

Intro

Sources: Auerswald (1539), Ed. Egenollfs (1529? 1535, 1558-69), Meyer (1570)

Pedagogy: how I teach, and why I teach that way

Intent of class: process and technique

Falling practice

1) Process: sources of strength

- Exploration: in opposed actions, what makes your action strong? What makes you weak? Where does strength come from?
- Technique: Shoulders and hips. *Auerswald 1, 7, 6, 15-16*

2) Process: how to throw

- Pairwise demonstration: what makes a person fall down? How do you avoid falling down? What can you do to counter their avoidance?
- Technique: Push one / pull the other. *Auerswald 4-5, 58, 61, 47*

3) Process: upper body control

- Exploration: slow attacks with an imaginary knife, single-step counters. Use simulators if you need them.
- Technique: Arm-locks. *Egenollfs: Dagger intro, 7 plays*

Review processes and associated techniques.

Lunch break

4) Process: staying safe

- Discussion and Exploration: opponent has a knife simulator, you are unarmed. Before he enters engagement, range, how do you position yourself?
- Technique: Four ways to lay in wait. *Meyer: Vier lager.*

5) Process: maximize your threat

- Exploration: in sword-to-sword combat, how do you maintain your threat even when he blocks?
- Technique: Winding, twitching and changing. *Egenollfs: pages 8-11*

6) Process: timing (vor & nach)

- Discussion: what does it mean to have initiative? To be "before" or "after" your opponent? when you're after, how do you recover initiative?
- Pairwise demonstration: when you're after, how do you recover initiative?
- Technique: Mastercuts. *Meyer:*

Review: Processes and associated techniques

- Extra time? Students choose where to dig deeper.

Assessment

- Pairwise slow-work (practice first, then demonstrate for all to see). Students comment on elements drawn from the class.

1) Sources of strength (Shoulders and hips)

Auerswald:

1.
Firstly, look and see
if your opponent comes to you high or low
If he is high
you must not worry
and may from these techniques,
as your senses guide you,
freely take
But if he is low
then have yourself in greater caution

Your own hips can only be engaged if you have somewhere to go. Keep your knees bent, and your hips can swivel quickly and powerfully, and can go down or up.

7.
Running through under the arm.
In the assault I catch his left hand with my right
and lift it over him
and run through under his left arm with my head and body
and step my left thigh behind his left leg
and right myself up
so that I have him powerfully on my left hip.

Your shoulder dominates his shoulder. Your hip dominates his hip.

6.
The shrugging of the opponent.
When I have wound him
then I come with my right hand on his right hand
and with my left hand on his right elbow
and cause him to shrug up for me
And during that shrug
I sweep my left hand under his right arm and through
And during that shrug
I step my left thigh behind his right
Then I heave him up with my left hip
and am totally powerful over him.

Your shoulder dominates his shoulder. Your hip dominates his hip. This is worth of repeating.

15.
While winding, I spring with my right thigh, winding it around his left leg
and take the half-hip

16.
When I have taken the half-hip,
and he has begun to break out of it
then I step with my right thigh entirely behind
so that I have my left hand on his shoulder
and pull him entirely over

Your leg denies him the power of his hips. Your hand denies him the power of his shoulder. You must *coordinate* your own hip-and-shoulder twist, or this “pulling him entirely over” bit won’t work.

2) How to throw. (Push one / pull the other)

Auerswald:

4.

This piece is called the weakening of the arms
that you pull in on his left hand with your right
near the fist
so that he must bend.

5.

When you see
that he has bent himself
then take his left hand with your left
Thereafter, stretch your right hand under his chin and through
and while stretching
you must spring with your right leg
to obstruct his left thigh
then you are totally powerful over him.

Pull his shoulders, push his hips.

58.

The entering of the hook.
I pull his left arm in with my right hand
and come in over the ankle
and run in with my right thigh against his right leg
then I am right in the hook

You can now push or pull his leg at will.

61.

The winding of the hips and the hook.
Here comes the backward throw
when I have someone with my arm
then I go with my right arm over him
and wind my right hip forward
denying
and run him into the hook
and stay with my left foot against him
Then the backward throw is fast and sure.

As in this example: your right hip pushes, while your right leg pulls, and your arm provides you leverage.

47.

Another break of the hook.
While he is entering,
I force my left thigh to displace his left foot
and put him back with my left hand.
This technique
cannot be caught by many.

A subtle application, but it's still just pushing his leg and pulling his shoulders.

3) Upper body control (Armlocks)

Egenollfs: Fighting with the dagger: Seven useful techniques.

I. If your opponent stabs downward from the high line, towards your face or body, then block with your left arm. Wind your hand over his right arm, from the inside out, and press close into his left side. Then you may stab him with your dagger, into his face.

Blocking the dagger usually begins by engaging your left arm against his right. Here, you control his arm by engaging him with your left hip.

II. If your opponent feints a thrust to your face, but redirects to your flank, you will intercept the thrust with your left arm. Wind your left hand over his right hand from below, press firmly on his chest, and stab him with your dagger into his face.

This time, it's your shoulder that provides the leverage (against his bent right arm) to control his arm, as you push his own right hand into his chest.

III. If the opponent holds the dagger so that his thumb is by the guard and he attempts to stab up to your face, then drive your left hand to his right arm, winding over it from below, and over his right hand. Bring the hand with the dagger to your left side, above the shoulder and set upon him.

Again, using your left shoulder to control his hand, this time by pulling his hyperextended right arm to just above your own shoulder.

IIII. If the opponent holds the dagger so that his thumb is by the guard, and he attempts to stab your flank or stomach, then drive your left hand down upon him from above, and stab with your dagger under his right hand into his nethers. Heave your right over him, and press firmly into your chest, swinging him from your right side.

If the stab "into his nethers" isn't adequate, finish it with a throw. Obviously, this is particularly useful if you don't actually have a knife to stab with.

V. If he holds the dagger so that the guard is by his little finger, and attempts to stab low from the high line, you will take your dagger firmly, and stab low towards his left flank, against his thrust, catching him above his right hand. Grip your dagger blade with your left hand, below your right, and press hard with your arm into his. Turn under him, and that is the end.

Again, this still works if you have no knife: your defense is your right wrist, crossing your body to intercept his right wrist, followed by your left hand bending his right arm.

VI. If he has his dagger, and you don't have yours, and he stabs to the high line, then you can drive up with your right arm from below, and grip him with your right hand, just behind his right hand. Drive your left hand from below, up to his right elbow, take his arm entirely over the left arm, and throw him.

Similar entry to play V, but here you use your left hand to raise his right elbow, instead of pulling it downward. Choose your play based on his force: If he's fully committed, use play V (downward, bending his arm). If he's recovering upward, use play VI (upward, and to the side).

VII. If he has his dagger, and you don't have yours, and he stabs to the high line, then drive the thrust in with your left arm, and wind from the outside, over his right arm, pressing into your left side. Swing him over your right side, breaking his arm. If you wish to throw him onto his back, then spring with your right leg past his left side, and grip under his right arm with your right hand.

Block as in the first play, but this time, you pull his arm in. A hip twist finishes the play. Do this very carefully, please, and never, ever actually break your training partner's arm.

Lunch Break Reading: Some interesting comments from Egenollf's knife section

Taking the thrust

The first and nearest in all dagger fighting is / that you are aware of every attack / from whence it comes / so that you may / defend with the hand / and take your care.

Counter:

Therefore / when your attack is overcome / be cautious that the opponent's attack is intercepted by your other hand / with which you will then work / to break his arm / and use your feet to come into wrestling.

The First Conclusion

It is namely to have care / to study all of his attacks / so that they will not succeed / and thus from the first to devote yourself / to dominate your opponent / and gain advantage through careful wrestling.

Counter:

When he has taken your attack / and gained advantage over it / and made it weak / strike him then with your hand in the nearest place.

Note that where the hand leads the attack, the elbow always follows / give it a good and powerful push after.

Again we see the importance of observing the opponent, stated as the first point. Also note that dagger fights are determined by *wrestling*.

Beginning

If he attacks from the roof / then come forward and find his right hand with your left / and set him one in his torso in return.

Counter:

When he has stopped your high attack / and winds his attack back towards your torso / use your left hand / to press his right hand against his left side / Step with your right thigh near his / and then throw him with your left arm / as you would before you gripped his right hand / and do this quickly / at once.

This "Action / Counter" organization is common throughout Egenollfs. Here, the counter is a push-pull throw, identical to the process established in Auerswald.

Outward throw

When he stabs against you / find his thrust with your left hand / strike in return with your own dagger deep under his right arm / so that you catch his back / step onto his left foot with your right / throw him over as you have him held / with both hands.

Counter:

When he has held you / feint as if you would strike him in the throat / then swing him around / and come away from his throw.

The throw is again a push-pull, and requires coordinated timing (not mentioned by the author). The counter uses a threatened thrust to escape, which we see more of in Meyer's "Abzug".

Break the arm.

When he stabs at you / then slip the hand / and drive quickly with your back to him. Heave so that you break his arm over your shoulder.

Counter:

If he would break your arm over his shoulder / then move quickly / slip your head under your arm / pull with both your hands on his hand / with which he is holding you / turn over around him / putting his arm on your shoulder / and you will do to him what he wished / to do to you.

Although this can be taken further again.

Marozzo (1568) includes the same counter to the same arm-break.

4) Staying safe (Four ways to lay in wait)

Meyer: Vier Lager

Ox [*Ochs*]

The upper part of the combatant is allotted to the Ox, and as that has two quarters, the right and left, so one can divide the posture of the Ox into two parts, namely the right and left. The right Ox is done thus: stand with your left foot forward, and hold the sword with the hilt up by your head on the right side, so that your point extends toward your opponent's face. For the left Ox, position yourself opposite to this, that is, stand with your right foot forward, and hold your sword with the hilt by your head on the left side as I have said. Thus you have both Ox guards or postures.

Meyer's four guards follow the Lichtenauer school. The Ox is clearly named for its resemblance of an Ox's horns, as the sword blade extends from near your forehead, sloping slightly towards the center of your face (and your opponents)

Plow [*Pflug*]

The lower part of the combatant belongs to the Plow, and as that has two quarters or two sides, right and left, so the Plow is called right or left. Both are in essence merely the position of a thrust from below. Execute the right Plow as follows: stand with your right foot forward, hold your weapon with the hilt by your forward knee, and aim the tip or point at your opponent's face as if you intended to thrust at him from below; thus you are in the left Plow.

The Plow follows the Ox's agricultural theme; the sword blade is now angled like each of the blades of a plow. This is a very strong defensive guard, but as Meyer suggests, it lends itself primarily to thrusting attacks.

Day [*Tag*]

The guard of the Day, which is also called the High Guard [*Oberhut*], is executed in the following manner: stand with your left foot forward, and hold your sword up over your head so that the point extends right upwards. Now any attack that is delivered from above is said to be executed from the Day or High Guard, therefore this posture is called the Day.

Similar to the Italian *guardia alta*, this is a very exposed guard, only to be adopted well out of range. Many modern researchers translate this guard (written as vom *Tag* in earlier sources) as "from the roof".

Fool [*Olber*]

The Fool in my opinion takes its name from the word *Alber*, which is to say 'simple-minded', since from this guard no proper stroke can be readily achieved, unless one gathers for a new cut after the opponent's cut has been caught by means of a parry, which is truly the part of a fool and simple man, to allow someone to strike him without a prepared counterstroke. It is performed thus: stand with your left foot forward, and hold your sword with the point extended toward the ground in front of you before your forward foot, such that the short edge lies above, the long edge below. Thus you lie properly in this guard.

As Meyer suggests, earlier Lichtenauer sources use the word *Alber* rather than *Olber*.

Like the Lichtenauer authors before him, Meyer includes nine other positions, but indicates these for as the primary ways in which to lie at rest (*Lager*, literally "to lie"); the other positions are references points which one strives to use as training tools (*Hüten*, literally "guard").

5) Maximize your threat (Winding, Twitching and Changing)

Egenollfs, pages 8-11 (these four passages appear in the order presented; one additional passage has been omitted from the original sequence):

Rule:

Mark this / when you wish to thrust someone / that you meet with the point / therefore always wind your sword with the pommel under the right shoulder.

Winding is simply the act of redirection your point on-line, while your blade is engaged with the opponent's blade. If you place your pommel under your shoulder, your point will generally be on line. Winding in this way also engages the power of your shoulder, and transfers that leverage into your sword work.

On twitching.

Whoever comes to fight / will find a twitch works right / the twitch / finds the foe / this work / causes woe. Pull all your strikes into a twitch / if a master's skill you wish.

Twitching, like the four ways of laying, is a common element in the earlier Lichtenauer tradition, and is also used in Auerswald's wrestling plays. The author here never details exactly what is meant by a twitch, but it typically involves a rapid two-stroke action, pulling out and then returning to place.

Many of the passages in the Egenollfs book have this characteristic of rhyming couplets, which may be influenced by Lichtenauer's original *Merkvers* (mnemonic poem).

On Binding.

When you begin to be bound / test if he is lying strong or weak / If he lies hard / then wind under and through / strike him / against his face and left ear / thus you wind his sword out / and cause him to expose himself. But if he twitches / and strikes / then you must drive upward and set him aside.

An example of a winding strike. Swords are engaged on the inside line, as if both combatants are in a left plough. Wind by bringing the pommel under your right shoulder, as described above, while keeping blade contact and allowing your point to drop towards his chest. Finally, extend a thrust towards his left cheek or ear, which will drive his sword across his body, and expose him.

(It's not mentioned here what to do if he's lying soft. The answer is to drive through his soft defenses, though you must be wary of HIS wind against YOUR strength...)

The opponent may counter your wind with his twitch: as your point slips under his blade, he should raise his point up and quickly strike down on your sword, breaking your action.

Break (*counter*)

When someone has bound you up / and lies fast / so that you may not twitch / and he also does not wish to twitch / then heave your pommel over him / and leave him your point going between his hands / and twitch towards yourself / so must he leave it.

This passage assumes that you have missed the opportunity to break his wind by twitching, and that his strike to your face or ear was not incapacitating (see "On Binding, above"). Your remaining "break" is to make an inverted wind: drop your point and raise your pommel, then snap your point back up towards his chest.

6) Timing (*vor* & *nach*), and the Mastercuts

Meyer, Chapter 7: Advice about Stepping

... so much depends on this, that as experience shows, all combat happens vainly, no matter how artful it is, if the steps for it are not executed correctly. Therefore the combat masters of old who were very learned and experienced in this, stated in their twelve rules: "Whoever steps after the cuts / should not rejoice much of his skill." Therefore each stroke must have its own step, which shall take place at the same time as the stroke, if you wish to achieve anything with the devices you use. For if you step too soon or too late, then it is over with your device, and you thus defeat your own cuts.

Compare Meyer's comments on coordinated timing of attack and footwork to Auerswald's plays above.

The "twelve rules" Meyer refers to are listed in Egenolffs, and an earlier 16th century text by Paurenfeindt (1516). Another of those rules is "Strike and step together / and set your feet one after the other."

Meyer, Chapter 8: Concerning Before [*vor*], After [*nach*], Simultaneously [*Gleich*] and Instantly [*Indeß*]

It is called Before when you attack your opponent with your cutting in the first Onset, and further drive on, so that he cannot come to his undertaking or device, but must restrict himself to parrying so that he may defend himself from you. ...

Now the After is when you are rushed on by your opponent, as has been described before, so that you cannot carry out your intention.

"Best defense is a good offense". If all he gets to do is block you, you will eventually win. If all you get to do is block, then you'll never win.

Meyer, "A Good Counter Against All High Cuts"

In the Onset, position your sword in the left Change {right foot forward, sword on the left side, point down}, and note when he cuts in against you from above, and step with your left foot toward his right, that is to your left, well out to the side; along with this stepping out, cut upwards with your long edge against his incoming cut, so that in cutting upwards you push your pommel through under your right arm, and thus catch his cut with crossed hands up in the air on your long-edge forte. Now when the swords connect and clash together, then jerk your pommel forcefully back out from under your right arm, so that through this jerking out the foible of your blade swings in behind his sword over his right arm, and diagonally back out through his face; and when you thus wind the Low Cut back out for a High Cut at his face, at the same time step out backwards with your left foot further toward the left side... cut thus through his face as you back-step. Now when this Low Cut is executed along with the step out and winding out quickly in a continuous motion, then it will proceed surely and well for you. From this Winding Cut many other fine devices are also derived and carried out.

This is a challenging sequence-- don't panic. The key is in the first upward stroke, to tuck your pommel under your right arm, as described. This places your point on line even as you parry his stroke, which brings you from the *nach* [after] and into the *vor* [before] in a single action. This ability to strike while defending is a defining characteristic of the German "Mastercuts".

Comments on Sources:

This class has drawn entirely from three texts: a short wrestling book by Fabian von Auerswald, published in Wittenburg in 1539, a compilation of sources (largely unattributed) compiled by the publisher Christian Egenollfs and published in Frankfurt in 1535 and reprinted by his heirs in 1568 and 1569, and a comprehensive text of German martial arts (including an adaptation to then-modern rapier play) by Joachim Meyer, published in Strassburg in 1570.

All three texts are written in High German, and principally represent civilian, sportive play: Meyer includes a variety of weapons used in German traditional sport fighting (the *fechtschule*), and von Auerswald refers in his prologue to his expected readers as “any so high or low in station”. Woodcuts in all three books depict civilian German dress of the time (though von Auerswald, who is personally depicted in all 85 plays in his book, is dressed in a somewhat antiquated style, being as he himself describes, “an eccentric old man”).

All three books clearly build upon an earlier tradition of martial arts: Meyer refers frequently to his predecessors, reiterates Lichtenauer’s *Merkvers*, and draws comparisons between sport fencing in his era and in earlier times. Egenollfs includes an entire section of text from the late 1400s, while von Auerswald includes several plays useful for a system of sport-wrestling used “in olden times”.

I chose these three texts primarily because they provided a useful framework for the structure of this class, and secondarily because they suit my own appreciation of the 16th century mindset.

Quotations from Meyer used here are translated by Dr. Jeffrey Forgeng, from the book [The Art of Combat](#), used here without permission. I strongly recommend purchasing Dr. Forgeng’s translation (ISBN #1403970920)

Quotations from Egenollfs and von Auerswald are translated by the presenter of this class (MKA James Klock).

A facsimile of von Auerswald’s text is available on the class presenter’s website, along with my own translation:

<http://www.klocktower.org/ringen/auerswald>

Facsimiles of the other texts used are available at the Freifechter website:

http://www.freifechter.de/cgi-bin/cowman/content/fechtbuecher/fechtbuecher1_2