MOENS, Petronella (1762–1843)

Petronella Moens was born in Cabarda, a small town in the province of Friesland, on 16 November 1762, and died in Utrecht on 4 January 1843. At the age of four she suffered from a children’s disease, which made her practically blind. In spite of her blindness she was very well educated by her father, the clergyman Petrus Moens, who read aloud to her the works of contemporary Dutch writers.

Later she hired personal assistants to read aloud and write down texts for her. This enabled her to become one of the most productive female authors in the Dutch Republic.

She presented her ideas to the public in an appealing and accessible way and covered nearly all genres of literature: her impressive oeuvre contains poems, essays, novels, children’s books, magazines and almanacs.

Today, Moens is remembered primarily as a literary author. Her philosophical relevance lies in the fact that she was a typical advocate of the mainstream moderate Enlightenment, and that she paid special attention to the emancipation of women and slaves. Of special interest are her contributions to the periodical press. Together with the writer and politician Bernardus Bosch (1746–1803) she edited at least five periodicals during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, of which De Menschenvriend (1788–97) and De Leerzame Praat-al (1790–92) were the most widely read. After the annexation by France and again in 1815 under King William I, Middelburg was given permission to establish an Atheneum, which the city would have to pay for, but such an institute was never realised.

SOURCES

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MISSY, Jean Rouset de, see Rouset
MOLINAUS, Petrus (1568–1658)

Petrus Molinaeus (Pierre du Moulin) was a Huguenot theologian and the most famous preacher of his time in France. His many works (about one hundred books and pamphlets) are for the greater part discussions with Roman Catholics and Armenians, but he also wrote on purely philosophical matters.

Molinaeus was born in 1568 in Baby en Venin, near Montes. He narrowly escaped the massacre of St Bartholomew’s Day. He studied theology in Sedan. At the age of eighteen he wished to continue his studies in Paris. However, the civil wars prevented him from doing so, and Peter went to England. There he obtained the degree of doctor of theology. Though he was invited in 1592 to become a preacher in a church in Paris, he chose to continue his academic career, and accepted a post at the University of Leiden. At first he was a lecturer in languages. In 1593 he was appointed Professor extraordinarius of logic; somewhat later he also taught physics. Hugo Grothus was among his students.

In 1596 he returned to France, where he became a preacher in Paris. In 1617 he was appointed by the council of Vitré as representative of the French church at the Synod of Dordrecht. However, the King of France prevented him from taking up this appointment, because of his contacts with the King of England. During the Dordrecht Synod, Molinaeus proposed a plan to compose a confession that could serve as a common basis for the Reformed, Lutheran, and Remonstrant churches. The proposal was not successful.

In 1622 Molinaeus left Paris again, to become professor of theology in Sedan and preacher of the Reformed Church. He continued to perform these functions with short interruptions until his death.

The Elementa Logica was published for the first time in 1596. It appeared in thirteen editions. The book was translated into Dutch, French and English. Molinaeus follows Aristotle’s Organon closely. With respect to ‘invention’, i.e. the finding of arguments, for example, he follows Aristotle’s theory and is more interested in the structure of the arguments itself than in the discovery of arguments. According to Molinaeus philosophy is the knowledge of human and divine things, obtainable by the human mind. These things he calls in accordance with tradition the first notions. The instrumental art of logic, however, deals with second intentions, taken to be the ‘effects’ of first intentions. The use of logic is to create new general knowledge, for our senses have only individuals as their objects. Once we have become conscious of their universality and the mind perceives these things as universal, it forms first intentions (genus, ‘species’, etc.). With their help we are able to know infinitely many other things belonging to the universals. In his theory on the categories, Molinaeus goes beyond Aristotle, calling second substances (for instance ‘man’ as species) formal parts of the essence of the first substance. First substances he considers to be the material parts of the second substances.

The subject matter of logic is the syllogism. In line with Zabarella (1533–89), Molinaeus discusses order and method in an appendix to demonstration. It should be remembered that Zabarella’s Opera omnia had been published in Leiden in 1594. Order is defined as the position by the intellect of parts of a discipline, either to decorate speech, or to avoid confusion. Here, with Zabarella’s help, Molinaeus takes the Thomistic view of Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607) who took order to be a representation of the structure of being. Moreover, order generates distinct knowledge. Method, however, is the instrument allowing the intellect to arrive at what was previously unknown. There is a twofold order in science, namely the order of composition, starting with the simplest things, and the order of resolution, beginning with the complex things in nature, and ending with simple things. Theoretical sciences proceed by composition, the arts in general and practical sciences by resolution. For example, in mathematics one starts with unity, point, etc., to end at composite figures. In the arts in general and in the practical sciences the procedure is reversed. Here we start with the end, and end with the simplest things. For instance, in ethics one starts an investigation with some individual good, and an architect starts his art by studying a particular house. Molinaeus outlines the following contradiction: in general, the arts start from the end, but in the instrumental arts, namely logic and grammar, the elements are taught first,