Notes on the début of Daniel Heinsius as a Dutch poet

The results of the investigations by Breugelmans into the emblem collection Quaeris quid sit amor: are so important that they deserve to be viewed in a wider perspective and to be supplemented where possible. Breugelmans established that this collection (better known by the title Emblemata amatoria used from the third edition on) was not first published round about 1607, as had hitherto been assumed, but in 1601. Nor was it the Amsterdam bookseller Dirck Pietersz Pers who published this and the next two editions - his first involvement as a publisher was in 1607 - but in all probability his older colleague Hans Matthijsz. At all events the book was printed at Amsterdam by Herman de Buck. By closely comparing the states of the engravings Breugelmans succeeded in establishing a definitive order for the various editions and thus laid the foundation for the bibliography of the work. And lastly, Breugelmans confuted the theory put forward by Landwehr that the Dutch poems in this collection had been written not, as had always been supposed, by the Leiden classicist Daniel Heinsius but by the Amsterdam doctor Jacobus Viverius. Here Breugelmans agreed with the American Heinsius expert Paul Sellin, who had shown in detail how inadequately Landwehr had gone about his task. This fact was re-emphasized not long ago when A. K. H. Moerman drew attention to a passage in Viverius's work where he explicitly named Heinsius as the author of the poems.

Why is it so significant that we now, thanks to Breugelmans, know precisely when and where the Quaeris collection was first printed? The answer is that this little book was the very first to introduce a new form of emblematic print and poem, the erotic emblem, a young offshoot of an old stem. The child of more than one father, - platonism, hermetics, medieval symbolism could all lay claim to paternity - the emblem was born in the Italy of the late Renaissance. Although partly a society game, it was also in some respects a philosophy of life; one which taught men to understand the language of flowers and the dumb creation. Thanks in particular to Alciati's famous collection, emblems had made their way with astonishing speed throughout the whole of Europe. The odd thing is that the erotic emblems which rejuvenated and renewed the old genre should have arisen, not in the South but in the North,
in the Republic of the United Netherlands, the young state which owed its existence first and foremost to the Reformation which in those parts had elbowed out the Renaissance. It was from the Netherlands that this new genre made its way into the literature and art of the neighbouring cultures. So it is totally justified to maintain that the Quaeris collection forms a landmark. For Dutch literature, the appearance of Heinsius, the humanist, as a Dutch poet was, as we shall see, a significant event; for European literature of the Baroque period, this work paved the way for the triumphal entry of the erotic emblem.\(^1\)

Isolated examples of the erotic emblem are, it is true, to be found in the well-known collections by Alciati, Sambucus, Hadrianus Junius and others, but there was nothing in the nature of a whole series of emblematic prints and poems dealing solely with love. Interest in this special form first manifested itself among the humanists at the recently founded University of Leiden during the closing decades of the sixteenth century. Janus Douza the Elder, the famous governor of the University, historian and Latin poet, a man who was also on friendly terms with the poets of the ‘Pléiade’, had founded at Leiden a circle which in many respects resembled the company which had gathered round the wealthy patron Marcus Laurinus at Bruges.\(^2\) And in fact, to the extent that Douza’s ‘cénacle’ contained a number of persons from Laurinus’s circle who had moved to the North, one could almost regard it in a way as a continuation of the Bruges group. Originally Douza had been supported by Justus Lipsius, the ‘second Erasmus’, but in 1591 the latter moved to Louvain. From 1594 onwards the ‘grand old man’ was Josephus Justus Scaliger. Another member of the circle was the polymath Bonaventura Vulcanius. The spirit of libertinism which permeated Douza’s group was in marked contrast to the rigid Calvinism that dominated both the town and the university of Leiden. Van Gulik, the foremost authority on the Leiden period, is quite right in asserting that eroticism was part and parcel of its ambience.\(^3\) One has only to look, for example, at the numerous editions of classical poets like Theocritus, Catullus and Ovid published during these years by the professor-printer Raphelengius – Plantin’s son-in-law and the man responsible for carrying on the ‘Officina Plantiniana’ at Leiden. Or one has simply to note the passionate

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