

Introduction to Giganti's Single Rapier

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Introduction

Niccoletto Giganti was a fencing master in Venice in the late 16th/early 17th century. In this class we will be doing an overview of some of his single rapier techniques as laid out in his 1606 manual. Giganti himself recommended that all fencers be competent in single rapier since one would not always have a secondary weapon, and one might drop their secondary in the course of a duel.

All quotes and pictures are taken from Tom Leoni's 2010 translation.

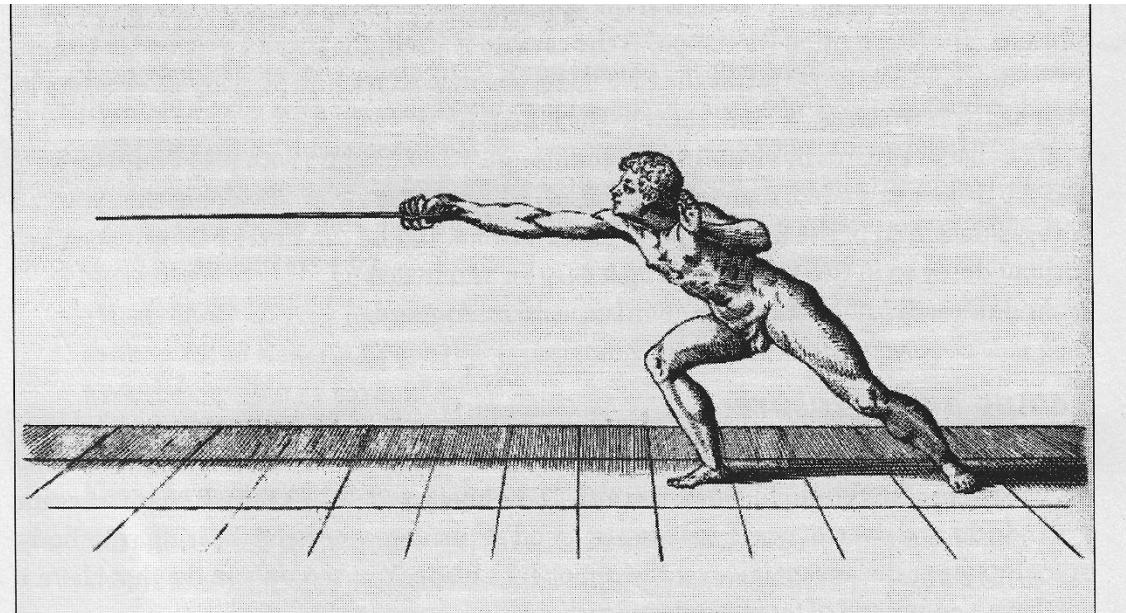
Stance

Unlike some other masters, Giganti does not describe nor illustrate any specific guards so we must use his general guidelines and the plates to determine what stance he advocates. He recommends a stance that is “preferably narrow rather than wide so that you have the capacity to extend it”. Looking at the illustrations, his definition of “narrow” is really only in comparison to some other masters, as the figures are clearly standing with feet wider than shoulder width. They are somewhat profiled, and the back foot is turned out somewhere between 90 and 135 degrees. We know from modern anatomy that the exact angle of turn-out is a matter of personal comfort since there is a wide variation in hip structure. Their weight is more on the back foot, and the front knee is slightly bent, optimizing the ability to perform a quick, balanced lunge or step in any direction. The left hand can be held back near the cheek or chest, or it can be held forward.

As for sword placement, Giganti states that “...every motion of the sword is a guard to the knowledgeable fencer, and all guards are useful to the experienced man; conversely, no motion is a guard to the ignorant, and no guard is effective for someone who does not know how to use it”. Looking at his first plates, which demonstrate the most basic motions, the fencers use a guard where the sword is partially extended, the hand is about at the height of the bottom ribs, and the point is aiming at the opponent's face. This is where we will start.

Measure

Giganti only mentions two distances: “Measure is that distance from which you can reach the opponent with your sword. When you cannot, you are instead out of measure.” Further reading clarifies that in measure means that you can hit with a lunge, not moving the back foot. He does not discuss in detail how to get to this distance, so we will not be covering that in this class.



1 – Delivering a Lunging Thrust

How to Deliver the Thrust

After discussing the guards, counter-guards, measures and tempi, I need to show and explain how to carry your body while delivering a thrust and recovering. While studying this art, you must first learn how to carry your body and deliver lunging thrusts that are as long as the one you see in this illustration. The heart of the matter is the ability to deliver quick, long, strong lunging thrusts and immediately recover out of measure.

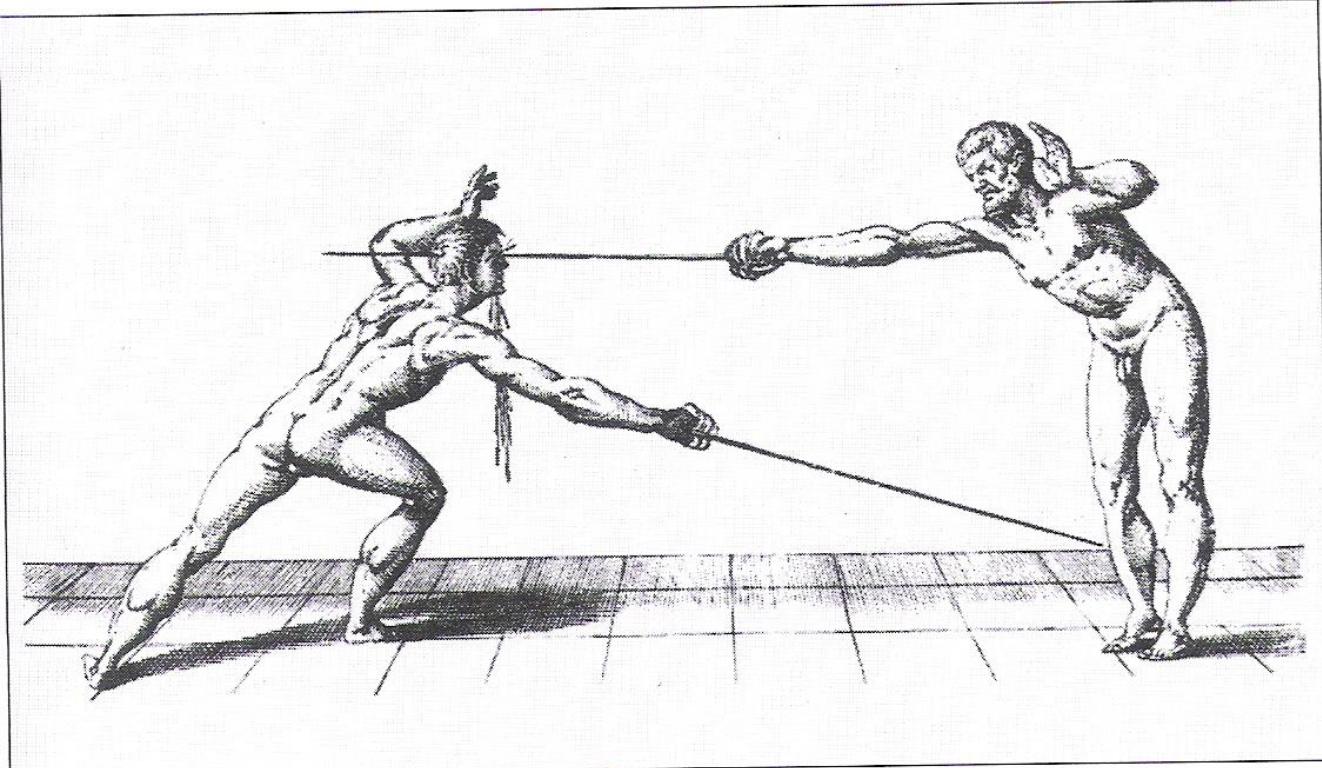
To deliver a lunging thrust, set yourself in a solid stance, better if a bit narrower rather than wide so that you may then extend your front foot forward. While delivering the thrust, extend the sword-arm and bend the knee as much as possible.

Here is the correct way to deliver this attack. After getting in guard, first extend the arm, then extend your body forward (in one tempo), so that the attack arrives on target before the opponent realizes it is coming. If you moved your body forward first, he would see it and use the tempo to parry and deliver a simultaneous counterattack.

Recover by moving the head back first, then the body and lastly the foot. If you recovered your foot first while your head and body remained forward, you would make yourself vulnerable.

To learn this art correctly, you first need to practice this thrust; once you know how to deliver it, the rest will be easy to learn, but not vice-versa.

Note that this style of lunge does not require taking a large step forward; the majority of the extension comes from folding the upper body forward, leaving the hips (and center of balance) a little behind the lead foot. This allows for quick recovery either forward or backward.

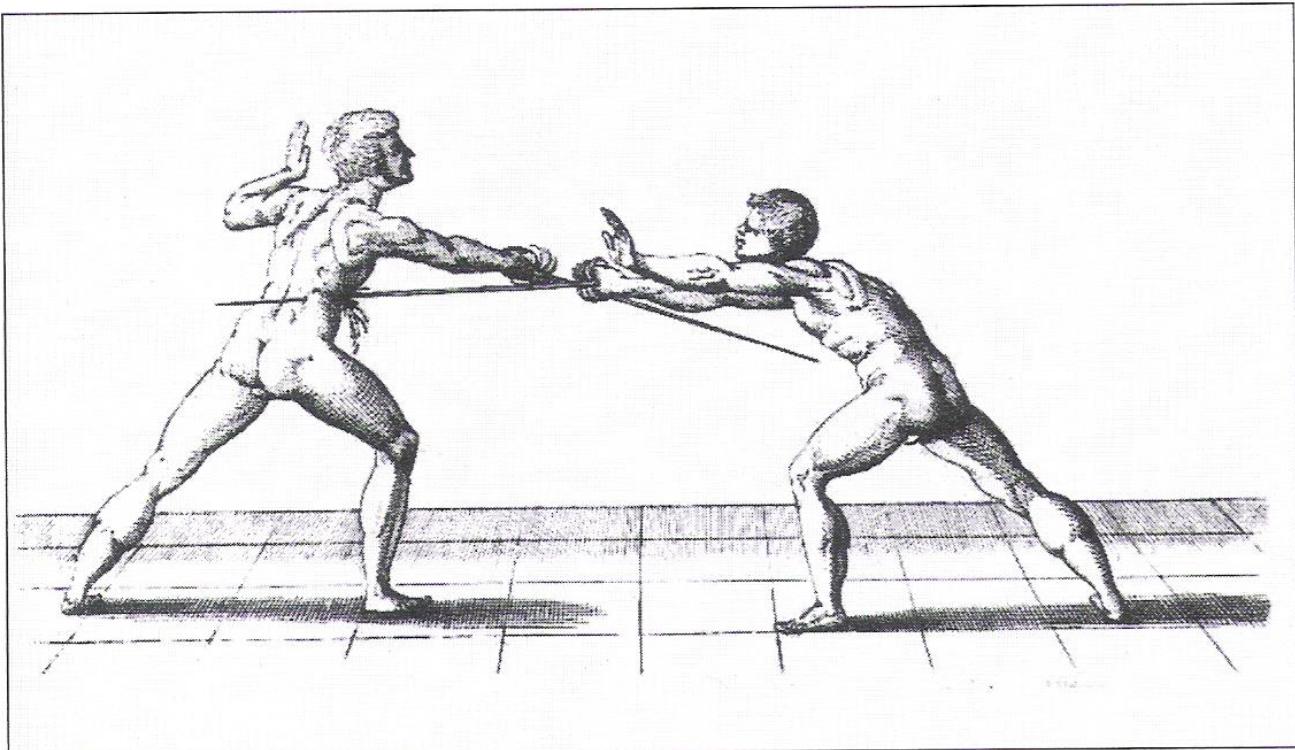


14 – How to defend against a cut to the leg

Plate 14

“ If the opponent attacks you with a mandritto or riverso [cut to the front leg], [[they]] must extend [[their]] right foot and project [[their]] body and head forward. As [[they]] do[es] this, withdraw your right leg and deliver a thrust to [[their]] face in the same tempo; this will cause the opponent to stick [[themselves]] on your point, without being able to defend or hit you. Then, recover out of measure, as I have often explained.”

As in the lunge, this extension is mostly from the upper body folding forward from the hips. The hips stay balanced over the feet to allow for quick recovery forward or backward. This action can also be used against an opponent using sword and dagger, simply aim your sword at whichever part of the upper body is not covered by the dagger; just inside the shoulder of the hand holding the sword is an excellent target as it is very difficult to defend with the off hand. If your opponent is much taller than you, thrust or cut to the arm.



16 – Parry and low-line counterthrust to the chest

Plate 16

“This illustration shows you a safe way to parry thrusts to your chest and to deliver a counterthrust to the opponent's. This can be done in different ways; some pass from out of measure, others start in measure and others yet get inside the measure. ... Suppose you and the opponent are facing each other without any of you having the advantage of the blade and [[they]] pass[[es]] to attack you with a thrust to the chest. In that some tempo, follow [[their]] blade with yours, lower your point by lifting your hand and parry. Pass with your left foot towards the opponent's right, removing your body from the threat of [[their]] point, and hit [[them]] in the chest while placing your left hand on [[their]] hilt.”

This action uses the sword, off hand, and body placement to defend. By stepping a little to your opponent's right, you remove your body from the line of their attack while making the angle of your own defense and attack stronger. The left hand should not be necessary, but here Giganti uses it to make absolutely sure that he is safe. One can do the same to the inside line but there one needs to use the off hand to cover the low line since the sword coverage is not as complete.

Bibliography:

Leoni, Tom. (2010). *Ventian Rapier: The School, or Salle*. Wheaton, IL: Freelance Academy Press.