guard, if the enemy feints to strike you under the sword hand to force you to parry and to offend you on the outside to the right shoulder, then by stepping and leaning on the left side, you will offend him in *seconde* to the right shoulder, taking the first tempo that the enemy stirs the foot, and retiring, covering with the sword.

The same tempo must be taken against the enemy making a feint on the outside to offend you on the inside: strike him in *quarte* and volte half the body on your sword side and, having struck, withdraw and parry with the sword, secure in the guard of the body.

If the enemy breaks the measure when you attack his sword from the inside and make a *cavazione* to the outside, approach the left foot to the right and re-attack his sword on the outside; he will certainly make a *cavazione* to the inside. Doing that, carry the foot and the hand forward, offending him with a blow of *quarte*, volte the body by a half to avoid the same tempo.

The same tempo may be taken when you attack the enemy's from the outside and breaking measure he does the same actions, excepting that you must strike in *seconde* and, bending on the left side and withdrawing, parry with the sword.

Being in measure in front of your enemy, your sword adjusted to the outside of his, you will open, withdrawing the body by bending the left knee, and bring your sword to inside that of the enemy to force him to take the tempo on you. Doing that, leaning on the left side until giving the knee to the ground, offend the enemy with a blow of *seconde* that we call '*le passe dessous*'.

Having done this *passata sotto* to the enemy, because you had engaged him in the same tempo [your sword will pass] in to his body up to the guard, which means that often one is forced to leave it there and quitting the hand and approaching the enemy,

take him around the body, and tripping him with the leg, carry him to the ground. Also, if one wished to withdraw, it would be necessary to remove the body, which would be exposed to the fury and mercy of the enemy who having his own free might offend you before yours was disengaged.

If your enemy in fury beats his sword on yours and enters with the left foot, seizing you by the collar and so that neither of you can hit each other because of the fierce action as this may happen, keep yourself from retreating but on the contrary approach him and changing the sword from the right hand to the left, offend him with a thrust to the part of his body which will be the easiest for you, though to be easier for you hold your sword by the middle of the blade with the left hand, which by itself is less deft than the right, and if you know your tempo grab his leg and, pushing with the right hand, bear him to the ground and immediately return your sword to the right hand to use it if necessary.

If attacking the sword on the outside, the enemy strikes to within, parry with yours and enter with the left foot; doing that, beat your sword against the guard of that of the enemy; bend it under the left arm and with an effort take it from his hand when retreating the body back and still hold your sword point right at the face of the enemy to hinder him so that he cannot pounce upon you, thereby avoiding a confusion that happens very often by the more able when they are weaponless.

All kinds of arts want, when we have learned from excellent masters, to be practiced often; this is the same where the body must be disposed through exercising, in order to act in advancing or retreating with all kinds of speed, courage and judgement when it is needed and one must take the tempo on the slightest movement that the enemy makes in measure, without any sort of hesitation for fear that the enemy, who has the reason and the weapons like ours, goes against all that we want to do [so that the enemy] does not take advantage of greater resolution over us. All this knowledge depends on having been well demonstrated and having often practiced this science with people who understand it more or less. For to know something and not to practice it, it is [like] a hidden treasure that rusts as the body numbs and slows when it lacks exercise. But both make men masters.