

Training Skills, Acquiring Virtues

Moral Improvement in Early Printed Fencing Manuals

Abstract

The Paurenfeyndt (1516) and Egenolff (1530s) Fight Books are among the earliest printed manuals for martial arts in the German language area. The concepts they use to legitimise their art reveal a connection with Humanist ideals of moral education. In appropriating these ideas, however, they granted more agency to physical training. In doing so, they reflect contemporary discussions on whether virtue was an innate quality or an acquired skill.



Andre Paurenfeyndt, *Ergründung Ritterlicher Kunst der Fechterey*. Vienna: Hieronymus Vietor, 1516. E.1939.65.357 (Glasgow Museums) Source: Wiktenauer.com

Virtues and Skills

- Egenolff: the art of fighting moderates the ‘hitzigen, freydigen geylen’ (heated passions) of the young, making them ‘geschickter’ (able / artful) in their exploits. The ancients educated their youth in combat to develop a ‘gmüt’ (disposition) of a ‘geschickliche Institution’ (appropriate / discerning education) (p. 2r-2v; Bauer, 99-100)
- Paurenfeyndt: the art of fighting will cause ‘pehendigkait’ (quickness / artfulness / measure) to ‘entspringen’ (sprout) from the ‘zarten Jugent’ (soft youth) (p. 1)
- Pier Paolo Vergerio: the passions of the young burn hot, increasing their desires. Training their rationality and prudence allows them to resist these passions (1405; Kallendorf, 15; 19)
- Joachim Camerarius: the precise and disciplined style of a great artist like Albrecht Dürer flowed from his pious and modest character. Even the elegance of Dürer’s fingers reflected his measured mind (1532; Parshall, 13; 17)

Conclusion

Paurenfeyndt and Egenolff consider that since virtuous skills could be nurtured; virtue itself could be nurtured in physical training. This went against contemporary Humanist discourse, but is reflected in the concepts they use. Like the martial training they admire, these concepts united ideals of a quick body and a discerning mind.



Anonymous, *Der Alten Fechter gründtliche Kunst*. Frankfurt am Main, Christian Egenolff, 1530s. VD16 ZV 9515 Univ.-Bibl. Augsburg Source: Wiktenauer.com and Bauer, 2016

Referenced Works

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