QUARLES AND REICHWEIN:
A STUDY OF CONTEMPLATIVE THEORES AND IMAGERY
IN THE ELEKINES AND THREOPHILA

by

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ABSTRACT

The Emblemes (1635) of Francis Quarles and the epic Theophila by his younger friend Edward Benloe provide the student of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry of devotion with useful models of contemplative themes and imagery. Their didactic treatment of a popular devotional theme—the soul's progress from terrestrial to divine love—is related to patristic and medieval mystical theology and to Renaissance neo-Platonism. The marked influence of St. Augustine can be observed in the poets' adoption of stylistic variety, visual and verbal devices which heighten the reader's spiritual perception, and the 'roving' search for God through mental prayer.

The concept of man's assimilation to God by virtue of his imitation of divinity is an important premise of the spiritual pilgrimage undertaken by the two protagonists, the Anima-figure and Theophila. In seeking to attain godliness they re-enact the threefold mystical way (of purgation, illumination and union) expounded by St. Augustine and the mystical theologians of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Both poets take upon themselves the role of awakening the reader to an awareness of his mortal condition and to the industrious pursuit of godliness. Both promote the purification of the soul of its worldly and self-interest.

The illuminative plateau of the mystical way suggests the wider theological importance of vision in the meditative process and as the sumnum bonum of Christianity. In the Emblemes and Theophila the neo-Platonic Deity of Light and Fire is the source of much metaphysical imagery as it is applied to the soul's journey. For both poets the superluminary Deity must supersede the restricted light of human reason just as the latter excels the lesser glow of the senses. The portrayal of the illuminative stage in Theophila demonstrates the author's indebtedness to the Christian Platonist tradition. In describing the progress of the soul from illumination to pure contemplation of God, Benloe provides the doctrine of ignorance or via negativa of St. Augustine.
the pseudo-Dionysius and Nicholas of Cusa. The final vision emphasizes the metaphysical relationship between Trinity and Unity (so important to the contemplative act itself) which is symbolized by the Person of Christ who conveys Divine Love to the Many and acts as the Mediator of man’s salvation.

The final stage of union with God through love dramatizes the antagonism of both Quarles and Benlowes towards the secular love conceits and goals of the Petrarchan sonneteers. But it also reveals the religious poet’s necessary recourse to such imagery as the nearest analogy by which the divine experience can be conveyed. In this stage—and indeed throughout the contemplative journey—the imagery of fire is employed to depict the movement of the pneumatic soul of man towards the immaterial Fire of Deity. The imagery of spiritual fire as unitive agent is frequently associated by both poets with various alchemical themes such as the transformation of man from imperfect metal into gold and the projection of God into creation by means of the Word and, equally important to the poet, by means of the medium of sacred verse. Benlowes, for example, sees his epic as an important link in the divine plan of spiritual regeneration.

Quarles’ popularity was more enduring and widespread than that of his younger friend. His timely devotional guidebook in English combined an attractive format, a pious subject which encompassed both puritan asceticism and the mystical lyricism of the Canticles, and a dramatic style. The simplicity, vividness and occasional humour of Quarles’ poetry make it enjoyable if not inspiring literature. Benlowes, on the other hand, buries his undoubted metaphysical wit in a deluge of mystical, hyperbolical and elaborate expression. To this metaphysical ‘excess’ is added the pedantic ingenuity and convoluted metrics which create a final impression of artificiality and hollow rhetoric. Benlowes’ fondness for imitation not merely of the divine attributes but also of the bold conceits and phrases of his fellow poets also reinforces the note of superficiality. While both Quarles and Benlowes have been

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allotted an accurately modest status among the metaphysical poets, they
do nevertheless provide a very useful guide, on the one hand, to a
popular and simplistic, and on the other, to an abstruse and esoteric,
treatment of contemporary devotional themes.
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The subject of the present study is two minor works of the metaphysical school, the Emblemes (London, 1635)\textsuperscript{1} by Francis Quarles and the epic Theophila (London, 1652)\textsuperscript{2} by Edward Benlowes, the young friend of Quarles and patron of a number of contemporary writers.\textsuperscript{3} Both poems are rather odd examples of the writings of the metaphysical school, the former by virtue of its notorious popularity amongst 'the vulgar' and the latter by its metaphysical excesses. The interest in the poems taken together is the way in which they provide the student of religious metaphysical poetry with a comprehensive treatment of the themes and imagery of the via contemplativa which proved so attractive to the period as a whole.

The Emblemes were modelled on the popular continental vogue which combined "simple allegorical designs" with "an explanatory

\textsuperscript{1} All subsequent references to the Emblemes pertain to the Bodleian Library original edition, Douce Q.411.

\textsuperscript{2} All subsequent references to Theophila pertain to the Bodleian Library original edition, Douce B. 799. The extended title is: Theophila, or love's sacrifice. A divine poem. Written by E.B. ... Several parts thereof set to fit aires by ... J. Jenkins.

\textsuperscript{3} Benlowes' recent biographer lists the following as probable recipients of his largesse: Francis Quarles, Phineas Fletcher, John Ogilby, Payne Fisher, Sir William D'Avenant, Thomas Fuller, James Howell, Ralph Winterton, and John Sictor. Harold Jenkins, Edward Benlowes (1602-1676): Biography of a Minor Poet (London, 1952), passim.
motto ... destined to teach in an intuitive form a moral truth." Quarles took his engravings and general format from two Jesuit sources, Herman Hugo's Pia Desideria (Antwerp, 1624) and the anonymous Typus mundi (Antwerp, 1627). The two were combined in Quarles' version so as to present the latter plates in Books I and II, and the former in Books III to V. The production proved to be a best-seller in an age of great metaphysical and devotional poetry. "While Herbert was kindling in the minds of poets and platonists," noted Beachcroft, "Quarles' Emblems were enjoying a robust gregarious life, 'a wonderful veneration among the vulgar', as Philips, Milton's nephew, called it." A comment by Horace Walpole indicated how even John Milton's fame was eclipsed "till the world had done admiring Quarles." From the time of the original publication in 1635 until the turn of the century, the Emblemes went through twelve editions.

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5 The full titles are: Pia Desideria Emblematica Elerciis et Affectibus SS Patrum illustratae et Typus mundi in quo ejus calamitates et pericula nec non divini, humanique amoris animathia, emblematicae pronuntiatur a RR. C.S.I.A.


8 Gordon S. Haight, "The Sources of Quarles's Emblems," The Library, 4th Series, XVI (September, 1935), 188.
Douglas Bush described it as "the most popular book of verse of the seventeenth century" (p. 89). Some critics have attributed this quantitative distinction to factors outside the poetry itself. Pope, for example, accurately pointed to the attractions of its visual form ("Or where the pictures for the page atone, / And Quarles is saved by beauties not his own."). Other critics have noted the timely appearance of Quarles' popular guidebook to devotion in conjunction with a national period of intense moral self-scrutiny and interest in theological doctrines. The pleasing countenance of the Emblems in this sense merely enhanced the didactic piety of the work.

There were, however, reasons for the popularity of the work more directly related to its metaphysical style and content. The "theological wit" of the greater metaphysical poets added a savoury element to Quarles' characteristic "dark vision." The persuasive and vivid metaphorical expression common to the school of Donne was modified by Quarles' simple phraseology and colloquial manner in such a way that his verse suggested the lyricism of Housman rather than the 'strong-lined' poetry of Donne. An excerpt from Emblem II.10 illustrates Quarles' blend of homely phrase and melancholic theme:

10 Beachcroft, p. 81.
11 Ibid., p. 80.
12 Bush, p. 90.
Fond youth, go build thy hopes on better grounds:
The soule that vainly founds
Her Ioyes upon this world, but feeds on empty sounds:

Or what are Men, but puffs of dying breath,
Reviv'd with living death?
Fond lad, O build thy hopes on surer grounds
Then what dull flesh propounds;
Trust not this hollow world, shee's empty: Mark;
she sounds.

(p. 102)

Beachcroft rightly suggests that Quarles' forte lies in the natural emphasis and rhythm given to carefully selected words. "The flow of unexpected and rather odd thoughts and expressions from Quarles' pen seems convincingly ready and unforced." (p. 80).

By contrast with the striking lucidity of the Emblemes, Theopilia is a superb example of metaphysical poetry gone to seed. It threatens to outdo the learnedness and argumentative wit of Donne's verse as well as the "glowing intensity" of Crashaw and the baroque school of devotional poetry. Tightly knit by elaborate conceits, clever word and visual games, and hyperbolic ejaculations, Theophilus is an explosive poetic bundle which demonstrates, according to George Williamson, just "what could happen to Metaphysical poetry when it packed all of its extravagance into one mind." 14

The complimentary verse of D'Avenant, John Hall, Jeremy Collier and Walter Montague merely highlighted the discrepancy between Benlowes' assumed role of vatis and his subsequent rapid fall from literary fame. Anthony a Wood remarked cryptically in 1691 that Benlowes was "Much noted in his time, but since not, for the art and faculty of poetry." 15


14 Ibid., p. 176.

15 Anthony a Wood, Fasti Oxonienses... (London, 1691), ii., 358.
In his "Character of a Small Poet" Samuel Butler's attack on Benlowes further reduced the impact of Theophilus on later readers, perhaps even beyond its proper scale.

Butler rightly defined Benlowes' status as a second-rate poet in terms of the latter's absorptive use of source-material, frequently with little or no alteration from the original: "whatever he lights upon either in Books, or Company, he makes bold with as his own."16

In the current academic world, in other words, Benlowes would fail on the ground of plagiarism alone. And yet what is interesting about Benlowes as a representative of a passing phase in English literature is that even in this vice (one among many poetic faults) he follows naturally the precepts laid down by Owen Felltham's popular meditative guide, the Resolves. There Felltham defends the practice of "quoting without naming one's authors" as a literary technique appropriate to gentlemen, for "to do otherwise would be 'for a Gentleman . . . a little pedanticall'."17

Benlowes, alas, has also to answer for his pedantry. But the crux of his failure as a poet lies to a great extent in his gentlemanly approach to the art. He is rather more the cultured virtuoso of the Renaissance than he is a poet. His pen is nostalgically engaged in revivifying a decaying world by injecting it with the 'old philosophy' in an exalted theological poetic cultivated by occultists of the Italian Renaissance. In Theophilus the stylistic peculiarities of the seventeenth-century concettisti and theological writers of the neo-Platonic school merge with the poet's grandiose religious and poetic designs to create the baroque pearl18 so representative of the artistic emphasis of the age. Butler's neoclassical perspective in the following

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passage emphasises the striking contrast between the new poetic values and those represented in Benlowes' epic:

There is no Feat of Activity, nor Cymbal of Wit, that ever was performed by Man, from him that vaults on Pegasus, to him that tumbles through the Hoop of an Anagram, but Benlowes has got the Mastery in it, whether it be high-rope Wit, or low-rope Wit. He has all Sorts of Echoes, Rebus's, Chronogramms, &c. besides Carvichets, Clenchets, and Quiroles—As for Altars and Pyramids in Poetry, he has out-done all Men that way; for he has made a Gridiron, and a Frying-Pan in Verse, that, beside the Likeness in Shape, the very Tone and Sound of the Words did perfectly represent the Noise, that is made by those Utensils... 19

While Theophila's occasional shaped verses suggest an aesthetic affinity with Herbert's Temple, the visual splendours of the engravings reinforce the nature of the poet's debt to the art of the Italian Renaissance. 20 Theophila is depicted as a youthful mater dolorosa, her eyes directed heavenwards as if in a trance, her well-endowed figure enveloped in flowing garments. From the radiant clouds about the Sun winged angels descend to crown the heroine—and later the poet himself. Here too are portrayed geometrical representations of the Godhead, the heavenly host seated amongst billowing clouds, sinners cascading down to the fiery abyss.

The background of theological and stylistic concepts which bear on the visual emphasis in the Emblemata and in Theophila is an important aspect of the present study. Both works take for their central theme the way in which the loving soul prepares itself for the visio Dei which might be experienced imperfectly during man's corporal existence and only in its full glory after the release of the soul from its imprisoning cell. The path of the soul on this rigorous journey is

19 Waller edn., p. 53.

20 See Jenkins, pp. 48-55.
the meditative way employed by the mystical theologians. The poets' depiction of Anima and her relationship with the Divine Cupid reveals the considerable influence of St. Augustine, the philosopher-divine whose writings permeated both Catholic and Calvinist theology in the seventeenth century. St. Augustine's theories of Christian oratory also provide an aesthetic basis for the Emblemata and Theophila. The early Father's praise of biblical simplicity on the one hand and of rich allegorical symbolism on the other is manifested in the two stylistic approaches which distinguish the poetry of Quarles and Benlowes.

St. Augustine's writings were highly valued by Ficino and the Italian neo-Platonists for their Platonic content. In Theophila traces of the metaphysical doctrines which entered mystical theology from Augustine's early Greek sources may be perceived. As discussed below, Theophila is constructed in such a way as to embody the triadic principles which the Christian meditative tradition inherited from the early neo-Platonists. The final chapters of this study will focus on the imagery of illumination and union which entered the metaphysical poetry of Quarles and Benlowes through the theological poetic of medieval and Renaissance mystical theologians.

The Emblemata and Theophila represent two varying degrees of Christian neo-Platonism which are described by Maren-Sofie Rustvig in her article "Images of Perfection". "It is," she writes,

a fairly simple matter to prove that Augustine's Christianized version of Platonic thought influenced not only the Middle Ages but also the Renaissance, so that it may be wiser to refer to Renaissance syncretism rather than Renaissance Neoplatonism whenever the reference is to works like Pico's Heptaplus or Ficino's Theologia Platonica. . . .

The many syncretistic accounts of creation published during the Renaissance illuminate themes and images of frequent occurrence in English poetry from Spenser to Milton, especially images of perfection. 21

In the *Emblemes* Quarles weaves the emblems and imagery which evolved out of Augustinian and neo-Platonic thought into a poetic expression which focuses on meditative and biblical themes, and in particular on the personal struggles and conflicts of the individual soul. In *Theophila* the background to the experience of the God-loving soul is expanded and elaborated with a network of concepts which belies a more marked affinity with the semi-occult themes of the 'old philosophy'.

In both poems the doctrine of universal correspondences underlies such hierarchical relationships as, for example, that between bodily passion, the soul's intellective and creative fire, the cosmic sun and the supreme Divine Fire of God. The continuing influence of the Renaissance world-view on mid-century minor poets like Quarles and Benlowes lends support to Carré's statement that the "philosophy that 'pretendeth to discover' that correspondence or concatenation which is between the superior globe and the inferior' . . . continued to absorb many thoughtful persons during and after Bacon's day." Where Benlowes departs to some extent from Quarles' more orthodox adaptation of such a worldview is in his eagerness to expound many of the syncretistic features outlined by Carré as belonging to the semi-occult fringe of the old philosophy:

In the writings of these illuminati an elaborate tissue of allegory was woven round the Worlds of nature and of spirit. A plethora of mystical explanations were drawn from the biblical narratives, especially from the story of the creation of Adam in Genesis; and a mass of occult cosmology was culled from the hermetic books and from the Cabbala. . . . The opposing principles of light and darkness . . . play an important role in the scheme of things. The mind is light, the body darkness. Every feature of the heavens and the earth has its counterpart in the body and mind of man, for God has made two images of Himself, the world and man. The analogies between the macrocosm and the microcosm are endlessly drawn out. The claims of astrology, alchemy, and sympathetic magic are pressed at every point; for all things are permeated with secret affinities and antipathies. As regards method, the old symbolism of numbers, of geometrical forms, and of letters, is lavishly employed.

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23 Ibid., pp. 232-233.
Francis Quarles (1592-1644) and Edward Benlowes (1602-1676) were close personal friends, and their deep friendship is witnessed in the Dedication as well as in two engravings of the Emblematic. 24 "My deare Friend," writes the elder poet, "You have put the Theorboe into my hand; and I have playd: You gave the Musician the first encouragement; the Musicke returnes to you for Patronage." Beyond the mutual fondness for music and the arts and the financial largesse of Benlowes cited by Quarles in his Dedication, the two poets shared a common educational and social background. Both were born of Essex gentry; and though a decade separated the two poets, they had each been educated at Cambridge—Quarles at Christ's College and Benlowes at St. John's—and had spent a year at Lincoln's Inn. In his biography of Benlowes Harold Jenkins records the "strong local tradition that Quarles actually composed the Emblemata at Brent Hall [in Finchingfield, site of the Benlowes' family manor], where a path beside an old wall in the garden is still pointed out as his favourite walk while doing so." 25

The friendship between Quarles and Benlowes also included Phineas Fletcher (1582-1650), whose poem The Purple Island (1633) was greatly admired by Benlowes. The poetic kinship with Fletcher is a significant one, for Theophilia reflects a similar interest in allegory, belaboured correspondences and didactic scheme, and pseudo-scientific themes. 26 The Christian Platonistic poetry of Phineas' father, Giles Fletcher, as well as the earlier poetry of Du Bartas and Spenser,

24 The engravings are those accompanying Emblem V.6 and the Invocation to Book I, in which the globe is marked by their residences (Foxwell and Finchingfield, respectively).

25 Jenkins, p. 77.

26 See Jenkins, pp. 69-70. Benlowes' alchemical imagery will be discussed in Chapter IV. The Preface carefully maps out the astronomical ratios and distances between earth and superluminary levels of the cosmos, thus reminding the reader of Benlowes' friendship with Alexander Ross, a controversial and conservative virtuoso in science whose astronomical publications challenged the theories of the new philosophy.
were also greatly esteemed by Benlowes. The works of the former two poets undoubtedly reinforced Benlowes' Platonic and baroque inclinations.

Neither Quarles nor Benlowes penetrated the literary circles of the court, although their works were at times addressed to royalty and Benlowes sought royal recognition for his friend's work.\textsuperscript{27} Quarles attained a modest reputation during the 1620's with his Argalus and Parthenic, and biblical narratives; and the Divine Fancies or devotional meditations of 1632 were well received. He wrote a number of prose tractates in the early 1640's, but the Emblemes, frequently combined with the Hieroglyphiques of the Life of Man after the latter had appeared in 1638, proved to be the mainstay of his popularity.

Both men evinced by their publications an overwhelming concern with devotional topics embodied in a didactic form. Quarles' Enchiridion (1640-1) again dealt with religious precepts, this time in prose. Apart from a few complimentary verses and onomia, Benlowes also concentrated on religious themes. One of his early works combining poetry and prose was the Sphinx Theologica. This consisted of a series of meditations accompanied, like the Emblemes, with biblical texts. A volume of devotional poetry followed Theophrile and was entitled Maria Coelestis (1673). Jenkins' comment reveals that the later volume on miracles was as otherworldly and wondrously contrived as his epic:

The discovery of God's mysterious order made one write in paradox; and to do so was to honour God by imitation. In such a poet as Benlowes this 'metaphysical' method survived well into the Restoration. By now Hobbes and Newton had exalted

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\textsuperscript{27} His "Quarles" was introduced by a poem to Charles I, and touched on the misfortune that his friend's valuable services were as yet unrewarded (Jenkins, p. 80). Quarles' Divine Poems (1633) was also addressed to the King.
reason and natural law; but Benlowes still retained
the earlier mind which, instead of looking for a
lucid system of things, thrilled to a mystery
inexplicable on earth. (p. 295)

The later cantos of Theophila reveal Benlowes' fondness for
the life of rural retirement and meditation, in which the miracles
of creation constitute for the devotional poet an earthly Paradise:

This the Spring-Garden to spiritual Eyes,
Which fragrant Scent of Gums out-vies;
Three Kings had thence their triple mystick Sacrifice.

O, happier Walks, where CHRIST, and none beside
Is Journeys end; and May, and Guide!
Where from the humble Edges are greatest Heights
decory'd.

(XIII, xxiii-xxiv, p. 239)

In Canto XIII Benlowes attributes in part his devotion to "SCRIPTURIA" and the contemplative life to an amorous mishance of his youth.

(T' have been affected by a Virgin Hair,
Rich, young, and chest, wise, good, and fair,
Was once his first Delight, but ERAV'N restrain'd
that Care!

(xxviii, p. 239)

This Petrarchan motif is apparently sublimated in the poet's devotion to the saintly ways of Theopila, and may also account for his Platonic aloofness to the charms of the fair sex. Thus he continues:

... A high'r Love's here design'd;
Fit in each Breast to be ensrin'd;
Bright Apparel do admit no Sex, nor does the Minde. (xxx, p. 239)

Quarles was no such abstainer; but he did share his friend's disapproval of wanton city ways and dedication rather to the contemplative modus vivandi. Indeed the religious affinities between both poets can best be observed in terms of their relationship to the continental meditative tradition.

Amidst the religious tumults of the age Quarles and Benlows stood firm against what the former described as the "two vices, Popery and Separatisme." Each arrived at his uneasy compliance with the High Anglican faith by the contrasting routes of Puritanism and Catholicism respectively. But their adherence to the Church of England and the monarchy as the rightful modus operandi remained a strong bond between them.29 Quarles summarises their mutual position in his only play, an allegorical "Comedie" entitled The Virgin Widow (1640). In Act V, Dr. Artesio is called upon to assist Lady Albion, who is "much troubled in her head, and when the fit takes her, 'she speaks never a word of sense: she talks of nothing but Bishops, and Petitions.'" He concludes that she is beset by "some bad blood in her veins," which requires cautious treatment, for "if a veine be once opened, the best blood in her body may chance to pass too, which she can hardly spare, without palpable danger." Lady Temple, it transpires, is similarly plagued, in her case by a "Lethargie"--"a Chronicall disease, and time must cure it." "But let her know," warns Quarles via Dr. Artesio,

that so long as she entertains this rude rabble of unsanctified Mechanicks, Shee can never prosper in her health. Till she banish them, there will be no roome for me. . . . Let her fasting be frequent, and her Prayers, Common.30

While Quarles in the orthodox fashion denounces the activities of the extreme separatist elements in the Puritan ranks, there is nevertheless a strong Calvinistic flavour to his piety. His works display a marked aversion to those social activities against which

29 Both poets paid dearly for their royalist position. See Gordon S. Haight, "Francis Quarles in the Civil War," RES, 12, No.46 (April, 1936) and Jenkins, Chapter 21, "End of the Landed Gentleman."

30 Haight, ibid., pp. 148-151.
the Puritans inveighed, to "plays on Sunday . . . drinking, and . . . the ribald talk of the tavern." Grosart writes that this ascetic tendency derives from the poet's probable early tutoring by the local chaplain, a man renowned as a member "of the old stock of 'godly Puritans'" (p. xv). Indeed, during his adult years Quarles associated with "the better class of Puritans". Gordon Haight notes that the neighbouring Barrington family, influential Parliamentarians, maintained financial and social relations with the poet. Quarles also delivered his translations of the Psalms to the New England Puritan, John Cotton, "for his approbation."32

To a great extent it was this deep piety in Quarles' writing which endeared him to a wide readership. The moralistic age apparently identified with his persistent theme of the "wretchedness of man's earthly existence." This aspect of Quarles' temperament is appropriately represented in his first work, a macabre Feast for Horaces. Fuller, for one, relished the way in which Quarles could visualize both the external and the inner condition of fallen man: "His verses on Job are done to the life, so that the reader may see his sores, and through them the anguish of his soul."34

This austere note is counterbalanced by an idealism which is suggested by Fuller's further comment that Quarles "had a mind biased to devotion. Had he been contemporary with Plato (that great back-friend to poets), he would not only have allowed him to live, but advanced him to an office in his commonwealth." (I, 519). This blend of worldly renunciation with otherworldly aspiration is evident in

31 Haight, "Francis Quarles . . .," p. 147.

32 Ibid., pp. 147-8.


the **Emblemes**. From the grotesque portraits and astringent commentary of the early *Typus Mundi* plates the poem progresses to the final ecstatic scenes of divine love. The erotic sensibility and mystical lyricism of the *Canticles* and *Psalms* figure prominently in the later emblems.

Benlowes lived to experience the upheaval of the Civil War and in *Theophila* he attacked the "Protestants" who threatened to destroy the fabric of what he considered the heart of Christian worship. A lengthy passage in Canto III deplores the war-torn plight of the nation. There Benlowes recounts with dismay the disrespect of the "Sons of Thunder" and "rudely fierce" "Presters" for the High Anglican Sacraments ("LORD, they, through faithlesse Dreams, the Feast disown / Of thy SONS Incarnation!"). The production of *Theophila* in the years of the Puritan ascendancy owed much to the poet's belief that a metrical discourse on love would have a greater impact on the public than the fear-instilling tactics of the Non-conformists. He expresses his hope that "Love may Them lead by Verse, whom Sermons fright; Bring Them, where Faith comes not, into Heav'ne Light." (IX, 17., p. 129).

Benlowes' sympathies, however, could not rest entirely within the framework of the orthodox Anglican faith. While he had abandoned the Catholic faith of his early years, the need for an intense and artistic component in religion remained. In Canto I he slights the worldly hierarchies of the Church of England in favour of a purer and more mystical worship:

> Lambeth was Oxforde Whetstone: Yet above 
> Preferments Pinnacle they move, 
> Who string the Universe, and bracelet It for LOVE.

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35 Benlowes' grandmother was a recusant and his father renowned as "'a learned Papist.'" (Jenkins, pp. 16-17). During the poet's period of travel on the Continent (1627-1630), two younger brothers were students at the Jesuit college in Douai (Jenkins, p. 44). He renounced Catholicism soon after his return to England (p. 56).
Virtues magnifick Orb inflames their Zeal;
By high-rais'd ANTHEMS Plagues they heal;
(I, lx-lxi, p. 9)

Whose Spells make Enochs walk with THEE; withhold
'Corruption, and translate e're old:
All Vaticans are dross; THIS, Magisterial Gold.
(I, xciii, p. 13)

Of the orders of saints and Apostles encountered by the poet in his contemplative journey in Canto VI, three are singled out for particular esteem—St. John, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. Augustine. These figures embody for the poet the central tenets of his epic theme of divine love. Along with St. Paul and with the Virgin Mother and the Psalmist heralded in Canto VI, this gathering provides the focus of Benlowes' religious inspiration. It encompasses two central aspects of Renaissance syncretism: the exhilarated concept of "divine AMOUR" (VI, xiii, p. 83) and the revival of interest in the apostolic and patristic sources of the Christian faith.

The influence of the early Christian poets and writers has been detected in both works. 36 Quarles adopts the static personifications of the medieval allegorical tradition, enlivening them by a characteristically witty turn of phrase. In his penultimate Emblem, for example, Quarles lists those displeasing human attributes which are absent in the Heavenly Kingdom:

There, time is swallow'd with Eternity;
Wry-mouth'd disdain, and corner-haunting lust,
And trey-fac'd Fraud; and beetle-brow'd Distrust;
Soule-bogling Rage; and trouble-state sedition;
And giddy doubt, and goggle-eye'd suspicion;
And lumpish sorrow, and degenerous fear,
Are banisht thence, and death's a stranger there:

(V.14, p. 298)

Roditi finds in Theophila "a blend of Renaissance Jesuit or almost macaronic Latin and mediaeval abstraction with paradoxes, antitheses, puns, and other tropes . . ." (p. 345). Benlowes owes something of the dramatic flavour of Theophila as well to early Christian sources, as his sub-title "Pneumato-sarco-nachia" suggests. An excerpt from Prudentius' Psychomachia ("The Fight for Mankind") reveals the striking similarity between the two works in their heady mixture of emotive and luxurious imagery:

Savage war rages hotly, rages within our bones, and man's two-sided nature is in an uproar of rebellion; for the flesh that was formed of clay bears down upon the spirit, but again the spirit that issued from the pure breath of God is hot within the dark prison-house of the heart, and even in its close bondage rejects the body's filth. Light and darkness with their opposing spirits are at war, and our two-fold being inspires pervers at variance with each other, until Christ our God comes to our aid, orders all the jewels of the virtues in a pure setting, and where sin formerly reigned builds the golden courts of his temple, creating for the soul, out of the trial of its conduct, ornaments for rich Wisdom to find delight in as she reigns for ever on her beauteous throne. 37

The adoption by both poets of a Christian rather than the mythological Muse of classical literature reflects a further humanistic interest in the primal authorities of the Christian tradition. Thus Quarles exhorts his soul to

Invoke no Muse; let heav'n be thy Apollo: And let his sacred Influences hallow Thy high-bre'd Straynes; Let his full beames inspire Thy ravisht braines with more heroick fire; . . .

("The Invocation," p.1)

Fuller records his approval of the way in which Quarles' poetry abjures the "profaneness, wantonness, and satiricalness" of secular

verse and yet retains a lofty vision and expression "as if he has
drank of Jordan instead of Helicon, and slept on Mount Olivet for his
Parnassus" (p. 519). Benlowes also identifies the Muse of devotional
poetry with the Holy Spirit, for "The pious Muse courts HEAV'N; when
highest Things / She soars for, still She craves, BLES'T LOVE, thy
Wings!" (IX, 15, p. 129). Later in the same canto he pleads,
"Shade me, O LORD! I seek not Virgil's Tree;/ Hence, Springs profane;
Glide, Siloam, by me!" (IX, 19, p. 131). In affirmation of this
substitution of superior Christian themes for classical ones, Benlowes
in "The Author's Design" actually parodies the great Virgilian epic
to suggest the ultimate glory of his subject:

OF CHRIST, and of the SFOUSES Sighs, I sing,
And of the Joyses that from Those Auros spring,
The World ne'er knew; Of her Souls mystick Sense,
And of her Heavenly Zeal.

Quarles retains the patristic textual accompaniments which his
predecessor Hugo had included in the Fia Desideria emblems, and
extends this format to include the Typus mundi section as well. In
"The Sources of Quarles's Emblems," Gordon Haight associates this
interest in patristic authorities with the humanist tendencies of
the English Protestants.

At the time of the Reformation few men in England had
read more than scraps of the Fathers quoted in Sacretals
and other ecclesiastical writings. But after the Counter
Reformation had begun its work, patristic study was serious-
ly undertaken by Englishmen, who, though they recognized
only the Bible as authority in religious matters, found it
expedient to confute the claims of a Catholic out of his
own favourite books. Quarles was one who knew their value.
Dr. Love, the Vice-chancellor of Cambridge, commended the
Emblems 'By Fathers, beckt; by Holy Writ, led on,' and
Benlowes in Quarles declared that the reader of the book
walks through a garden of poets and Fathers like a bee
through flowery fields. 38
For the *Typus Mundi* emblems, Quarles selects his textual commentaries from the patristic anthology by Thomas Hibernicus entitled *Flores Doctorum* (1306). The combined group of prose passages reveals the dominant status of medieval mystical theologians, including St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Bonaventure, as well as the major influence of St. Augustine.

In the contemplative tradition established in its Christian form by St. Augustine may be found the influences which determine the combination in Quarles' and Benlowes' poetry of an ascetic rejection of worldly pursuits with an evocation of the lyrical strains of Catholic mysticism. Their poetry illustrates that for these minor poets too, as Mertz observes of the major devotional poets, "[t] he realm of meditation is broad enough to hold Jesuit and Puritan, Donne and Milton, the baroque extravagance of Crashaw and the delicate restraint of Herbert." 39 The writings of Augustine exercise an influence on Quarles and Benlowes which extends beyond the contemplative method itself to include the wider metaphysical issues treated by Benlowes in *Theophila* and a number of stylistic features peculiar to both poets.

Mertz states that "the Augustinian mode of meditation was still highly influential in the seventeenth century, through the widespread circulation of the works of Augustine and his followers." 40 What is important in relation to Quarles and Benlowes is the link which Augustine's writings demonstrate between neo-Platonic concepts of the soul's ascent to God and the later mystical theology of Christianity.

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It was Augustine's role, by infusing Christian vitality into the Neoplatonic theories on the purification of the soul, to introduce into Western asceticism, even before the time of the pseudo-Platonist, the whole collection of images and formulas which still nourish our ascetical literature. Thus mystical theology owes to him the distinction of the three great stages in the ascent of our soul to God which are called the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways or lives.41

This via contemplative is explicitly adopted by Benlowes in his "Summary of the Poem" as the path by which Theophila attains "an eminent Degree of PERFECTION in the Intellectual." (p.16). The God-loving soul ascends to her Beloved, he writes, "by three Waves, which Divines call the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive; She is happily led into the Disquisition of Sin by Ken; of Suffering by CHRIST as SPONSOR; of Salvation, by Him as REDEEMER." (p. 15). This threefold approach is associated by Benlowes with the further triadic schema of St. Paul—faith, hope and charity.

The Emblemes, contrary to Eleanor James' theory that "there is no consistent thread of story told by Quarles' emblem poems,"42 progress by a similar route to the vision of the City of God and 'spiritual betrothal' with Christ. The subject-matter of the Typus mundi engravings is the contemptus mundi whence the contemplative begins the flight of the soul in search of the only true goal, the very source of all creation. Books I and II castigate the soul of narrator and reader for its worldly pursuits, and bolster these persuasive tactics with a forceful presentation of gospel precepts, the faith which steers the soul through the initial purgative stage. Beginning with Book III, the now God-loving soul struggles to rid itself of the vestiges of self-love and earthly interest and eventually comes to experience the momentary but rapturous love-relationship with Christ. Its pilgrimage is one of ascent through the cosmic spheres in search of God and also one of the introvertive self-scrutiny which yields the inner spiritual map of salvation.


42 Eleanor James, "The Imagery of Francis Quarles' Emblemes," Studies in English (Austin, Texas, 1943), p. 31.
The dominant presence of the Divine Cupid is the focal point of Quarles' Christocentric emphasis in the Emblemes. In Benlowes' epic this type of meditation on the nature and events of Christ's Incarnation and Crucifixion is portrayed in those passages (Cantos II-IV) narrating Theophila's "love-sacrifice". Benlowes expands the contemplative route, however, in Cantos VI to VIII to illustrate that cosmic flight of the soul through the super-celestial regions where it comes to rest in a greater comprehension of God and of the mysterious workings of the Trinity. In this latter Theocentric contemplation Theophila acts as spiritual guide in the manner of Beatrice in the Divine Comedy and Elizabeth Drury in Donne's Second Anniversary.

Augustine propounded a "roving" type of contemplation in which the soul searches through earthly and heavenly realms for knowledge of and communion with God. Martz describes the Augustinian journey of the soul as a roving quest for the traces, the vestiges of God, first in external nature and then, most importantly, within the mind of man. As Augustine explains the quest in the tenth book of his Confessions . . . it consists of a search for the image of God within the mind of man, an image defaced by sin, but nevertheless restored in its essential powers through the sacrifice of Christ. It is man's duty, according to Augustinian thought, to advance as far as he can toward a renewal of this image, with the help of divine grace.43

This concept of re-establishing the soul's similitude to its Divine Parent and Saviour is an important one in the Emblemes and in Theophila. It had been an important theme of the medieval mystical writings and later of the syncretistic theologians of Renaissance Italy. In English poetry before the metaphysicals it had been

exquisitely rendered in Spenser's "Hymne of Heavenly Love." The poet there roams through the events of Christianity's spiritual history and 'discovers' man's creation after the "heavenly patterne" of God. The narrator proceeds rapidly to consider the Fall, the subsequent suffering of Christ—"lampe of light, / Most lively image of thy fathers face,"—and the profound lesson that man's salvation lies in reciprocating the divine act of love. With this understanding, the poet rouses himself from his brutish image and through meditation raises his eyes to the Divine Image. The final stanza portrays the blissful end of the soul's struggle towards a clearer perception of and steady intense devotion to God:

Then shall thy rauisht soule inspired bee
With heavenly thoughts, farre above humane skil,
And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see
Th'Idee of his pure glorie, present still
Before thy face, that all thy spirits shall fill
With sweete enraiment of celestiall love,
Kindled through sight of those faire things above.

Benlows' summary of the soul's threefold approach to God emphasizes this imitative theme:

In the Purgative Nay she [Theophila] falls upon Repentance, mortification, Self-denial; helpt in part by the knowledge of herself, which breeds Contrition, Renuntiation, and Purpose of Amendment: In the Illuminative she pursues Eorall Vertues, Theological Graces, and Gossip-promises, revealed by CHRIST, as the Great APOSTLE, which begets in her Gratitute, Imitation, and Appropriation. In the Unitive she is wholly taken up with Intuition of super-celestial Excellencies, with beatifical Apprehensions, and Acherencies, as to CHRIST in Bodie, to the holy GHOST in Spirit, to GOD the FATHER in a bright Resemblance of the Divine Nature.

(pp. 15-16.)


This "bright resemblance" of Deity, while an integral component of Christian theology, receives particular emphasis in the writings of the mystical Platonists of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. That it could evoke a strong reaction from the more orthodox sector of the Anglican clergy is clear from a comment made by John Tillotson, later Archbishop of Canterbury, who noted that "Sterry, praying for Richard [Cromwell], used those indecent words next to blasphemy, make him the brightness of the father's glory, and the express image of his person." 46

What Tillotson objects to as enthusiastic holiness in a Puritan divine is precisely the evangelical optimism inherited from the syncretistic neo-Platonism of Renaissance theologians like Picino and Pico della Mirandola. Leland Miles, in John Colet and the Platonic Tradition, 47 records the strong influence of this tradition in the writings of the humanist reformer and Dean of St. Paul's. Augustine and the patristic writers were of great attraction to the Florentine Academy inasmuch as they echoed its Platonic and Hermetic interests. Picino, for example, suggests a reading list for the student of "Platonic thought" which reveals the eager absorption of early Christian and medieval thought into a syncretised Renaissance Platonism. The list, according to Røstvig, "recommends not only Hermes and Plotinus, but the great medieval treatises such as Chalcidius' commentary on the Timeus and Macrobius' In Somnium Scipionis. In Dionysius the Areopagite omnia sunt Platonica; in Augustine, multa." 47a

Traces of this neo-Platonic heritage are present also in the poetry of John Donne, as Frank Doggett notes:

To such a student of the Church Fathers as he was, a certain infiltration of Platonism was inevitable. He could not fail to absorb it from a reading of Augustine

46 Vivian de Sola Pinto, Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan 1613-1672 (Cambridge, 1934), p. 35.
47a Røstvig, "Images of Perfection," p. 2.
alone, even if Plotinus were unknown to him. However, whereas Donne's secular verse could assert the complementary status of the body with the soul in "the fullest and most perfect love," Quarles and Benlowes adhere to the uncompromising position of the neo-Platonists Ficino and Giordano Bruno (in the De Glorioso Furori) that true fulfilment is attained through that rapturous separation and elevation of the soul from the inferior body. Only after the soul's "Translation" to Heaven will it be joined by the resurrected body.

Beachcroft astutely remarks "that Quarles was doing in the market-place what other metaphysicals were doing for a more exacting audience."(p. 94). While markedly less 'enthusiastic' and more attuned to man's paltry condition in this life, Quarles nevertheless echoes Benlowes in transmitting to the public the lofty doctrines of Renaissance neo-Platonism which emphasised man's supreme powers of exaltation through his spiritual faculties. They affirm the capacity of man to draw himself up by virtue of his divinely wrought soul and the impetus of divine grace through the Word of the gospel to that degree of perfected similitude with God through which man participates in a love-relationship with Christ and ultimately in the beatific life of Paradise. One could regard the popular Emblemes as a seventeenth-century self-help course in spiritual improvement. The way is rigorous and Quarles' pen is most at home when depicting the trials of the journey. But the promise is as dazzling as the initial path is dark, and the success of the Emblemes in its time is related to the constant emphasis on the eminent role which man can assume.

49 Ibid., p. 291.
50 Benlowes' term, IV, xcvi, p. 69.
Benlowes similarly intends his epic as a guide for the lesser educated in the exalted precepts of Divine Love. In the Preface his programme of universal regeneration is set against the background of what he viewed as the fallen state of man. Thus the Preface opens on the gloomy conservative note of the "Dotage of the World", its inhabitants mired in vanity and "Sensuality", "the Herd . . . night-wildred in their Intellects". The poet's vision, in the best humanist tradition, is one of instilling in the "foolish World, laden with Sin, fond of Trifles" a respect for sacred wisdom—"nothing being so great in humane Actions as a pious knowing Minde". Indeed for Benlowes, as for the Renaissance neo-Platonists, the role of the intellect is nothing less than the mirror which recaptures the original aspect of divinity:

Man endued with Altitude of Wisdom, in the sweetnesse of Conscience and Height of Vertue, is of all Creatures sub-Angelical the Almightyes Masterpiece, the Image of his MAKER, a Candidate of DIVINITY, and Model of the Universe; . . .

Theophila, the poet announces, "inoculates Grafts of Reason on the Stock of Religion". It is intended in particular to capture those "[m] ost wretched" persons "whose undisciplin'd Education leaves them unfurnisht of Skill to spend their Time in any Thing, but what in the prosecution of Sin tends to Death", to "divert" them from the "Shelves of indiscreet Vice," and to "direct" them to the life of Christian virtue and reason.

Certain Aristotelian literary precepts, also enunciated in Sir Philip Sidney's Apologie for Poetrie (1595), are adapted to Benlowes' spiritual ends. His epic is didactic in its concern to disseminate the Christian doctrine of Divine Love, the anesis or understanding of its precepts. But in personifying the saintly soul as Theophila and through the poet's own narrated experience of the contemplative life the poet desires to go beyond knowledge to praxis by motivating his readers to follow the vivid example set forth in his heroic epic.
Here in an Original is presented an Example of Life, with Force of Precepts, happy who copy them out in their Actions! Indeed Examples and Precepts are as Poems and Pictures; for, as Poems are speaking Pictures, and Pictures are silent Poems; so Example is a silent Precept, and Precept a speaking Example:

The concept of the speaking picture applies in an important way to the emblem form as well. The Jesuits had been quick to grasp the educational advantages of a "visible poetry" which would blend the artistic visual stimulus of the engraving with the doctrinal lesson of the accompanying poem. The Horatian concept of utile et dulce was undoubtedly a factor in Quarles' efforts to provide poetic paraphrases of biblical narratives. His taking up the popular continental vogue for emblems owes something to a further classical dictum contained in the Apologia. Sidney there echoes Plutarch's thought in stating that the poet serves a valuable role as

The vivid metaphorical expression which links both poets to the metaphysical school is a further and related form of visual emphasis. The continental theorists of the concettisti admired the metaphor for its "qualities of insight and 'vision'" and for its capacity to suggest those corresponding aspects of a universe composed of layered planes.

51 Fuller in his History says of Quarles: "His visible poetry (I mean his emblems) is excellent, catching therein the eye and fancy at one draught, so that he hath out-Alciated therein, in some men's judgment." (p. 519). Alciati was an important populariser of the emblem vogue; his Emblematum Liber was published in 1531.


of being. Benlowes espouses the metaphor for the same reasons that the Renaissance admired the Egyptian hieroglyph, namely as a literary (or visual) correspondence to that higher intuitive mode of cognition which characterized the communications of angelic beings. According to George Boas in the introduction to his edition of Horapollo's Hieroglyphics, Plotinus was the source both of later misrepresentation of the Egyptian symbols and of Renaissance interest in visual symbols as examples of intelligible cognition.

'It must not be thought,' he says, 'that in the Intelligible World the gods and the blessed see propositions; everything expressed there is a beautiful image, such as one imagines to be in the soul of a wise man, images not drawn, but real. And therefore the ancients said that real being is ideas and substances. . . . It seems to me that the Egyptian sages, either working by right reasoning or spontaneously, when they desired to represent things through wisdom [Sophia], did not use letters descriptive of words and sentences, imitating the sounds and pronunciation of propositions, but drew pictures, and carved one picture for each thing in their temples, thus making manifest the description of that thing. Thus each picture was a kind of understanding and wisdom and substance and given all at once, and not discursive reasoning and deliberation.' 54

This higher wisdom in its Christian context is precisely the ideal to which Benlowes aspires at the opening of Theophila:

Nigh' Souls converse with Souls, by ANGEL-way,
Enfranchis'd from their pris'ning Clay,
What STAINS by INTUITION, would They then convey!

(I, i, p. 1)

During the poet's later contemplation of the "Bright-harnessed INTELLIGENCIES" (VI, lxxii, p. 90) he describes further how these superior beings "Idées see" (VI, xciii, p. 93):

Thus, THUS, with one fleet Glance intuitive,
Into Each other's knowledge dive;
And, by Consent, Thoughts, else inscrutable, unriv'e.

(VI, xoiv, p. 93)

The hieroglyph or visual symbol was considered by Renaissance occultists to represent the prelapsarian wisdom, which at the Fall descended into discursive thought and linear expression by means of the alphabet. The paradoxical blend of brevity and expansive meaning inherent in metaphor and the metaphorical conceit rendered such literary communication a fitting simulation of the wisdom to which Benlowes as a devotional poet aspired. Accordingly, he urges his "Fancie" to

Cull Metaphors well-weigh'd and clear,
Enucleate mysteries to th' Ear.
Be Wit Stenography'd, yet free;
'Tis largest in Epitome.

Benlowes' view of metaphor coincides with the general outlines of the seventeenth-century continental theorists for whom all creation constitutes a poem which imitates the harmonious splendour of God. The book of Nature is for these writers paralleled by the book of Holy Writ, both of which reflect the mysterious majesty of the Creator. Mazzeo outlines this view with regard to one of its principal exponents, Emmanuele Tesauro:

Tesauro maintained that acutesse or conceits were not created by men only but by God, his angels, and by animals. The universe was created by a God who was a 'witty creator,' . . . The world was a poem made up of conceits. The notion that the world is a poem of God is old enough as a conception and, in various forms, goes back at least to Plotinus. However, the important difference for Tesauro is that the world is a 'metaphysical' poem and God a 'metaphysical' poet. He conceived inrezzo as the faculty in men analogous to God's creative power. It is a small particle of the divine nature, for it can create 'being' where there was no 'being' before. As God created a 'metaphysical' world, so the poet creates 'metaphysical' poems. 55

55 Joseph A. Mazzeo, Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies, p. 53.
Augustine’s views on the Bible’s symbolic obscurity were also an important source of this later Renaissance interest in metaphor, and Benlowes may have had the former in mind when he refers to God’s supercelestial creation in Canto V as “Seas of BLISSE” “ensense[d] by "Tomes full of mystick Characters”. Certainly he thinks of the creative act of devotional verse as inextricably linked with the writer’s knowledge of the Divine Ideas: “To write to Sense / HEAV’NS Chronicle, you’d ask a HEAV’ND-Intelligence.” (V, xi. p. 68). The Preface defines poetry in terms of a bridge between the intelligible world and the creative imagination which functions in accordance with the sympatheia of the cosmic units. “Divine Poesie,” he writes,

is the internal Triumph of the Mind, rapt with S. Paul into the third Heaven, where She contemplates Ineffables . . . this Divine Rapture chains the Mind with harmonious Precepts from a divine Influence, whose Operations are as subtle and resistlesse as the Influence of Planets . . .

The rich symbolical expression of poetry operates in the sphere of the arts in the same manner in which the Word of the Johannine text illuminates the mind of man, that is by superimposing the hidden sacred meaning on the lesser “sensual” pleasures of the visual faculty. Thus “Vivacity of Fancie in a florid Style disposeth Light and Life to a Poem, wherein the Masculine and refined Pleasures of the Understanding transcend the feminine and sensual of the Eye . . .” (The Preface). Canto I reiterates this exalted view of the illuminating virtues of “Rich poesie!“:

As, where from Jewels sparkling Lustre darts,
Those Rays enstirre the duskie Parts:  
So, Beams of Poesie give Light, Life, Soul to Arts.  
(I, lxix, p. 10)

Quarles’ address to his readers adopts the neo-Platonic concept of the hieroglyph to his emblematic parables. “AN Embleme,” he says,
is but a silent Parable. Let not the tender Eye checke, to see the allusion to our blessed SAVIOUR figured, in these TYPES. In holy Scripture, He is sometimes called a Sover; sometimes, a Fisher; sometimes, a Physician: And why not presented so, as well to the eye, as to the ear? Before the knowledge of letters, GOD was knowne by Hiero-

Quarles' employment of the metaphorical conceit is devoid of the ornate flourishes and, to some extent as well, of the inclination shown in his Jesuit sources to mythological allusion.56 His fondness for the plainly worded erudition of the biblical narrative again contributed to the continuing appeal of the Emblemes throughout the seventeenth century. This choice of an unadorned rhetoric may have been reinforced by the example set by his early employer, Archbishop Ussher.57 Richard Parr describes the Archbishop's address to his Oxford audience during a visit in 1642. Ussher,

Benlowes obviously espouses the literary mode of "studied Eloquence" which Quarles and Ussher rejected. But the Augustinian doctrine of obscurity nevertheless provides an important background to their mutual interest in rousing the soul to mental and visual goals of a higher order. "'No one has any doubt,' wrote Augustine 'that some things are understood more readily through figures of speech, 

56 G.S. Haight, "The Sources of Quarles's Emblemes," pp. 204-5.

57 Grosart, I, p. xix, records the statement of Quarles' widow that he had been Secretary to the Lord Primate of Ireland and suggests that Quarles' employment would have been around 1621-22.

and that when something is searched for with difficulty, it is, as a result, more delightfully discovered. "Quarles adheres to the "provocative and evasive" tactics for which the later neo-Platonists of antiquity were renowned, through his frequent use of the riddle. The Emblems as a whole are dominated by the ceaseless questioning of the narrator:

Can nothing settle my uncertain breast,  
And fix my rambling Love?  
(II.12, p. 109)

Where is that Good, which wise men please to call  
The Chiefest? Does there any such befall  
Within man's reach? Or is there such a Good at all?  
(IV.13, p. 233)

And am I sworn a dunghill-slave for ever  
To earth's base drudge'ry?  
(V.13, p. 293)

It is most often combined with the riddle in the concise epigrams which follow each emblem and frequently link the subjects of the individual emblems. The epigram to Emblem II.15 teases the mind of the reader with the Pauline paradox that man's true being resides in the eradication of the natural self and the inflow of the Divine presence:

My heart, but wherefore do I call thee so?  
I have renounced my interests long ago;  
When thou wert false, and fleshly, I was thine;  
Mine wert thou never, till thou wert not mine.  
(p. 123)

A further allusion to the Augustinian concept of intellectual stimulation through unusual or enigmatic concepts is found in Emblem IV.13, where the poet alludes to the possible nature of the Chief Good:


60 Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance, rev. and enlarged edn. (Great Britain, 1967), pp. 8-9. Wind uses the phrase to describe the style cultivated by Pico. The latter's admiration for the rich and mysterious sublimity of Porphyry, Proclus, Iamblichus, among others, is also noted by Wind.
Benlowes delights in the entire gamut of verbal ingenuity and tenebrosity upheld by the occultists of the Renaissance and cited in Butler's satirical sketch. Like his predecessor, John Donne, Benlowes seems to have modelled his poetic mannerisms on the abstruse style and love of paradox so prominent in the writings of Pico. However, whereas Donne could infuse the tradition with intellectual brilliance and a firm control over his witty erudition, in Theophilia the vogue degenerates into the "cryptic pomp" and dreary conventionalities which signalled the passing of the tradition. Amongst the various techniques of this neo-Platonic idiom, Benlowes is particularly fond of that microcosmic contrary of opposites, the paradox. Characteristically, it is applied to the corresponding layers of his poetic cosmos—to the Petrarchan lover of Canto I who lives in a climate of "warm Frosts" (vii, p. 2) and in Cantos II and VIII to the inhabitants of Hell: "Riddle! Compoile'd, at once, to live and die! / Prvying they froze, and freezing frie:' (II, xliii, p. 28). The pun is also recruited to suggest the many layers of reality, and the lilting effect of onomatopoeia to imitate the drunkards of Canto I: "They stagger, rowl, / Their feet indent, their Sense being drunk with Circe Bowl." (xxi, p. 4). Also designed to capture the reader's intellectual eye are the theological conundrums of which Nicholas of Cusa was also enamoured. Thus in Canto I the reader is confronted with the lines "Who steals from Time, Time steals from him the Frey: / Fastimes passe

61 Wind, ibid., p. 216, nn. 76-8 discusses Donne's interest in Pico, Nicholas of Cusa, and other neo-Platonists.

62 Wind, loc. cit. The phrase quoted here is used by Wind to describe Pico's attempts at an oratorical mechanism suitable for communicating the ineffable (p. 11).
HEAV'N away: . . ." (xxxvi, p. 6).

The Christian Platonist's re-creation in poetry of the manifold wonders of Divine Creation could lend itself as well to the employment of variety within a unified framework which was not necessarily dominated by the Aristotelian unities. Benlowes appears to some critics to abandon both unity of structure and consistency of tone. Edouard Roditi, for example, writes that "Benlowes mixed, too freely for art as imitation but not freely enough for art as invention or as nature, the various manners and tones of art, the gorgeous and the grotesque, the lofty and the macaronic, the liturgical and the satirical."63 Williamson also finds in the jumbled styles and disjointed rhythm those faults which lessen Benlowes' stature in the metaphysical school. "He combines greater extremes of colloquial and learned words, of English and Latin verse, of the ugly contractions which are such a blot on the poetry of this time and the irregular syntax which adds to the obscurity."64

These blemishes in Theophila bear a striking similarity to those found in the poetry of Du Bartas, whom Benlowes praises in the opening stanzas of Canto III. Significantly, the Protestant poet had also regarded himself as a vatis rather than a court poet, and poured out his religious enthusiasm in an "abominable fustian". 65 A Paracelsian of the literary world, Du Bartas cultivated a style at once "bombastic . . . vulgar, tedious, dull. lack[ing in ] restraint".66 The tendency of the pedant and virtuoso to indulge in clever word-games conspired in both poets to anchor and contort the smooth elegance of Spenserian poetry. De Mourgues describes the convoluted metrics which make a

63 Roditi, pp. 352-353.
64 Williamson, The Donne Tradition . . ., p. 179.
65 De Mourgues, p. 39.
reading of Theophila so laborious:

The quality of harmony, of wholeness, is fatally endangered by a broken rhythm . . . the reader's mind, constantly stopped by recurrent commas, and, moreover, hampered by the repetitions . . ., is left without any valuable thread to follow or key-word to pause on; hence an unpleasant effect of disconnected enumeration or juxtaposition . . . (p.39).

It is likely that this assumption of a poetic license of variety owes something to St. Augustine's views on Christian oratory. He had modified the Ciceronian rules of speech by assuming that sacred literature dealt with a consistently sublime topic. He therefore advocated "a variety of styles or a mixture of styles in the treating of a uniform subject-matter . . . St. Augustine even takes the step of showing that, although a speech or piece of writing may appropriately have a prevailing style, the mixture of styles is good for the sake of variety itself."67 Du Bartas is a prominent spokesman of this Christian aesthetic. When criticized for neglecting the classical unities, Du Bartas replies (in the Brief Advertissement sur sa première et seconde Semaine [1564]) that he does not aspire to such an ideal in his Christian epic. The Second Week, he states emphatically,

is not (no more then my first) a worke purely Epique or Heroique, but in part Panegyricall, in part Propheticall, and in part Didascatile. Heere I simply set downe the History, there I move affections: Heere I call upon God, there I yceuld him thankes: heere I sing a Hymne unto him & there I vomit out a Satyrs against the Vices of mine Age: Heere I discouer of naturall things, and other-where I praise good spirits. 68

A mixture of verse-forms in a single Christian work of devotion


had been illustrated in metaphysical poetry by Herbert's Temple, and was a marked feature of the Emblems as well. Indeed, the popularity of the Emblems, according to Rosemary Freeman, owes much to Quarles' "variety of metre and structure," beside which Arwaker's later emblem book based on the Pia Desideria plates proved "entirely monotonous."69

Where Quarles can be rhetorical, dramatic, didactic, or lyrical by turns, at one moment urging the soul with all the persuasiveness of a preacher's art to return from the paths of wickedness, at the next elaborating a scene between the guilty Animus and Justice in which Christ dramatically intervenes to save the now repentant sinner, Arwaker presents each emblem from exactly the same point of view. Every one of his poems is a pious lament by the suppliant soul. 70

Theophila is also based on the assumption that a variety of styles and themes render the poem attractive to a large audience. Benlows exhorts his creative imagination:

T'each Palate various Lanna deal,
Have for the Wise strong Sense, deep Truth:
Grand-Sallet of choice Wit for Youth.

He produces, accordingly, a potpourri of hexameral material, didactic commentary, witty satirical sketches, private prayer and ecstatic lyricism. Introducing his satirical Canto X, Benlows surveys the various stylistic approaches (all represented in his "spiritual poem") and decides that "here" he chooses one suited to his particular intention—a sweeping gesture again reminiscent of Du Berts:

Various are Poets Flames; Some, Eclogues write,
Others describe a horrid Fight,
Some Lyrick Strains, and some the Epic do delight:


70 Loc. cit.
But, here my sharpened Muse shall entertain
The Scourges of Satyrick Vein,
To lash the world, in which such Store of Vices reign.
(X, i-ii, p. 426)

Speaking of Benloue's, Samuel Butler says "Imitation is the whole Sum of him." It is clear that in Theophila Benloues sets his limited creative talents on higher sights than the imitation of other poets' witty sayings. He does so in conjunction with the aesthetic of the Christian neo-Platonists which retains the Aristotelian mimesis, but provides a higher plane of image-making more closely associated with the Platonic Forms. In his Apologie Sidney had established the pre-eminence of sacred poetry by subordinating Aristotle's imitation of nature and human events to the superior art of "making . . . images of an eternal and intelligible reality." In the application of his creative faculty to the search for intelligible principles underlying the transitory beauty of the sensible world, the devotional poet promotes the ascent of the reader to the supreme Reality. For Sidney, as for Augustine, man's creation in the image of the Deity signifies a status higher than that of nature, "which in nothing he sheweth so much as in Foeurne, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings . . ." Sidney accounts "chiefe both in antiquitie and excellencie" those poets who "imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God"—including David and Solomon, the scriptural poets so important to the Emblemes and Theophila. Sidney furthermore claims that "the skil of the Artificer

72 This is Joseph Kazzes' allusion to Platonic imitation in Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies, p. 193.
74 Ibid., p. 158.
standeth in that Idea or fore-concise of the work, and not in the work
it selfe. And that the Poet hath that Idea is manifest, by delivering
them forth in such excellencie as he hath imagined them." (p. 157). The
further neo-Platonic notion that imitation of divinity effects the trans-
formation of man into a higher level of being is voiced by Giles
Fletcher in his introduction to Christ's Victory and Triumph in
Heaven (1610). Contemporary reaction to having "prophane Poetrie to
deale with divine and heavenly matters" is evidently a consideration
which must be met by Christian poets, and Fletcher replies by expressing
his admiration for the Psalmist who "by imitating the singing Angels in
heau'n, himself became, though before his time, an earthly Angel."75

In accordance with this poetic of creation on an otherworldly
pattern, Benbowes composes his epic as a reciprocal act of Christian
devotion. Just as Christ gave His life for man, the poet creates his
epic of Divine Love as a love-sacrifice to Christ. Dedicating his work,
as did St. Augustine in the Confessions, to the Saviour, Benbowes states

My Subject's THEOPHILL, for HEAV'N design'd,
Off'ring pure SACRIFICE with sacred MIND.

In Canto IX Benbowes reiterates this theme by urging Christ,

Upon thy Altar let my Verses prove
The Victim, Heart the Altar, the Fire Love!

(IX, xii, p. 129)

The prayer which precedes the "Summary of the Poem" expresses the
concept in the visual form of an altar. Here the poet's "OFFERING"
of love is described in terms of the circle of Being familiar to neo-
Platonic thought: "As All came from let All return to THEE!"

Benbowes' heroine also reflects the imitative pattern, being a
quintessential personification of those godly virtues which produced

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75 The Poems of Giles Fletcher, ed. Rev. A. B. Grosart, The
Fuller Worthies' Library (Private Circulation, 1868), pp. 65-7.
the glorified members of the heavenly hierarchy. She represents "the ideal way of one sanctified soul who stands for many," a principle of perfection and unity arising from the manifold realms of terrestrial being. Beyond these thematic re-creations of the divine pattern, however, Benløves turns to numerical principles to unite mathematically the various aspects of his divine theme, and in particular to convey the central role of Christ within the epic both as the Second Person of the Trinity and as the Mediator of man's salvation.

Qvarnström has observed the manifestation in Theophila of this numerical form of composition and its affinities with Milton's Paradise Lost. As the "redeeming hero," Christ's monumental triumph over death is placed by the poet at the "ideal Christian centre of the poem." Midway through Canto VII the narrative portrays the rejection of temptation, and at the precise "mathematical mid-point" of Canto and epic, it breaks off dramatically with the half-line, "Then forth thou wentest." The Three-in-One motif is also embodied in Benløves' employment of the unusual three-line stanza form. Here again Augustine's influence can be detected, for as Qvarnström notes it "was the great Father of the Church who put the final seal of approval on the practice of numerological exegesis." In the Renaissance this numerical pattern of creation is frequently associated with that "Hypostatic kind of Neoplatonism which includes Hermetic and Cabbalistic ideas!"

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77 Cf. fn. 70.
79 Ibid., p. 72.
80 Qvarnström, The Enchanted Palace . . ., p. 81.
81 Ibid., p. 63.
82 Röstvig, The Hidden Sense (1963), cited in Qvarnström, Poetry and Numbers . . ., p. 44.
CHAPTER II

THE METAPHYSICS OF CHRISTIAN NEO-PLATONISM
AND THE EARLY STAGES OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE JOURNEY

The journey of the soul to God requires a fundamental transformation of man's being from a creature dominated by the appetites of the body to a heavenly man, simulating in his perfection the higher intelligible beings which revolve about God in ceaseless contemplation and devotion. In delineating the nature of the intelligible world and of the soul's relationship to that world, the Christian poets of the metaphysical school manifest an intellectual and artistic attraction to the neo-Platonic doctrines which entered Christian mystical theology via such writers as St. Augustine, the pseudo-Dionysius, and Nicholas of Cusa. These doctrines are set forth at length in a didactic fashion in Theophila and to a lesser extent in the Emblemata. They provide the metaphysical background to the soul's threefold way of ascent, which in its early stages will constitute the subject-matter of the latter section of this chapter.

Theophila represents the consummation of Benlowes' longstanding interest in theology, and in particular the doctrines of "mystical DIVINITY". He concludes his eighth canto with the phrase "OMNIA in UBO, & in OMNIBUS UNUS," a motto which underlines the nature of the poem's philosophical and theological orientation. Benlowes' integration of the complex notions of being and Reality constitutes a striking example of the definition of metaphysical poetry given by James Smith, for whom this genre is characterised by "'an overwhelming concern with metaphysical problems; with problems either deriving from, or closely resembling in the nature of their difficulty, the problem of the Many and the One.'" 1

The outline of the 'metaphysical problem' confronted by Theophila and the poet is presented in Benlowes' Preface. It is cast in a form similar to that found in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa: how can the seemingly fundamental disparity between man and God be bridged? The vast cosmic distance which separates terrestrial men from super-celestial beings would seem to reinforce the magnitude of the problem. Man, it seems, is "local and circumscribed by Place," a "finite Creature" "groveling on Earth in the Mud of Error and grosse Ignorance, ... unable by any Art or Industrie to finde out the true Nature, Form and Vertue of the least flye or mast." How remote in every way from this diminutive creature is the transcendent One, described by Benlowes in the abstract terms of Plotinus:

\[ \text{[He] is a true, real, substantial, and essential NATURE, subsisting of HIMSELF, an eternal BEING, an infinite ONENESS, the radical PRINCIPLE of all Things; whose ESSENCE is an incomprehensible Light, His POWER is Omnipotency, and his BACK an absolute Act; WHO, before the Creation, was a BOOK rowld up in HIMSELF, having Light only in HIMSELF; WHO is a SPIRIT existent from everlasting to everlasting; One ESSENCE, Three SUBSTANCES; whose DIVINE NATURE is an essential and infinite UNDERSTANDING, which knowes all Things actually always; ...} \]

It is in relation to this incomparable God that the tension of the meditative poem is generated. How is finite man with his incomplete knowledge of the created world ever to arrive at a comprehension of the infinitely wise and uncreated Source of his being?

According to Plotinus, God can be known only by his own kind, 2 or as Benlowes states elsewhere, "only Light can Light declare".3 The positive core of the neo-Platonic worldview is its affirmation that man can know (or see) God by means of his inner spiritual perception.

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3 V, ix, p. 63.
Benlowes raises this conceptual possibility by suggesting that "[i]f any creature knew what GOD is, he should be GOD; for none knoweth HIM but HIMSELF". This hypothetical deification of man is soon confirmed by the poet, who perceives in God an emanative Principle which, upon integration by the creatures, succeeds in drawing them up to Its own divinity:

... INFINITESIMESSE being the right Philosophers Stone, which turns all Metals into Gold, and one Drum of IT being put, not only to a Seraphin, or to a whole Element, but even to the least grain in the world, or the least mote in the Sun, is of Force to make it true and very GOD ...

Here is revealed the mutual promise of neo-Platonism and Christianity that the universe is a unified entity through participation in the Intelligible Principle whence it originates and to which it is destined to return. Benlowes' allusion to the alchemical symbol frequently associated with Christ as Creator is fundamental to the experience which Theophila and the poet undergo in the epic. For in Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection man finds the pattern of his own return to God. "Why then," asks Augustine in the City of God,

if it is the will of the same God who made this living creature, cannot an earthly body be raised up to a heavenly body, if the soul, which belongs to a more exalted order of being than any body, even a heavenly body, could be linked with an earthly body?

The alchemists had wrestled with the same puzzle on the metallic plane of creation, and had concluded that the projection or descent of Spirit into lesser matter would hasten the evolution of that matter into the perfect metal gold. To the Christian, man must first purify himself in order to receive the spiritual gift of grace which kindles in him the will to proceed to union with God.

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4 One treatise based on this analogy, the anonymous Sophic Hydrolith, will be discussed in Chapter IV. Christ as the visible coincidentia oppositorum, the "Divine-humane," is fundamental to Theophila's emphasis on the mediating role of Christian love.

5 Augustine, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans, trans. Henry Bettenson, Penguin edn. (Great Britain, 1972), p. 1026 (Book XXII, Chapter 4).
Through his microcosmic constitution man is possessed of the ability to ascend from earth to heaven. He is, Giles Fletcher writes, "of the great world the small epitome." In his Eleven Pious Meditations Quarles repeats this popular Renaissance theme:

MAN in himself's a little world, Alone,
His Soul's the Court, or high Imperial throne,
Wherein as Empresse, sits the Understanding
Gently directing, yet with awe Commanding
Her handmaid's Will: Affections, Maid of Honor;
All following close, and duly waiting on her:

In the Christian worldview the original harmony of man as an angelic being had been shattered by the presumptuous will, and in his fallen condition man is torn by his intermediary position between angelic and bestial existence. Augustine's doctrine is echoed in Benlowes' didactic portrayal of man's state in Canto I:

Brutes covet nought but what's terrene; HEAV'NS Quire
Do in eternal Joyes conspire;
Man, 'twixt them Both, does intermediate Things desire.

Had we no Bodies, we were ANGELS; and
Had we no Souls, we were unsan'd
To Beasts: Brutes are all Flesh, all Spirit the Heav'ly
BAND.

(XXX-XXXI, p. 5)

According to Gombrich, this triadic scheme of man is a major concern in the writings of Cicino:

The nether parts of our soul link us with the world of the body and its senses; the exalted region of the mind partakes of the Divine; and human reason, which is man's own prerogative, stands in between. Our soul is the scene of constant strife between the fretful motion of the animal instinct and the yearnings of reason—a

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strife which only Divine guidance can resolve from above, bringing with it the serene stillness of heavenly wisdom.

In the Invocation to his Emblemes Quailes maps out the vertical ascent of man to the apex of human perfection along the three-runged ladder of the neo-Platonists. It is a journey from the impure fires of lust to the pure flames of seraphic contemplation:

... Let Reason curbe
Thy hot-mouth'd Passion; and let heav'ns fire season
The fresh Conceits of thy corrected Reason; ...

(pp. 1-2)

Man's link with Deity is described by Benlowes in terms of the Stoic pneuma, a concept preferred by St. Paul over the Platonic nous and later found chiefly in the patristic writers. Referring to the Divine act of creation, the poet writes:

Then did of 'th' Elements Dust Mans Bodie frame
A perfect Microcosm, the Same
He quickned with a sparkle of Pneumatick Flame.

(II, xi, p. 24)

This "supernatural principle" of fire represents man's capacity for greatness. It is "the latens Deitas of Aquinas, capable of being awakened into saving activity. 'Man, without understanding, (i.e., the divine principle) is nothing worth and is as the beasts that perish.' His soul, his Ego, stands as a mean between the competing claims of the sense-world and Super-nature." In Vaughen's translation of the epistle sent by the fourth century Bishop Eucherius to his kinsman Valerianus, this soul of fire is related to two important

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10 Walter Leslie Wilmhurst, "Introduction" to M.A. Atwood, Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy, rev. edn. (New York, 1960), pp. 27-8. The quotation in the preceding sentence is from p. 27 of this work.
motifs of metaphysical religious poetry—those of ascent to the divine origin and of man's essential likeness to God:

But the Soul being descended from the Father of lights, is like the sparks of fire still flying upwards. The Soule is the Image of God in us, and the precious pledge of his future munificence. 11

The fire of the human soul seeking its heavenly abode is in a very real sense the start of the spiritual flight of the contemplative. For the poet the impetus of ascent is intimately associated with the winged flight of the creative imagination. In both instances what is sought is a return of the spiritual fire of man to its Maker. In his Invocation Quarles prays for the soul's escape from its earthly prison and ascent to that spiritual freedom which resides far above the terrestrial perspective of corporeal man:

Let Heaven's full beams inspire
Thy revisht braines with more herock fire;
Snatch thee a Quill from the spread Eagles wing,
And, like the morning Lark, mount up and sing;
Cast off these dangling Plummets, that so clog
Thy lab'ring heart, which gropes in this dark fog
Of dungeon earth: Let flesh and blood forbeare
To stop thy flight, till this base world appeares
A thin blew Laneskip; Let thy pinions sore
So high a pitch, that men may seeme no more
Than Pismires, crawling on this Bole-hill earth,
Thy care untroubled with their frantick mirth,

No, we must fly like Eagles; and our Rhimes
Must mount to heav'n, and reach th' Olympick ore;
Our heav'n-bloome fire must seek no other Sphære: ...

In "To My Fancy upon Theophila," Benlowes also portrays the forthcoming journey as one which will remove him from the clouded vision of the sensible world to a height from which the invisible Deity will 'swim into ken':

Fly through *Arte Heptarchie*, be clad
With wings to soar, but not to *gad*.
Thy Pineous raise with mystick Fire,
Sometimes 'bove high-roof't Sense aspire.

No Musick courts Spiritual Ears
Like high-tun'd Anthems; This uprears
Thee, FALCIE, rapt through Mists of Fears,
And Clouds of Penitential Tears;
Bagling 'bove transitory Spheres,
Till ov'n the INVISIBLE appears.

This motif of the "mystical ascent" advanced by both poets echoes
the invocation of Spenser's "Hymne of Heavenly Love". In the latter
the transition from human to divine love is marked by the exalted
sense of super-terrestrial vision and by the song of praise which
accompanies such a flight:

Loou, lift me vp upon thy *golden* wings,
From this base world vnto thy heavens hight,
Where I may see those admirable things,
Which there thou workest by thy suoueraine might,
Farre above feeble reach of earthly sight,
That I thereof an heavenly Hymne may sing
Vnto the god of Loue, high heavens king.\textsuperscript{13}

The hermetic writings embrace a similar view of the soul's capacity
to transcend the finite limitations of bodily sensation. The
following excerpt from Canto X\textsuperscript{13} of Theophila is reminiscent both of
the Confessions (Book X, Chs. 1-8) and of two passages in the
Corpus Hermeticum:\textsuperscript{14}

Man may confine the Bodie, but the Minde
Like Natures Miracles; the Minde
And Dreams) do's, though secur'd, a free enjoyment find.

(1xix, p. 244)


\textsuperscript{13} Poetical Works, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt, p. 593.

\textsuperscript{14} L.C. Martin discusses the influence of
this hermetic theme on Henry Vaughan in his article "Henry Vaughan
The image of the soul as a bird embarked on a flight to freedom is sustained at various points throughout both poems. In Emblem V.9, again reminiscent of Augustine's biblical allusion, the soul is chained to its terrestrial prison by its persistent love of earthly objects and so, says the poet:

... when my soul directs her better eye
To heav'n's bright Palace (where my treasure lies)
I spread my willing wings, but cannot fly,
Earth hales me downe, I cannot, cannot rise; ... 

(p. 278)

And in Emblem V.10 the bird metaphor again conveys the repressive presence of the fleshly cage. During the tumultuous scene of war in Canto III Benlowes interrupts to urge his soul to maintain its flight beyond such earthly travails:

How vile's the World! Fancie, keep up thy Wings,
(Ruffled in Bustle of low Things,
Toss'd in the common Throng) ... 

(xviii. p. 39)

The image recurs in Canto VI as the poet describes his rebirth into the spiritual life:

THOU, LOVE, when as my guilty Soul did dwell
In Nest of Ruine, did'st unshall
My Spirit (fledg'd with GRACE) from that disord'red Cell. 

(xvii, p. 83)

Man's glory for Renaissance neo-Platonists and Hermetists lies in the operations of the 'infinitely expansive' soul. For it is the latter which roams through the layers of creation in search of the Chief Good and then turns inward to discover the principle of deity there. In Emblem V.6 Quarles summarises the Augustinian procedure whereby man contemplates the creatures and finds all splendours of creation outmatched by the supreme God whose presence alone constitutes an inner Heaven for man. The subdued note of praise in this poem,

15 Confessions, VII, 6, 11.
16 Ibid., X, 8.
reminiscent of Herbert, makes it one of Quarles' more successful lyrics. The pattern of the following excerpt indicates the nature of the earlier stanzas, in which Earth and Air are similarly evaluated by the 'mind's eye':

I love the Sea; She is my fellow-Creature;  
My careful Surveyor; She provides me store:  
She calls me round; She makes my diet greater;  
She wafts my treasure from a forreigne shore:  
But, Lord of Oceans, when compar'd with thee,  
What is the Ocean, or her wealth, to me?

To heav'n as high City I direct my Journey,  
Whose spangled Suburbs entertaine mine eye;  
Mine Eye, by Contemplations great Attourney,  
Transcends the Christal pavement of the sky;  
But what is heav'n, great GOD, compar'd to Thee?  
Without Thy presence Heav'n's no Heav'n to me.

(Emblem IV.13)  

Emblem IV.13 repeats the motif of the quest for God in the creatures and pleasures of the sublunar world. The Chief Good sought by man, Quarles states, must be beyond decay and change of any sort and encompass the highest Form of perfection. The narrator proceeds by considering in turn the possibility of finding the One in treasure, in worldly fame, in pleasure. Analyzing each in turn, he perceives their limitations and turns finally to soar above the realms of Nature to the Source of all Good, the "ALL IN ALL."

Mount, mount my soul; and let my thoughts casheire  
Earth's vaine delights, and make their full careiere  
At heav'n's eternall joyes; . . .

(p. 234)

The contemplation of the Absolute reinforces the soul in its vision of participation in divinity. In Cantos VII and VIII Benlowes ascends to such contemplation of the transcendent Deity:

But now behold Its Height, Above all Height!  
Plac't beyond Place! Above Lights Light!

(VII, xii, p. 87)
In sketching the supersensible One Benlowes draws upon the abstract geometrical "images of perfection" and harmony which the Renaissance neo-Platonist tradition had inherited from the Greek philosophers. Here is revealed Benlowes' adherence to what Røstvиг describes as the "exegetical tradition that expressed the harmony of creation and the scheme of redemption through mathematical images in the manner of Pythagoras and Plato, images that permit the accommodation to our world of sense of that perfection of which the created universe is but a dim and shadow reflection." The One of Benlowes' epic reflects the paradoxical attributes which Nicholas of Cusa had delineated in the God who is at once transcendent and immanent, beyond the logical contradictions which man's intellect can see. He is the "Immense INFINITAS" (VII, xxxviii, p.100), the "peerless uncreated NATURE" (VIII, xi, p.110), the Chief God sought by Quarles in the Emblemes. As in the Hermetic and neo-Platonist writings where God--following Plato's identification of the Form of the Good with the dazzling light of a spiritualised sun--is depicted as "non-parel LIGHT" (VII, xxiv, p.98), Benlowes' contemplative Cantos VI to VIII are dominated by the "radiant eminence" at the source of creation.

The sense of awe which informs Benlowes' metaphysical portrait of Deity revolves about this paradox at the Source of Being. For is not merely the One, remote and self-sufficient, but also the Many, the overflowing infinity which informs and encompasses all creation. The Godhead is seen by the poet in the emanative form described by Plotinus, as a "never deficient Brightness" and "a Spring ever-flowing." (The Preface). Theophila's ecstatic devotion to God in Canto IV is conveyed in terms of the concentric flow of Deity outwards through the ringed layers of being:

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17 Røstvïg, "Images of Perfection," p. 22.
From THEE my JOY-EXTENSIONS spreading flow;
Dilating, as Leaf-gold! be not slow,
O, THOU, my All, and more! Love-lorn, THEE still I woo!

(IV, lxxvii, p. 62)

Quarles too describes God as "the flowing Spring of Light," to whom he prays: "Enrich mine eyes with thy resplendent Ray" (IV, 2, p. 190). Like the 'single eye' image with which Nicholas of Cusa describes a Deity at once transcendent and immanent,18 Benloves' God is "A Light unseen, yet in each Place dost shine!" (VII, lxxxix, p. 106). He is the Archessence both beyond and within the objects of creation:

Who only in THY SELF subsist, without
Or Form, or Matter! yet, no doubt,
Immanent in the Matter of the Universe throughout!

(VIII, xii, p. 111)

In depicting God in the geometrical form of the circle, Benloves adapts a metaphor of perfection in which biblical authority blends with Platonic and Hermetic thought.19 Thus the notion of God as "a sphere whose circumference is everywhere and whose center is nowhere" is employed by Benloves as it had been by Donne and the earlier theologians Nicholas of Cusa, St. Bonaventure and St. Augustine.20 In Canto VII the poet expresses his awe at the infinite Deity:

Immense EFFIGIIE! what mystick Art
Of THEE may copy any Part,
Since THOU an indeterminable CIRCLE art!

(VII, viii, p. 96)

Elsewhere he queries "what may the whole CIRCUMFERENCE surround" when


20 Ibid., p. 12. See also Inge, II, 118-9.
the "very CENTER so diffus'd is found" (V.ix, p. 96). The meta-
physical depiction of the soul's communion with God as the coincidence 
of concentric circles is suggested in Canto IV. There the heroine's 
readiness for the ascent to Heaven is attributed to her spiritual 
alignment with God:

In LOVES triumphant Chariot plac'd She is; 
Concentric are her JOYES with HIS; 
Encharioted in Fire, her Spirit HEAV'N-ripe for Blisse. 
(xc, p. 63)

Augustine absorbed the Platonic Sun-God metaphor, as elaborated by 
Plotinus, into his notion of the Trinity and the resulting inter-
relationship between the soul and its Source of fire and light proved 
immensely important to later adaptations of the threefold way of 
ascent to the Deity. Leland Miles discusses the blend of neo-Platonic 
and scriptural allusions in the writings of Augustine.

Plotinus, having identified the Good with Beauty and 
the One, inevitably pictures God as a Sun pouring 
out light, and with light bringing unity, beauty, 
and goodness . . . To Augustine this notion was 
especially appealing because it had Scriptural 
authority. Malachi 4:2 had spoken of 'the Sun 
of righteousness,' and John 1:5 of God as 'Light.' 
Augustine therefore followed Plotinus in calling 
God or the Good a Sun or Light by which things 
are known. 23

This neo-Platonic Sun-God analogy is adopted by Penlopes in setting 
forth the manner in which man can interpret the hypostases of the

21 The neo-Platonists were notoriously fond of triadic schemes of 
Reality. See Wallis, Neoplatonism, pp. 106, 130-134.

22 The triadic principles of Reality were often depicted in terms 
of the Platonic principles of light and fire. See F.R. Cornford, 
Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato, incl. transl., rev. (New 

23 Miles, p. 97.
Christian Trinity. In Canto VIII he states that

By Speculation from Sole Substance, we
The FATHER; from its Splendor see
The SON; from's Heat the HOLY GHOST. Here, One is Three. (xlii, p. 114)

This triad is the inspirational fount of much metaphysical imagery as it is applied to man's journey of ascent to God. While in the mystical stage of purification the aspirant endeavours to cleanse himself of all that is ungodly, in the latter stages of illumination and union the soul advances to those two contemplative experiences enunciated by Augustine and the medieval mystical theologians—the knowing and the loving of God. That the Renaissance neo-Platonists could find room in their syncretistic philosophies for the Augustinian 'law of love' in its Christian framework is suggested by Ficino's invocation in the Sopra l'Amore. Here we find the metaphors of the final contemplative stages—those of light and fire—once again applied to Divine Love in a neo-Platonic context. "May the Holy Spirit of Divine Love," writes Ficino, "... illuminate our minds, and inflame our wills, in such fashion that we may love Him in all His beautiful works, and then love His works in Him, and so come to rejoice infinitely in His infinite Beauty." 24

Giordano Bruno's emblematic prose treatise De Glorifico Furori also outlines the unifying impetus of that contemplation which seeks to effect man's union with God through intellect and devotion:

By virtue of harmony and the fusion of opposites the intellect becomes one with the affections, and man realizes the Good and rises to the knowledge of the true. All conflicting desires being at last united, they become fixed upon one object, one great intent—the love of the Divine, which is the highest truth and the highest good. 25


25 L. Williams, transl., II, 31-2.
As the Word by means of which God's creation was effected, the Second Person of Augustine's Trinity takes on the attributes of the Plotinian Nous (or Intelligence) while superseding the latter's status by virtue of being, in Benloue's words, "COAEQUAL [to the Father] both in ATTRIBUTES, and in MAJESTIE" (VIII, xxix, p.113). Augustine identifies Christ with the Platonic Form of Truth; He is "the source of truth in itself". As such, His relationship to man is aptly suggested by the Sun metaphor. He is "the sun of our minds, the only teacher, the light which puts us in contact with truth." Benloue alludes to this "Sun of Righteousness" as the bearer of wisdom and divine grace which ushers the aspirant to the ultimate vision of God:

HE's thy bright Sun; ...

Spiritual Light Spirituals clears: In HEAV'N
Thou'lt view the full, what now by Shimmer, like Steph'n,
Thou canst but spy; ...

Oyl of this Lerr, obscureous Soul, lights Thee
To thine approaching HEAV'N! In Sancti'tie
Be actuated then; Being up assum'd
By this bright Sun, with this rich Oyl perfum'd,
Th' art possess'd with Heavenly Comforts, which,
With their Soul-cheering Sweets, both ravish and enrich.

(IV, 19, 27, pp.54-5)

Completing the Trinity is the Holy Spirit, intimately associated with Christ as the bond in the intelligible triad, as well as in the vertical association of man with God through Christ. As the supernatural power of goodness dwelling in man and constituting the soul's yearning for return to its Source, the Spirit is at once the spark of divinity within man and the Agent which "infuses ... 'form' or grace".

26 For Nous as intuitive cognition see Wallis, pp.53-6.
28 Ibid., p. 100.
29 Miles, John Colet ..., p. 92.
Benlowes suggests this important relationship between Christ and the Holy Ghost in terms of the neo-Platonic metaphors of illumination and flame:

No HEAV'N but TH'N, which SAINTS inherit
Through Grace, Divinest SAN, deriv'd by th' HOLY SPIRIT!
When Souls enflamed by th' highest LIGHT,
Fix on Thy clarifying SIGHT,
All Glories else, commend to THAT, are dusky Light!

Three dominant themes of neo-Platonic thought—the search for perfection-in-unity, the attainment of this state through imitation of a higher Principle of Reality, and the transformation of the philosophical lover into the object desired—merge in the contemplative way of Christian mystical theology. When the supernatural faculties of man are unified and concentrated solely on God during contemplation, the imitation of the harmonious operations of the Trinity facilitates man's future assimilation with Deity. Benlowes follows the triadic metaphors of the Godhead cited above (p. 50) by a description of the related manner in which man transcends the fragmented and mutable condition of the Fall:

The Intellect, the Memory, the Will
Resemblance make o' th' TRINITY; These fill
One Soul, yet are distinct in outward Workings still!

Thus, to restore from Fall, we may describe
THE TRINITY in UNITY!
Inscrutable ABYSS rebates our weaker Eve!

(VIII, xliii-xliv, pp. 114-115)

Benlowes' contemplative "reflection of the Trinity" is a prominent feature of St. Augustine's De Trinitate and of the later medieval theologians, St. Bonaventure and Richard of St. Victor.30

In the Emblemes and Theophila the glorious promise of contemplation is closely related to the Christian version of Horace's beatus ille theme. In Emblem IV.7 Quarles' praise of rural retirement

is based on the introductory text from Canticles vii.8: "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge in the villages." The Soul is addressed by Christ:

Come, come, my deare, and let us both retire
And whiffe the dainties of the fragrant fields:
Where warbling Phil'mel and the shrill-mouth'd Quire
Chant forth their rapturcs; where the Turtle builds
Her lonely nest; and where the new-borne Bryer
Breathes forth the sweetnesse that her Aprill yeelds:
Come, come, my lovely faire, and let us try
These rural delicacies; where thou and I
May melt in private flames, and feare no stander-by.

The world-weary Soul concurs in the following stanza:

Our Citie mansion is the fairer Home,
But Country-sweets are tang'd with lesser Trouble; ...

(p. 209)

The poem is accompanied by St. Bernard's praise of the joys of contemplation, couched in the Platonic language of ascent from sublunar mutability to divine immutability:

O blessed Contemplation! The death of vices, and
the life of virtues! Thee the Law and Prophets
admiro: who ever attain'd perfection, if not by
Thee? O blessed solitude, the Monzen of celestiall
Treasure! by these things earthly, and tranitory,
are chang'd into heavenly, and eternall.

(p. 211)

In Theophilus Benlowes expands this theme of "THE SWEETNESS OF RETIREMENT OR THE HAPPINESS OF A PRIVATE LIFE" to two Cantos (XII, "The Segregation" and XIII, "The Reinvitation"). Leaving the vanities of the secular commercial world behind, the poet turns to the more rewarding pursuits of genuine friendship and the visio Dei.

From public! Roads, to private Joy's our Flight;
To view GODS LOVE, we leave Leng sight;

(XII, xx, p. 222)

The surrounding landscape is infused with the poet's mystical aspirations, and the beauties of creation are inextricably bound up with an awareness
of God's immanence which again suggests the poet's hermetic interests:

Thinking, which Some deem Idlenesse, to me
It seems LIfes Heav'n on Earth to be;
By Observation GOD is seen in all we see.

Our Books are HEAV'N above us, Aire and Sea
Around, Earth under: Faith's our Stay,
And Grace our Guide, the Word our Light, & CHRIST our Way.

Friend, view that Rock, and think from Rocks green Wound
How thirst-expelling Streams did bound:
View Streams, and think how Jordan did become dry Ground.

(XII, lxxix-lxxxii, p. 229)

In "Benlowes, Marvell, and the Divine Casimire," Röstvig traces the minor poet's affinities with the Polish Jesuit priest whose immensely popular neo-Horatian odes and epodes caused him to be heralded as the "Horatius Redivivus". 31 Benlowes' acquaintance with Casimire Sarbiewski probably originated with his continental tour in the late 1620's. 32 That he had read the translation by G. Hils in 1646 of Casimire's poetry is evident from Röstvig's article, which indicates that Benlowes on a number of occasions makes "a conscious paraphrase" of the English version. 33 Casimire blends the "classical beatus ille philosophy" with the "Christian theme of the pious delights of a meditative solitude," 34 and this in the exquisite lines of the Jesuit poet endeared him to a number of writers of the time. Where Benlowes and Marvell, along with Henry Vaughan, part from the conventional motifs and espouse Casimire's Hermetic theme is in their evocation of the "spiritual reality" of the natural scene and in the mystical rapture which makes of nature a type of paradisiacal Garden of earthly delights. The notion that Nature is itself animated by

32 Ibid., p. 14
33 Ibid., p. 15
34 Ibid., p. 17
35 Ibid., p. 18
the Divine Presence is a prominent aspect of the Hermetic corpus.

For Benlowes, the Earthly Garden is the medium through which man communes with the One in the raptures of Divine Love; and thus the metaphysical problem of the Preface finds the happiest solution possible to man, while yet a corporeal entity:

This is Heav'n's Antepast! By Union
   He's One to All, and All to One
In Loves intrinsic Mystery to Souls alone!
Ecstatick Raptures loose our Hearts on high
   with Joyes Ineffabilitie!
Exub'rant Sweet's oerwhelm, as Torrents, Tongue & Eye.
   (XIII, xlv-xlvi, p. 241)

Røstvig concludes that in "these descriptions of the Earthly Paradise enjoyed by the contemplative neatus vir the tone is so sensuous, both in Casimire and Benlowes, that only the obvious connection with Canticles and with the philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus saves them from a charge of gross sensuality." In this respect Benlowes' eagerness to distil and pour forth the ecstatic tenets of the Renaissance trattati d'amore takes him much farther towards mystical and occult syncretistic thought than do the more conventional lyrics of Quarles. But both evoke the love-experience of the Canticles to convey the exhilarated goal of the contemplative route, and the further motifs of the mystical way which guide the reader through the rigorous maze of the spiritual pilgrimage.

The conversion of the soul from the worldly to the transcendent path of the spiritual quest necessitates an awakening of the soul's consciousness to its proper pursuit. The vigorous impetus of Quarles and Benlowes is aimed at arousing the reader to an awareness of the reality of his mortal nature and of the necessary mental energy and discipline involved in the escape from finite existence. Quarles

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36 Røstvig, Ibid., p. 18.
conveys the sense of activity demanded by the contemplative route to salvation early in the first book of emblems. In Emblem 1.7 the Divine Cupid urges the sleeping soul to stir itself, and to open its eyes to the false security of earthly soporific delights:

Why dost thou suffer lustful sloth to creepe
(Dull Cyprian lad) into thy wanton broves?
Is this a time to say thine idle vows
At Morpheus Shrine? Is this a time to sleepe
Thy braines in wastfull slumbers? up, and rouze
Thy leaden spirits; Is this a time to sleepe?
Adjourne thy sanguine dreams, Awake, arise;
Call in thy Thoughts; and let them all advise;
Hast thou as many Heads, as thou hast wounded Eyes.

(p. 29)

Benlowes reiterates this mystical awakening of self and reader "from slumbring Lethargie" (I, lxiii, p. 9):37

Shall Larks with shrill-chirnt Mattons rouse from Bed
Of curtain'd Night Sol's orient Head?
And shall quick SOULS lie numb'd, as wrapt in Sheets of Lead?

(I, lxii, p. 9)

In keeping with the neo-platonic correspondence between daylight and the supernatural illumination of the Lord, the poet bids men to bestir himself into the active promotion of the Divine Work:

_Arise; and rising, emulate the rare
Industrious Soinsters, who with fair
Embroiderries checker-work the Chambers of the Air._

_Ascend; Sol does on Hills his Cold display,
And, scatt'ring Sheets, does spicex the Day,
And shoots delight through Nature with each arrow'd Ray._

(I, lxiv-1xv, p. 9)

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Spenser's "Hymne of Heavenly Love" also includes the mystical call to the earth-ridden self, ibid., p. 595.
There follows the rigorous process of stripping the soul of its worldly attachments, of purifying it of all that is not God. It is in pursuance of this task that Quarles' puritanical temperament finds its forte. "The world's a popular disease" (I.8, p.33) is his motto throughout the Tyman Lundy emblems, in which he returns again and again to three particular symptoms—honour, pleasure and wealth. Earthly gratification of all sorts is mercilessly satirized. In Emblem 1.9 the poet opposes those "spirits who scorn to light [their] hallow'd Tapers, but at honours flame," the "braine-sick Lovers [who] know no heav'n but in [their] Mistresse eyes;" the "dunghill worldlings" of the "faithlesse, fickle world." (pp.37-8). In Emblem 12 of the same Book the allegorical vice of gluttony is conveyed by a vivid onomatopoetic touch. Thus the two "fools" greedily sucking nourishment from the globular bosom are literally and uncompromisingly 'exposed':

Thy Pauanck is dropsicd, and thy Cheeskes are bloat;

Thy flesh, a trembling Bogge, a Quagmire full of
humors. (p. 50)

The association of matter with evil is to be found in the early neo-Platonic writings of Plotinus. Dean Inge writes that in "the polemic against materialism Matter [for Plotinus] naturally becomes the principle of externality, the 'muddy vesture of decay' which impedes our vision of things invisible to mortal sight."38 As the lowest rung on the scale of being, matter accordingly holds the lowest status on the "ethical or spiritual scale."39 An "intangible impalpable all-but-nothing" unless informed by higher principles of Reality, matter was likened by Plotinus to "not-being," and to a shadowy and "fugitive bauble".40

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38 Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus, I, 135.
39 Ibid., I, 131.
40 Ibid., I, 130.
In the epigram accompanying Emblem I.4 Quarles rings a new conceit on the globular motif derived from the Tyndall plates by reducing the world to the insignificance of the Plotinian symbol through his characteristic technique of the riddle:

My soule; What's lighter than a feather? Mind:
Than wind? The fire: And what than fire? The mind:
What's lighter than the mind? A thought: Than thought?
This bubble-world: What, than this Bubble? Nought.

(p. 19)

Benlows' satirical attack on worldly vanity in Cartes X and XI is equally indebted to the ascetic teaching of St. John. The poet's 1657 revision of satirical sketches from Theophil, printed under the title The Summary of Misdome, opens with the apostolic text (I John 2.15-17): "Love not the World, neither the things that are in the World; if any Man love the World, the love of the FATHER is not in him". In section 3 of this later work Benlows attacks the three evils of worldly man previously denounced by Quarles and in St. John identified as "the Lust of the Eyes, the Lust of the Flesh, and the Pride of Life":

Riches from most men, swift as Eagles, fly;
Honours on popular breath rely;
Pleasure's a flash;--And All combind, but Vanity.
Why dost thou, WORLD, on these?

The sketch of the usurer Avaro in Theophil allegorically embodies the first vice. Modelled after Jonson's Volpone, he is "void of Grace . . . stor'd / With Gold, the GOD his Soul ador'd". Man's lust for pleasure is personified in the portraits of Avaro's son Volupto, the court dandy and drunkard, and his courtesan, a walking lesson in ladder-reversal:

Her Eyes spread Nets, her Lips Baits, & her Arms
Enthralling Chains: Sense hugs the Charms
Of Idlenesse and Pride, while Reason's free from Harms.

(XI, liii, p. 200)
With this "counterfeit" Helen, Volupto ("inconsiderate Flash")

... spend'st preuisous Dayes
    In Dances, Banquets, Courtisms, Playes;
    To gain the Shade of Joy, which, soon as gained, decayes.

(XI, lix, p. 200)

Finally, the reader is requested to

Summon ASPRIO, with his Looms of State
    To weave Frides Web, in spite of Fate;
    Who, once got up, threwes down the Steps did elevate.

................

Th' Ambitious treach'rous are, and hoodwinkt quite;
    Their giady Heads have dazled Sight,
    For, Jealousie clothes Truth in double Kists of Spite.
    His Eye must see, and vink; his Tongue must brave,
    And flatter too; his Ear must have
    Audience, yet careless be: Thus acts he KING & Slave.

(X, xlviii, 1-lii, p. 185)

All is ephemeral for the poet whose own biographical and literary example is ironically apt: "Great Fears, great Hopes, great Flots, great Ken make Tragedies!" (X,lvii, p.166).

The contemnus mundi theme in both poets blends into the purgative stage which the pious soul must undergo to erase its worldly dross and self-interest. Benlowes portrays the purificatory process experienced by Theophile in his second canto ("The Humiliation"), prefixed by the hexameral account of creation and man's Fall. His allegorical portrayal of the spiritual warfare endured by the contemplative owes much to the medieval mystics, and such descriptions as that of Sin show how fantastic the poet's "Fancie" can be:

Black Sin! more hideous then green Dracones Claws,
    Don Gryphons Talons, swart Beers Paws,
    Then checquer'd Panthers Teeth, or tannie Lions Jaws.

(II, xxiv, p. 26)

The meditative genre's dedication to that visualisation of death which characterises so much Jacobean devotional literature also takes on a grotesque aura in Benlowes' eyes:
E're on thy shaking Head Snowes light;
E're round thy palsy'd Heart Ice be concealed quite;
E're in thy Pocket thou thine Eyes dost wea;

E're in thy Hands thy Leg, or Silver in thy Hair;

Preventing Physick use. Think, now ye hear
The Dead-awakening Trump; Lo; there
The queasie-stomackt Graves disgorge worms fatning Cheer.

(II, xlviii-1, p. 29)

In fear and guilt Theophila "runs Faiths Course" from despair
and grief to the dawning enlightenment of the soul's restoration
through "second Grace, renewing Fire"(II, lxxxv, p. 34). The zeal of
the soul's internal campaign arouses all of the poet's evangelical
fervor, but presented in Benlowes' characteristic hyperbolic and
impersonal fashion, it evokes in the reader merely pathos and disbelief:

To HEAVIN now goes she on her Knees; which cry
... Loud, on her Tongue; much sneaks her Eye;
HEAVIN, storm'd by Violence, yields. Eyes, Tongue, and
Knees scale high.

(II, xcvi, p. 35)

The purgative trials of the soul in search of God are more
successfully rendered in the Emblemes, where they are presented in
the third book (Hugo's first section). The torments of the grief-
stricken anima are endearingly conveyed through her witty dialogue
with Christ as Physician:

Jes. Hold forth thine Arms, and let my fingers try
Thy Pulse: where (chiefly) does thy torment lie?

Soul. From head to foot; it reigns in ev'ry part,
But plays the selfe-law'd Tyrant in my heart.

Jes. Canst thou digest? canst relish wholesome food?
How stands thy taste? Soul. To nothing that is good:
All sinful trash, and earths unseav'ry stuff
I can digest and relish well enough:

Jes. How old's thy grief? Soul. I tooke it at the Fall
With eating Fruit.

Jes. 'Tis Epidemicall; ...

Here at least the doctrinal commentary is made palatable by the note
of humour. Or elsewhere (Emblem III.5, for example), the interior
debate between humility and pride may suffer from a prosaic didacticism but it is embodied in a tempered form which avoids the embarrassment of Benlowes' outbursts. The emblem of the repentant Woper, a theme common to meditative treatments of St. Mary Magdalen and rendered in the baroque form of the Jesuit emblem books by Richard Crashaw, is also presented in Book III. The subdued tones of Quarles here are in marked contrast to the emotive expression of both Crashaw and Benlowes, and again suggest the former's preference for Herbert's style:

O That mine eyes were springs, and could transforme
Their drops to seas! By sighs, into a storme
Of Zeale, and sacred Violence, wherein
This lab'ring vessel, laden with her sin,
Might suffer sinking shipwrecke, and be split
Upon that Rock, where my drench'd soule may sit
Crook'd with plenteous passion; O, and there
Drop, drop into an everlasting teare!

(III.8, p. 153)

In this early stage of the soul's quest, despair and the difficulties of renunciation of worldly pursuits are conveyed through the predominance of dark images. Emblem III.15, for example, is reminiscent of that 'dark night of the soul' described by St. John of the Cross, as the narrator ponders

How often, tir'd with the fastidious light,
Have my faint lips implor'd the shades of night?
How often have my nightly Torments praid
For lingering twlight, glutton'd with the shade!

(p. 181)

In a wider sense the imagery of darkness and light is employed throughout the Emblemes and Theopilo to evoke the conflict between body and spirit which besets the journey of the soul to its rightful home.
CHAPTER III

VISION AND ILLUMINATION

Kenneth Kirk states that "Christianity had come into the world with a double purpose, to offer men the vision of God, and to call them to the pursuit of that vision."¹ Quarles and Benlows manifest the interest of the Renaissance humanist in this primal and immediate visionary relationship between man and God which is a prominent theme in the writings of St. Paul and St. John. As discussed in Chapter I, the metaphorical expression so prevalent in seventeenth century devotional poetry is intimately associated with the contemplative's attempts to visualise and imitate the pattern of Christ. So too are the metaphors of the Sun-God employed in describing the illuminative stage of the mystical way, where the soul enters the blissful radiance of grace through its kinship with the Word.

Plato's theories of vision were still immensely important to the devotional literature of the seventeenth century. His description of the illuminating attributes of the Good remained a significant aspect of the Augustinian Trinity. In the operations of human vision, as well, Plato's concept of two types of perception in accordance with sensible existence and the intelligible reality entered the mystical tradition of Christianity. Plato had likened the visual sense-organs of man to the cosmic sun. He specified the causal relationship between the ability of the eye to perceive visible objects and the "stream" "dispensed by the Sun"² which floods the eye with light and thus


enables the act of vision to occur. He had also extended the concept of clear vision resulting from bright sunlight to the soul's dualistic sight. "When its gaze is fixed upon an object irradiated by truth and reality, the soul gains understanding and knowledge and is manifestly in possession of intelligence. But when it looks towards that twilight world of things that come into existence and pass away, its sight is dim and it has only opinions and beliefs which shift to and fro, and now it seems like a thing that has no intelligence." For Plato it is the Form of Goodness which gives "to the objects of knowledge their truth and to him who knows them his power of knowing".

Nathanael Culverwell's treatise on Spiritual Optics demonstrates the way in which the Christian Platonist absorbed the apostolic conviction that men can achieve a foretaste or glimpse of the radiant glory of God in this life, and the way in which this visionary emphasis is blended with the Platonic metaphor of the bodily prison. Culverwell takes the Pauline text of 1 Corinthians 13 as the basis of his treatise, which emphasises the difference which yet exists between the re-baptized soul's imperfect and cloudy vision in this existence by contrast with the glorified soul's "full and clear vision" of God.

Then when a believing soul returns to God that gave it, it sees him face to face, and fixes its eye upon him to all eternity. As soon as ever the soul is unsheathed from the body, it glister best gloriously; as soon as ever it is unclouded from corruption, it shall beam forth most oriently; as soon as it is let loose from this cage of clay, it sings most melodiously; nothing hinders a Christian from a sight of God face to face, but the interposition of a grosse earthy body; it is death's office to break down this wall of separation, that the soul may be admitted into the presence of God.  

3 Ibid., p. 215.

4 Nathanael Culverwell, Spiritual Opticks: OR A GLASSE Discovering the weakness and imperfection of a Christians knowledge in this life (Cambridge, 1651). The Pauline text cited below is that beginning "For now we see through a glass darkly . . . ."

5 Ibid., p. 9.
This anticipated vision of the "non-perc light" is applied by Benlowes to Theophila's spiritual progress in Canto IV where he says

Thou'lt view that full, what now by Glimps, like
Starkly
Thou canst but say; Then, shall thou Face to Face,
His Light, His Joy, His Love, His Purer, His Grace,
And his all-Fill'ng Gla res clearly see
In op'tick Eruptions from Eternities!

(IV, 19, p. 54)

Moreover, the poet is himself motivated by the ardent desire for such a "Glimpse," and in Canto V his Theocentric contemplation begins with the prayer

Meet, meet my prison'd Souls Address! oh, might
She view, through mouldring Earth, thy Light!

(V, v, p. 68)

Quarles in Emblem V.12 similarly combines the Platonic prison metaphor with the soul's yearning for the unobstructed rays of Divine Light:

If these refulgent Beams of heav'n's great light
Gild not the day, what is the day, but night?

Thou art my Sun, great GOD, O when shall I
View the full beames of thy Keridian eye?
Draw, draw this fleshly curtaine, that denies
The gracious presence of thy glorious eye;
Or give me Faith, and, by the eye of Grace,
I shall behold Thee, though not face to face.

(p. 290)

As noted in the previous chapter, Benlowes' debt to the neo-Platonic metaphor of God as an eternal wellspring of light is particularly evident in the central contemplative cantos. The soul's celestial journey is regarded by the poet as a "launch[ing] into shoreless Seas of Light". Referring to God as the abstract "super-eminence of lustre," Benlowes attempts to infuse the impersonal metaphor with an element of mystical rapture.
From such of Thing ineffably bright sides
Diffusion of such Splendor glides,
As rolls 'bove thousand Seas of JOYSS in flaming Tides...

(VII, xiv, p. 97)

The notion of God as an eternal circle of supreme light is a compelling aspect of Hermetic thought, and one which Henry Vaughan majestically integrates with the Christian purview in his poem "The World." Here the subjective experience of the poet is harmoniously linked with the remote and silent Principle; and the vision unfurls with all the grandeur of a profound moment recreated in the tranquility of the poet's memory:

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd, . . .

Benlowes too presents to Theophila the timeless circle of light and its shadowy copy of terrestrial change:

I 'th'RING of boundless LUSTER, from whose Ray
This petty World gleaneth its poem of Day;
Thou shalt be Crown'd with Breaths of endless Light: . . .

But how different from the rolling dignity and sense of exaltation in Vaughan is the minor poet's handling of his metaphysical image.

The correspondences which render man a microcosm of the universe enter into the spiritual journey towards light by virtue of the soul's intermediate position between the superior Sun and the dark territory of the body. A principal source for the astronomical metaphors of eclipse is Pliny's Natural History, which describes the shadows


resulting from the intervention of earth and moon between the sun and the celestial bodies which draw their light therefrom. Qua rugles transfers the astronomical theme to the human plane to express the soul's alternating fear and ecstasy in relation to the Source of its existence and spiritual evolution:

The still Commandress of the silent night
Borrowes her beams from her bright brothers Eye:
His faire Aspect fills her sharpe horses with light,
If he withdraw, her flames are quench'd and die;
Ev'n so the beams of thy enlight'ning Sp'rite
Infus'd and shot into my dark desires,
Inflame my thoughts, and fill my soul with fire,
That I am ravish't with a new delight;
But if thou shroud thy face, my glory fades,
And I remain a Nothing, all compos'd of shades.

(V.4, p. 258)

Benlowes repeats the astronomical image in delineating Theophila's relation to Christ:

HE's thy bright Sun; 'twixt HQW, and thy Soul's Bliss,
Thy earthie Body interposed is;
Whereby such dread Eclipse's caused are,
As fam'd Astronomers can ne'er declare: . . .

(IV, 17, p. 53)

The identification of Christ with the visible sun of man's cosmos leads the religious emblematis to employ the conceit of the heliotropic sunflower to describe the soul's faithful adherence to its spiritual Source of Light. The conceit derives from the Ovidian tale of Clytie, who having died for love of the Sun-god, is transformed into the plant renowned for its constancy in tracing the path of the sun. Benlowes applies the metaphor to Theophila's gaze in Canto IV: "Ye Twins of Light, as Sunflow'rs be enclin'd/ To th' SUN of RIGHTEOUSNESS . . ." (IV, 15., p. 53).

8 Book II, Ch. 7.
9 Freeman, p. 12; Praz, Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies, pp. 109-110.
10 Praz, loc. cit.
Benlives, and later Hilton, combine two further metaphors which occur in the writings of Ovid and Pliny to describe the central and sunlike presence of God. The Ovidian image of the sun as the eye of the universe becomes an important concept in Copernican thought. The following statement by Kepler places the image in a neo-Platonic and neo-Pythagorean context:

Therefore, since the sun is the source of light and eye of the world, the centre is due to it in order that the sun - as the father in the divine symbolizing - may contemplate itself in the whole surface - which is the symbol of God the Son - and take pleasure in the image of itself, and illuminate itself by shining, and inflame itself by warming.

The neo-Platonists also refer to a world-soul or intermediary hypostasis which informs and unifies the physical body of the universe, thus linking the corporeal entity with the One. Benlives' extended simile in Canto III distinguishing Theophila's similitude to the spiritual Sun rather than the reflected and mutable luster of the moon concludes with the combined metaphors discussed above:

So, Cynthia seems Star-chambers President, With crescent Splendor from Sol bent, Rallying her starry Troop to guard her glittering Tent. (Pearl'd Dove and Stars) yet Earth's Shade shuts up soon Her shop of Beams; those Gone doth run 'Love tea' horned Moon, beneath the golden-tressed Sun. Wh' on Skies, Clouds, Seas, Earth, Rocks both Rays, Stars, Rainbows, Pearls, Fruits, Diamonds pierce; The World's Eye, Source of Light, Soul of the Universe.

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11 Paradise Lost, V, 171.

12 Metamorphoses, IV, 244-7.


14 Pliny says of the sun (Nat. Hist., II. iv.13), "we must believe him to be the soul, or more precisely the mind, of the whole world, the supreme ruling principle and divinity of nature." Transl. H. Rackham, The Loeb Classical Library (London, 1938), p. 179.
In this passage Benlowes also suggests the "golden-tressed" Lover of the Canticles and the neo-Platonic universe in which the particles reflect the light principle of the Source.  

The Sun-God analogy is equally important as a description of the poet's relationship to his spiritual fount of inspiration in Theophilus. The poet in Canto IX sees his sacred muse in the role of the emblematic sunflower:

Blest Luso the Altar builds, where LOVE'S ador'd;
And throughs corn, loose hit, thy lost abhor'd;
She, Clytie-like, to th' Sun of Glory turns;
GOD is her Sun, with Light of Zeal She burns.

(The Argument, p. 127)

In impressa contained amongst other engravings in Phineas Fletcher's Furnie Island demonstrates the considerable personal interest in this sunflower emblem. The impressa represents Benlowes' anagram, "Sunward[er] Beloved" and the description by Jenkins reveals the manner in which Benlowes' charitable and poetic instincts both orbit about the Divine Sun:

The scrolls were entwined one with a sunflower...
the other with a pansy, at the top of the plate an emblematic sun appropriately shone, and 'sunwarde beloved' was used as the title of the verses, in which Fletcher, according to the curious fashion of the time, compared the pansy upon whose purple petals the sun prints its golden image to his own soul receiving upon it the image of the spiritual sun, that is, of God. 

According to St. Paul (2 Corinthians iii.16) "we all, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image." That image, St. Paul and later Christian Platonists affirm,


16 See Jenkins, Edward Benlowes . . . , p. 71.

17 Jenkins, loc. cit.
is devoid of the appetitive inclinations and restricted knowledge associated with corporeality. Thus in order to reflect the divine image, man must put aside his bodily and mental perception, and permit the illumination of the Word to inform his whole being. In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas echoes the Augustinian doctrine of grace through the descent of the divine Principle, an important departure from the Platonic ascent to beatific vision through man's unaided efforts of intellect and will:

The bodily senses, however pure they may be, can see nothing visible without the sun's illumination. Therefore the human mind, however perfect it may be, cannot know the truth by reasoning without divine illumination. And this belongs to the assistance of grace. 18

Augustine and later Christian Platonists do, nevertheless, retain the neo-Platonic introvertive path to divine knowledge. Sensual perception, they urge, is uncertain and inadequate to reveal to man the uncreated Essence of God. In Emblem II.6 Quarles exhorts the reader not to let his "Opticks be Abus'd" (p. 66) by the attractive snare of earthly vision. The engraving to this emblem suggests its metaphysical paradox and accompanying moral. It shows a diminutive Anima gazing entranced at the magnified self-image which appears in the globe-shaped mirror before him. In the background a gigantic Divine Cupid holds a tiny mirror in such a way as to capture the dazzling rays of the supernatural Sun.

Quarles attempts to dispel the "'darke cloud of vanity'"19 through which the reader pursues merely superficial goals, by revealing the falsity of the earthly "Portraiture":


This flaring mirror represents

No right Proportion, hie, nor Feature:

Her very looks are Complements;

They make thee fairer, roundlier, greater;

The skilful Gloss of her reflection

But paints the context of thy coarse complexion.

(p. 85)

He proceeds to explain that the soul gains in stature and intrinsic spiritual light in direct ratio to its rejection of the world's toys. In order to absorb the "more direct" rays which herald "the noone of Grace" it must not lengthen the shadows of mortality but rather see itself humbly in the full rays of Truth. By "shrinking in" ("Thy selfe's the Object thou should'st see") through rigorous self-scrutiny, the soul can paradoxically expand its spiritual horizons.

In Emblem III.14 the motif of true vision is presented in the form of a dialogue between Flesh and Spirit. The former chooses to perceive only the external beauties of the world through her tinted triangular perspective. Through it she delights to see

The world in colours; colours that distaine

The cheeks of Proteus, or the silken Traine

Of Flora's nymphs; such various sorts of hie;

As Sun-confronting Iris never knew: . . .

(p. 173)

By contrast with this concern for the ephemeral pleasure of "painted colours," Spirit seeks to comprehend the greater realities of being. Her visual aid is the telescope. "It helps the sight; makes things remote appear / In perfect view; It draws the object near." (p. 177). The "object" thus confronted is "Grim Death, e'en standing at the Glasses end" and beyond that grizzly spectre the soul's stark alternatives: above, the "Sonne / Of glory on his high Tribunall Throne"; below, the agonized inhabitants of Hell.

Self-knowledge is the constant theme of the meditative genre in
its syncretistic Renaissance form. Quarles cites the text from Hugo which outlines the mystical neo-Platonic approach to an understanding of Deity:

In vain he lifts up the e recently revised to behold his God, she is not first rightly advised to behold him. First thou must see the visible things of thyselfe, before thou shalt be prepared to know the invisible things of God . . .

This text accounts very largely for the particular role taken on by Quarles not only in the Emblemata but also in the subsequent Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man, whose introductory motto is: "MAN is man's A.B.C. There's none that can / Read God aright, unless he first spell man."

The casting out of sensual shadows by the light of reason is an important step in the ascent to God, but in the neo-Platonic schema it too must be superseded by that intuitive perception which operates on a plane beyond conceptual thought. As Benloues states in Canto III, "MEAV'S Perspective is over-reas'ming FAITH, / Which Soul-entrancing VISIONS hath". (xxi, p. 40). The Christian emphasis on humility, moreover, evokes an antagonistic reaction to the man who prides himself on account of his learning faculties. For Quarles and Benloues the light of Nature as sole guide is identified with atheism and mortality. Quarles accordingly scorns the man " whose low desire / Can finde sufficient warmth from Nature's fire". Peter Sterry explains the otherworldly perspective which relegates reason to a via media between sense and the Light of Divine Wisdom. He employs the candle metaphor popularised by Benjamin Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonist school. "Though the candle of Reason excell in light the Glow-worms of sense . . . Yet it is but a candle, not the Sun it self; it makes no day; only shines in the darknesse of the night."

Quarles' Emblem II.1 places human reason in this lesser category in accordance with the accompanying text of St. Gregory that man, "by how much the more he sees the light of grace, by so much the more he disdains the light of nature." The poet soberly queries the fate of the agnostic who would "Puff out Heav'n's glory" in order to inflate human reason:

Spend borrow'd breath, and blow,
Blow winds, made strong with spite;
When thou hast puff'd the greater light,
Thy lesser sparkes may shine, and warme the new made night;

Deluded mortals, tell me then
Your daring breath has blowne
Heav'n's Tapour out, and you have spent your owne,
What fire shall warme ye then? 21

(p. 66)

Pride is frequently associated with the ambitious self-inflation of the contemplative in his aspirations to find God. In this instance the emblem of Icarus is employed to illustrate the Christian humility required by the novice as well as the ultimate power of the Sun Deity:

In IV.11 the 'roving' narrator reports:

I search'd this glorious City; Hee's not here;
I sought the Country: She stands empty-handed;
I search'd the Court; He is a stranger there;
I ask'd the land; Hee's shipp'd: the sea; hee's landed:
I climb'd the ayre, my thoughts began t'aspire;
But, ah! the wings of my too bold desire,
Soaring too nearre the Sun, were sing'd with sacred fire.

(p. 226)

The conceit is extended to include the ephemeral nature of honour in Emblem I.9:

Draw neare, brave sparks, whose spirits scorn to light
Your hallow'd Tapours, but at Honours flame;
You, whose heroick actions take delight
To varnish over a new painted name;

21 Quarles refers again to "that false, feeble light / Of Natures Candle" in Emblem IV.10.
Whose high-bred thoughts disdain to take their flight,
   But on th' Icarian wings of babbling Fame,
   Behold, how tottering are your high-built stories
Of earth, whereon you trust the ground-work of your glories.

(p. 37)

Benlowes describes the illuminative plateau reached by Theophila
in Canto III in a context suggestive both of St. Paul's mirror image
and of the neo-Platonic notion of beauty as the radiant interior Form
of the Good. Prior to this he had stressed that the counterfeit
splendours of external beauty should not blind man to the "nobler
Light / O' th' Intelllect" (I,xiii, p.3). He had also depicted
the path to genuine beauty as the introvertive method prescribed by St.
Augustine and the neo-Platonists:

The soul, that beauteousness of Grace exquires,
   And to decline By-path's desires,
   Must inward bend the rays of his selected fires.

In the contemplation of Christ's sacrifice and the earnest
attempt to model his life according to the divine pattern, man cleanses
his soul of its sinful accretions and permits the greater inflow of
illuminating grace. It is along this Christo-centric route that Theo-
phila progresses to the blissful dawning of gratia illuminativa in
Canto III. There the trials of purgation cease momentarily and she
assumes the "new-born" characteristics of approaching spiritual fulfil-
ment. Benlowes' description of this state combines the exhilarated
sense of growth in spiritual life as well as the Plotinian notion that
true beauty inheres in the loving soul's divine Form, "a kind of force
or light shining from God": 23

This All-enforming LIGHT i' th' pregnant hands,
   The Babe THEO:EILA enshrin'd:
   GRACE dawns when Nature sets: Dawn for fair Day design'd.

---

22 Benlowes' phrasing is very similar to Leone Ebrea. See The
Philosophy of Love (Diolochi d'Amore), transl. F. Friedenberg-Seeley

23 Cited by Miles, John Colet, p. 46.
Breathe in thy dainty Bud, sweet Rose; 'tis Time  
Makes Thee to ripened VIRTUES climb,  
When as the SUN of GRACE shall spread Thee to thy Prime.

When her Life-Clock struck twelve (Hopes Noon) so bright  
She beam'd, that Queens admir'd her Sight,  
Viewing, through Beauties Lantern, her intrinsic Light.

As, when fair Tapers burn in Crystal Frame,  
The Case seems fairer by the Flame:  
So, do's HEAV'N's brighter LOVE brighten this lovely Dome; . . .

(Ill, xxii-xxv, p. 40)

The passage which follows provides a striking example of the aesthetic rationale of the Christian Platonist, whose appreciation of art and sensual beauty is dependent upon the inflow of radiant spiritual form. As Becker states in The Renaissance View of Man,

...a system that construed the universe, even the physical world, as a series of emanations participating to a greater or lesser degree in the purity of spirit made it possible for man to have his cake and eat it too. As a Neoplatonist, one could revel in the sensuous beauty of the physical world and all the while have as his ultimate goal the beauty and virtue of spirit. One could observe with considerable erotic satisfaction the shapely breasts of one's mistress, and yet declare that he loved her most for the beauty of her soul.

(p. 248)

While Benlowes could not bring himself to sanction the wanton pursuits of the Petrarchan scoaneters, the above description does in the main encompass the blend of piety and artistic sensitivity found in Theophila. As arduous as Quarles in castigating the flesh and its temptations, Benlowes' lavish manner of so doing betrays a marked degree of sensual involvement. In "To My Fancie upon Theophila," for example, he urges her to

Evade . . . peach-bloom Cheek-Decoies,  
Where both the Roses blend false Joyes,  
Presse not the two-leav'd Rubie Gates,  
Which fence their Pearl-Portcullis Gates.

24 Cf. Quarles' phrase, "the noon of Grace".
Suck not the Breath, though it return
Fragrant, as Phoenix spicie Urn.

Look up thine Ears, and so disarm
The Magick of Inmemoring Charm.
The lily'd Breasts with Violets vein'd
Are Flower's, as soon deflower'd as gain'd.

Like Milton's portrait of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, evil is here endowed with a questionable degree of dramatic charm.

The same is true of the portrait of Theophila in Canto III. Having defined her beauty in terms of the illuminating presence of the Good, the floodgates are opened for the subsequent Spenserian description:

> Her *Soul* the *Pearl*, her *Shell* out-whites the Snow,
> Or Streams that from stretcht Udders flow;
> Her *Lips* Rock-rubics, and her *Veins* wrought Saphyrs show.
> Attractive *Graces* dance about her *Lips*;
> Spice from those scarlet *Portals* skips;

But, might ye her sweet *Breast*, LOVES Eden, see;
On those Snow-mountlets *Apples* be;
May cure those *Linchicks* wrought by the *forbidden Tree*.

(xxvi-xxxii, pp.40-41)

Theophila's similitude to Christ, "The world's eye, source of light, soul of the universe" is reinforced by Benlowes' description of her as "*Eyes* sparkling *Eye*":

> Thy Faith's the *Lid*, thy Love the *Bell,*
> Beautying thy graceful *Brow* with *Form* and*LICAL*.

(III, xlii, p. 42)

This image of the soul at the height of the illuminative experience is suggested by the insistence of the contemplative tradition on the soul's intensely concentrated and fixed gaze towards God. A similar neo-Platonic emphasis is given to this stage of contemplation by Thomas Traherne in "The Preparative":


Then was my Soul my only All to me,
A Living Endless Ey,
Far wider then the Skie
Whose Power, whose Act, whose Essence was to see.
I was an Inward Sphere of Light,
Or an Interminable Orb of Sight,
An endless and a Living Lay,
A vital Sun that round about did ray
All Life and Hence,
A Naked Simple Pure Intelligence. 25

Benloues proceeds in the later Theocentric cantos (VI-VIII) to portray the nature of man's ascent beyond vision to God. In its general outlines it involves a progression from the visible to invisible planes of creation and from the vision of faith (that is, the inhabitants and splendour of "the heavenly court") to that of beatitude or "the reverent contemplation of the divine attributes and the Essence of God."26 In setting out the progress of the soul on this super-celestial journey Benloues again adopts the theological concepts of the medieval mystics and Renaissance neo-Platonists.

One such doctrine is that associated in particular with St. Augustine and Nicholas of Cusa, namely that the contemplative seeking divine knowledge must proceed from a position of 'learned ignorance.' Jacobs emphasises that this position stems not so much from "skepticism of the intellect" as from the notion of "the absolute unity and infinity of God." "It implies," he says,

a doctrine of the relation of the finite to the infinite which makes a severe demand upon the intellect, asking for an effort of abnegation, in order that through this act the creature seeking may come within the visio or glance of God, and through intuition perceive what the discursive reason cannot tell him. 27

Nicholas of Cusa assumes that God as infinite One is superior to the distinctions of logical cognition. Being ineffable to the reasoning powers of man and "infinitely greater than all that can be named,"

26 Collins, Christian Mysticism ..., p. 64.
the contemplative must approach Him with an awareness of the incapacity of reason to comprehend His incomparable nature.

At the beginning of Canto V ("The Representation") Benlowes reveals his willingness to acknowledge man's intellectual limitations and to accept the necessity of wisdom through revelation. Thus he queries the vast sea of undiscovered facts and unattainable powers which diminish the status of man in relation to God:

Canst lead Leviathan with a silken string?
Canst cover with a Hornets wing
Behemoth? Canst thou Sams into a Hutchinson bring?
Canst Nation fix? count Sands? recall past Day?
Shew Height, Breadth, Length o' th'spaying Ray?
Discern the Spheres? and rapid whirling stay?
Tell, tell how pond'rous Earths huge propesse Bell
Hangs poised in the fluent hall
Of fleeting Air? . . .

(V, xvii-xix, p. 69)

"HEAV'NS-HISTORIE," he concludes, "requires at least a SERAPHIN." (xxiv, p. 70).

A further neo-Platonic theory of Divine Wisdom is that like is only known by like. Hence the necessity of a spiritual medium through which the supercelestial realms may be revealed by the devotional poet. Benlowes' solution is the deus ex machina, the re-appearance of "Glorify'd THEOPHILA" as tutelary spirit and bearer of the illuminated wisdom resulting from her own ascent to glory. This pattern is earlier followed by Dante and by Donne in the Second Anniversary.

A "FORM ANGELLICK . . . divinely bright," Theopila appears before the poet in the "dead Ebbe of Light." In painting "this flame" on "Times cloth" (xxiv, p. 71), the poet again turns to the rich Spenserian idiom and thankfully keeps his promise to "Neglect curl'd Phrases frizled Skill" in the description which follows: Theopila, he says, was veiled and

[Her] Amber-curling Tresses were unbound,
And, like a glittering Veil, spread round,
And so about the snowy Shoulders sweetly wound.

Whose Robe shot forth a Tissue-waving Shine,
Which seem'd loose-flo'ring, for more fine
Than any interwoven Silk with silver-Plaine.

(V, xxxvii-xxxviii, p. 72)
Through her "voice-music" and eyes the poet participates in the supernatural perception of faith and of beatitude.

In the contemplation of God in Canto VIII Benlows demonstrates the kind of stripping away of earthly sensual and conceptual modes of cognition. He conceives of terrestrial examples of dazzling light, separately and then conjoined—the radiant glory of the mine, the refined gem, and the stellar jewels.

Couldst Thou invov'rish every Indian Mine,
And, from each golden Coll, unshrine
Those Beams, that with their Blaze out-face Days em'lious Shine:
Could'st find out secret Enings to unlock
The treasure'ring Casket of each Rock,
And reap the glowing Harvest of that sparkling Shook:
Could'st thread the Stars (fixt and erratick) here,
That stud the luminated Sphere,
That all those orbs of Light one Constellation were: ...

(VIII, xxvii-xix, p. 97)

The conceits tumble in on each other as the poet seeks to conceptualize the sum of radiant glory in creation:

Could all thy Stones be Gems, Seas liquid Gold,
Air Crystal, dust to Pearl enrol,
Each Star a Sun, that Sun more bright a thousand fold:

(p. 98)

Even then, he concludes, could these "Eyes of Earth, Sky, and HEAV'N combin'd, / And to one Optick point confin'd," still be inconsequential in the blinding presence of the "super-radiant OBJECT" (xxiii, p. 98). This is the kind of extravagance which Benlows exploits in a baroque flourish of imagery. But as the subsequent arid theological stanzas indicate, his theological point is that neither sensual nor intellectual concepts will stretch far enough to glimpse God unaided by divine Grace.

Through Theophila's suit, the poet is rewarded the illuminating powers which reveal the innermost aspects "of GOD'S hid Nature". This pure contemplation is a discourse on the metaphysical inter-relationship between the One and the Many on the intelligible and the sensible planes of Being. It is here that the poet comes to understand the way in which contemplation, by unifying the soul's three faculties, imitates the Trinity and brings man's spiritual activity into conformity with
that of God. Also revealed is the way in which the One, an "active
ERS" permeates and unifies the created world. A prose version of
Benlowes' exhilarated vision can be found in the writings of William
Law, disciple of Jacob Boehme. The following passage by Law is cited
in Underhill's Lysticism.

It is this eternal unbeginning Trinity in Unity of
Fire, Light, and Spirit, that constitutes Eternal
Nature, the Kingdom of Heaven, the heavenly Jerusalem,
the Divine Life, the Beatific Visibility, the majestic
Glory and Presence of God. Through this Kingdom of
Heaven, or Eternal Nature, is the invisible God, the
incomprehensible Trinity, eternally breaking forth and
manifesting itself in a boundless height and depth of
blissful wonders, opening and displaying itself to all
its creatures as in an infinite variation and endless
multiplicity of its powers, beauties, joys, and glories.

(p. 114)

A related theme which bears an intimate relation to the hero of
Benlowes' epic is that of Christ's role as mediator and agent of man's
union with God. From St. Augustine and Nicholas of Cusa, Benlowes
derives the metaphysical outlines which underlie his contemplative
experience of Divine Love.

To Nicholas the mediator is the unitor. Human nature
could not be united to the Father, save by the Son's
mediation. "Who is not deeply ravished when he meditates
carefully on this? For Thou, my God, openest to me such
a secret, that I see that man cannot understand Thee, the
Father, save in Thy Son, who is intelligible and the
mediator; and that to understand Thee is to be united
to Thee.' The Son, medium of union, is human nature
'profundly united' to God. Jesus Himself is to be
understood as the union (copulatio) of divine and human
nature . . . It is the humanity of Jesus that draws men
to the Father.26

It is in these precise terms that Benlowes praises Christ in Canto VII
as "EMANUEL! Divine-humane! / Who diff'ring natures join'd; whose reign
no ages scan!" This is the theological "mystery" unwoven in the
following Canto:

26 Jacob, ibid., pp. 18-19.
EQUAL, SON, Servant! All are Mysteries, not Mistakes!

Thus, by free GRACE is man's Deception healed;

Behold the Mysteries revealed.

WORD, ABRAHAM; shadow'ing, SON; Unction is Servant seal'd!

(VII, xxxv-xxxvi, pp. 113-114)

Benlows summarises the identification of Christ with the neo-Platonic "incidentalia oppositorum" as it pertains to man's salvation with the words: "All's thy'd in this Love-knot: JEHOVAH'S LOVE." (VIII, xxii, p. 112).

In the Emblems Quarles treats briefly and without abstract labyrinthine metaphysics the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. Within the framework of Emblem V.14 he portrays the vision of Faith—the luxurious "Causways" of the City of God—and passes to a concise description of the Divine hypostases. There he draws the verba of his poetic journey to a temporary close, and ushers in the silent res of contemplation. In heaven, he says,

... face to face, our ravished eye shall see
Great ELOHIM, that glorious One in Three,
and Three in One, and, seeing Him, shall bless Him,
And, blessing, Love Him; and, in love, possess Him:
Here stay, my soule, and ravish in relation:
Thy words being spent; spend now, in Contemplation.

(p. 298)

This contemplation of the divine attributes leads in the mystical doctrines of contemplation, to that unitive state which represents the apex of the spiritual pilgrimage during man's earthly existence. Here the soul experiences the "ravishing ecstasy, or intimate communion" with God through its intimacy with the Mediator. Thus Benlows' discourse on divine love as manifested in the redemptive act of Christ leads to the rapturous experience of union in Canto IX, and the Emblems conclude with the soul's lyric of joy and yearning for the enduring union which follows its release from the body.

29 Collins, Christian mysticism ... , p. 45.
CHAPTER III

UNITIVE AND ALCHEMICAL IMAGERY

The affirmation of God's love for His creation is foreign to Plotinian neo-Platonism, but it enters the Christian mystical theology of the Renaissance by an indirect route with strong neo-Platonic associations. St. John, St. Augustine, the pseudo-Dionysius and Nicholas of Cusa all stress the doctrine of love which is heralded anew by the Italian neo-Platonists of the late fifteenth century. As exemplified by Spenser's "Hymn of Heavenly Love," the metaphysics of Divine Love rest firmly on two neo-Platonic concepts, the cyclical cosmic process of emanation and return, and the principle of unity with God through the soul's conformity to a "heavenly pattern".

According to Plutonic thought, man, by virtue of his exalted origins, is possessed of an innate yearning to return to the Source of his being. The Plutonic eros is an attraction of the soul rather than of the flesh to the higher intelligible plane. While Benlowes accepts the Christian scale of love as an expression of aranse (Canto IX, "THE SONG"), his inclinations are in the main towards the mystical devotion of the contemplative ("Ravish'd with ecstasy, itself transcends, / Nor bounds, nor limits would it own;" but "Longs for th'Eternal, signs for HIM, beyond that lover!"

The concluding stanza of Canto II is again more attuned to the neo-Platonic philosophical love:

Mans restlesse kinde, GODS Image, can't be blest
Till of this ORB, This ALL, possest.
THOU our Souls Center art, our everlasting REST!

(c, p. 36)

It is the mystical Platonist's conviction that only the soul's possession of the spiritual Beloved brings complete fulfilment and glory to man. In accordance with this premise, Quarles and Benlowes are more severe than the secular metaphysical poets in their rejection of Petrarchan love imagery when such imagery is applied to the search for physical gratification. This note of antagonism towards the Petrarchian sonneteers is common to the meditative poets, including Southwell, Herbert and Vaughan. Spenser in the "Hymne of Heavenly Love" turns against the "lewd layes" of his youthful poetry. There is also a strong hostility to the Petrarchans in Giordano's dedication of De Glia Ercoici Furori to Sir Philip Sidney.

Quarles is particularly anxious to denigrate both the Alexandrian imp and the Ovidian predator of the secular love vogue. He does so by enveloping them in pathos. In Emblem II.8 Cupid is an all-too-human infant of the querulous type, seeking self-indulgence and pleasing baubles from his seat on the lap of Venus, "queen of false delights." The mythological paragon of love is here depicted as a doting mother who soothes her child's "peevish wranglings." She

... presents his eye
With antick Trifles, which th' indulgent earth
Makes proper Objects of mans childish mirth:

These be the Pipes that base-borne minds daunce after,
And turne immod'rate tears to lavish laughter;
Whilst heav'ly Raptures passe without regard;
Their Strings are harsh, and their high straines
unheard: ... (p. 94)

Elsewhere the classical Eros is depicted as a sorrowful metamorphosis—the long-eared Bottom of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The poet whimsically queries

Is this that jolly God, whose Cyprian Bow
Has shot so many flaming darts,
And made so many wounded Beauties goe
Sadly perplext with thimpring hearts?

(II.9, p. 97)
The engraving shows the tormented creature endeavouring vainly to hide from the Sun. It is, the poet claims, not the result of "Circean Charme" or "Necatean spight" but rather "owl-eyed Lust". At the first crack of the Doomsday "trumpet's dreadful blast" he "stands aghast, / And scrambles from his melting Throne!"

Benlowes opens his first Canto with a parody of the Petrarchan sonneteer which is strikingly similar to that of Giordano Bruno's Dedication mentioned above. In Quarles' emblematic manner he draws the reader's attention to the 'scene' of his subject:

Loves Captive view, who's Daies in smart Prosts spends;
On's Idol dotes, to Lit pretends;
Writes, blots, & rends; nor heed where he begins or ends.

His Stock of Verse in Comick Fragments lies:
Higher than Ten'tiffs Tique he flies:
Sole but a snare; Thee outray'st all Diamonds of the Skies.

Victorious Flames blow from thy brighter EYE;
Cloud those twin-lightning ORBS (They'll fire
An ice-vein'd Loin) cloud them, or, PLANET-struck, I die.

(1, vii-ix, p. 2)

The poet hastens to distinguish the true from the artificial beauty, the inner perception from the external gaudy display.

Does Troy-bane Helen (Friend) with ANGELS share?
All Lavish Passions Idols are:
Frequent are fuc'd Cheeks; The Virtues's rare:

A Truth authentick. Yet not skin-deep white
And red, perplex the nobler Light
O' th' Intellect; nor mask the SCULS clear piercing Sight.

Theophila is carefully distinguished from the conventional lady of the sonnets. Her eyes strike no passionate fire in the hearts of those about her; rather, they

... amaze the Viewers, and inspire
To Hearts a warm, yet chest Desire.
(As Sol heats all) yet fell they in Themselves no Fire.

(III, xxix, p. 44)
Both she and the Anima of the Emblemes are wounded by the dart of love, which enters by the eye and comes to lodge in the heart. But it is the mystical wound conveyed by Christ and bearing curative powers rather than destructive appetites. Both maidens endure the combined pleasures and torments resulting from their devotion to the "gentle tyrant" of the Canticles, and seek his attention, however ephemeral. But they do so in the service of that sole fulfilling Divine Love which culminates not in passion but in spiritual bliss, and which ends not in death but in eternal life.

The soul is the site of a never-ending rivalry between heaven and earth for its affection and the imagery of love in these devotional works revolves about the tug-of-war portrayed by Quarles in Emblem V.8, in which the soul is exhorted to

Remember, 0 remember thou art borne
Of royall blood; remember, thou art sworne
A Maid of Honour in the Court of Heav'n;
Remember what a costly price was giv'n
To ransom thee from slav'ry thou wert in;
And wilt thou now, my soule, turne slave again?
The Son and Heire to Heav'n's triune JERUHE
Would faine become a Suitor for thy Love,
And offers for thy dow'r his Fathers Throne,
To sit for Seraphims to gaze upon; ... (p. 274)

It is in the affective heart of man that the pull of earthly and heavenly desires is most keenly felt. Quarles describes the divisive effect of the conflicting attractions to sensual and spiritual stimuli in Emblem IV.1:

Sometimes a sudden flash of sacred heat
Warms my chill soul, and sets my thoughts in frame:
But soone that fire is shoudered from her seat
By lustfull Cupids much inferiour flame;
I feel two flames, and yet no flame, entire:
Thus are the hangryll thoughts of mixt desire
Consum'd between that heav'nly and this earthly fire.

(p. 186)
The imagery of fire is particularly important in the Christian Platonist's universe of corresponding planes of being, for it assumes the identity of the Divine Principle at the highest level, and amongst the four elements of the sensible world is regarded as the most perfect. It had long held a particular fascination for mystical theologians and poets as a fitting symbol both of transcendent Deity and of the individual's spiritual experiences in seeking union with the Divine. This twofold application of fire to the spiritual life in its macrocosmic and microcosmic aspects is described by Mircea Eliade as a

complex symbolism which associates the terrifying fire-theophanies with the sweetest flames of mystic love and with the luminous manifestations of the divine as well as with the innumerable 'combustions' and 'passions' of the soul. At many levels, fire, flame, dazzling light, inner heat, express spiritual experiences, the incarnation of the sacred, the proximity of God.  

As poetic chroniclers of the soul's inner transformation along the mystical way to union with God, Quarles and Bunyates frequently draw upon this traditional metaphor of God and of man's spiritual principle. St. Bonaventure's Stimulus Amoris, Rolle's Fire of Love, and St. John of the Cross' Living Flame of Love are examples of the prevalence of fire symbolism in the Christian mystical tradition, where it is employed to convey the general theme of Divine Love and in particular the unitive stage of the spiritual journey. Surprisingly, the imagery of fire is not a feature of the New Testament mystical writings on love. Indeed, it is conspicuously absent in the Pauline and Johannine texts. Its occurrence in these minor seventeenth century poets derives rather from the Platonic Sun-God analogy described above. Through the writings of St. Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius it had been incorporated into the Christian contemplative tradition, where it flourished in the divine love treatises of the Renaissance Platonists. The Stoic concept of nous as energizing fire also filters through this route to the metaphysical

school, and its influence may be perceived in the *Emblemes* and in *Theophila* where the imagery of fire blends so readily with that of the pseudo-science alchemy in evoking the soul's movement towards union with God.

The fire of God's love manifests itself to the soul in accordance with the latter's progress on the spiritual path. To the sinner it appears as the "consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24) which functions as a corrosive in order to purify the substance and hasten it towards perfection. It is this "afflictive" rather than "gentle" fire which the soul experiences during its purgative stage. According to St. John of the Cross the divine fire removes the impurities or dross of the soul by making "an assault upon it, wounding it with its flame, drying it out, and stripping it of its unsightly qualities until it is so disposed that it can be penetrated and transformed into the fire."\(^3\) In Emblem IV.14 the stray soul is relentlessly pursued by the Sun of Justice ("The eye of vengeance burnes; her flames invade / My swelling Soule: . . ." [p. 237]).

The beneficent effects of the Divine Fire are noted by St. John of the Cross. "He does not blacken [the soul] and convert it to ashes as [material] fire does to coal, but He brightens and enriches it." Hence arises the soul's paradoxical response to the "sweet cautery" of divine love.\(^4\) The softening of the heart from brittle clay to ductile matter is an essential aspect of the soul's upward ascent to union. Quarles alludes to this inner transformation in Emblem V.5, and distinguishes it from the inferior flames of human love:

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O can my frozen gutters choose but run,
That feel the warmth of such a glorious Sun?
Nethinks his language, like a flaming arrow,
Both pierce my bones, and melts their wounded marrow.
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\(^4\) Ibid., p. 596.
Thy flames, O Cupid, (though the joyful heart
Feels neither sting of grief, nor fears the smart
Of jealous doubts, but drunk with full desires)
Are torments weigh'd with these celestial fires;
Pleasures that ravish in so high a measure,
That 0 I languish in excess of pleasure;
What ravish heart, that feels these melting loves,
Would not desire and bathe the treach'rous eyes
Of dunghill earth? . . .

(V.5, pp. 261-2)

In Theophile the process of melting is more directly related to the
neo-Platonic metaphors of return to the One:

Ice is a thing distinct from th' Ocean wide;
But, melted by the Sun, does glide
Into it, becomes one with it, and so shall e're abide.

(VIII, lxxi, p. 118)

The Sun-God analogy by its very union of the principle of light
and the element of fire gives rise to frequent imagery in which both
the eye and the heart of the contemplative are affected by the
presence or absence of the spiritual Sun. The oscillations of the
Christian pilgrim who finds that the corruptible body renders him
unable to face the transcendent rays or again that the same inter-
posed shell of sin may remove him entirely from the fructifying rays
is the subject of the epigram to Emblem III.7:

If heav'n's all-quickning Eyes vouchsafe to shine
Upon our souls, we slight; If not, we whine:
Our Equinoctiall hearts can never lie
Secure, beneath the Tropicks of that eye.

(p. 151)

Through Christ, the visible Principle of Light, the shade to
which the miscreant soul flees (IV.14), man comes to know and to love
God and thus strengthened, the former "consuming fire" of God now
kindles in the soul the will to be united with Deity. In this state
the soul welcomes the most powerful rays of the Sun into its innermost
being, where they may dispel error and darkness:

Great spring of light, in whom there is no shade
But what my interposed sinnes have made,
Whose marrow-melting Fires admit no screene
But what my owne rebellions put betwene
Their precious flames, and my obdurate ears;
Disperse these plague-distilling Clouds, and clear
by many a Soul into a glorious day; . . .

(V.5, p. 262)

The illuminative stage of the mystical way is succeeded by
a third and final stage, characterised by the pseudo-Dionysius as
"perfection or fire (i.e., love)." This fire metaphor is reinforced
by Pico's weighty affirmation that "Dionysius is quite justified in
comparing God to the sun, because as the sun illuminates and warms the
body, so God provides to our spirits the light of truth and the ardor
of love." This combination of light and fire as essentials in the
mystic's experience of divine love gives to Benlevor's epic its distinct
neo-Platonic flavour. In Theophila the Johannine God of Love and of
Light and Cusanus' God of Love merge in an exhilarated vision of
progress towards fulfilment:

LOVE darts all Thoughts to its BELOV'D; doth place
All BLISS in waiting on His GRACE;
It languisheth with none to view HIM Face to Face!

And ushers in that BEAUTIFIC LOVE,
Which so divinely flames Above,
And doth to VISION, UNION, and FRUITION move!

(VIII, lxxix-lxx, p. 118)

In his De Itinerario Lontis in Doe St. Bonaventure also identifies
the culminating stage of the mystical route as a fiery love which
surpasses the illumination of intellect in the same way that the
Seraphs surpass the contemplative Cherubs in their proximity to God.
"If you would truly know how these things come to pass," says St.
Bonaventure," ask it of grace, not of doctrine; of desire, not of
intellect; of the ardours of prayer, not of the teachings of the
schools; . . . not of illumination, but of that Fire which enflames
all and wraps us in God with great sweetness and most ardent love."
Benlows renders this concept of the pre-eminence of love over
knowledge by the succinct emblematic phrase "Hearts outteach Eyes" (p. 121)
and by his exclamation during the discourse on love in Canto VII:

How far, immediate FLAMES, do You excell
All that in Tranquility high Torret dwell!
What then can antique see? What then can Volumes tell?

(xxii, p. 84)

The appropriateness of the mystical fire imagery to the
unitive experience is defined by Giordano Bruno. In reply to Cicada's
query, "Why is love symbolized by fire?" the author replies via his
'enthusiastic' spokesman, Tansillo:

For many reasons, but at present let this one
sufice to thee; that as love converts the thing
loved into the lover, so amongst the elements fire
is active and potent to convert all the others;
simple and composite, into itself.

It is in this sense that Benlows describes the unifying effect of
Platonic friendship in Canto XII:

When two encceav'd are in one high Desire,
   They feel, like ANGELS, mutual Fire;
   Flames Intellectual live, material Flames expire.

(x, p. 221)

The same connotation of the neo-Platonic and mystical fire imagery
dominates the poet's description of his 'embrace' with the Bridegroom
in Canto IX. Approaching the moment of the unio mystica, the poet
cries

Let us be One! In One, Two melted flow!
Let one Life, as one Love, inform us Two!

(IX, 89, p. 145)

That a reciprocal relationship has been achieved in which the mortal
contemplative burns with a flame as intense as his spiritual counter-
part—thus establishing the probability of union—is further emphasised
in the description of the consummation

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8 The Heroic Enthusiasts (Chi Sroici Furori): An Ethical Poem
by Giordano Bruno, transl. L. Williams, 2 vols. (London, 1867-9),
I, 44.
Quarles also suggests that the loving soul is able to reciprocate in kind the fiery love which emanates through the Word:

O how mine eyes, now ravish'd at the sight
Of my bright sun, shot flames of equal fire!
Ah! how my soul dissolv'd with over-delight,
To re-enjoy the Crown of chast desire!
How sovereign joy depox'd and dispossess
Rebellious grief, and how my ravish'd breast---
But who can press those heights that cannot be exprest?

(IV.12, p. 230)

His final emblem again suggests the mutual exchange of love in terms of fire imagery, although in this instance the poet anticipates its occurrence when the lustful fires of youth begin to wane:

My youth is in her Spring; Autumnal vows
Will make me ripe for so sweet a Spouse,
When after-times have burnish'd my desire,
Ile shoot thee flames for flames, and fire for fire.
0 leave me not, nor turne thy beauty from me;
Looke, looke upon me, though thy flames ov'recome me.

(V.15, p. 302)

The unifying symbolism of fire is frequently employed by Quarles and Denloues in conjunction with alchemical concepts. The latter had enjoyed a longstanding association with both mystical and neo-Platonic thought, and arose from the same period and culture which produced the Greek Anthology, the Alexandrian predecessor of the emblem books. Until the Paracelsian controversies altered chemical thought in the late sixteenth century, the alchemists had utilised the Aristotelian schema of elements and were particularly interested in the notion of a common matrix or prima materia underlying the various species and forms of matter. The prima materia for them the dynamic link between the worlds of matter and of Form. If it could be discovered and cleansed of its accumulated dross and the active Form of the spiritualized Stone projected thereupon, a perfected metallic substance could, they thought, be produced—possibly silver or gold. The operations of the alchemists, like those of the mystics which took place on the higher scale of human evolution towards Spirit, presupposed the procedures of purification and rebirth as preliminaries to spiritual perfection.
As conveyor of the “second Grace, glowing Fire” which restores man’s soul to its original heritage, the Christ of the symbolae and Theophila assumes the role which the alchemists attributed to their Philosopher’s Stone in the realm of Nature, that of transmuting imperfect matter into the purified eternity of gold. In Christ as in the alchemical Stone we can perceive the conviction that the Platonic bifurcated realms of matter and spirit may be bridged as a result of the descent of the Intelligible Principle. Both Christianity and the pseudo-science of alchemy assumed that the agent of man’s return to Reality (i.e., to perfection and unity) must be an active divine Principle sufficiently powerful—yet still able to commingle with vastly inferior matter—to precipitate in the degenerate entities a hastening towards the eventual reunion for which they were originally destined. A key role in this return of matter to spirit is played by fire. The anonymous author of the *Sophic Hydrolith*, a mystical treatise which purports to draw analogies between alchemical procedures and Christian doctrine, describes in religious terms the process of interaction between the divine spark at the core of the metal and the nourishing fire bestowed by the alchemist. Thus he states that

> the true Word of God, or the Spirit of God, whom Jeremiah compares to a fire, lies hid in our hearts, having been planted in our souls by Nature, and only defaced and obscured by the fall. This spirit must be aided, roused into action, and fanned into a bright flame, by another outward fire, viz., the daily fire of godliness, the exercise of all the Christian virtues . . . and the study of the pure Divine Word . . .

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9 Benelous, Theophila, II, lxxxv, p.


11 Ibid., I, 108.
The creation of the spiritual Tincture which by fire and water promotes man's welfare is itself a lesson in the rigorous ascent which faces the contemplative as well as in the monumental nature of the divine gesture on behalf of the fallen world. Pure spirit being too dissimilar in its perfection for union with corrupted matter, the "Divine Nature of God . . . [took] upon itself . . . another kindred 'metallic' body, namely our human nature, our human flesh and blood . . ." As common gold (unredeemed human nature) could not embody the Divine Messenger, the latter was incarnated with "a pure, sinless and perfect humanity"—the alchemists' pure gold. Thence begins the second stage of the work of regeneration. Just as 'our compound,' says the author of the Sophia Hydromith, must pass through a stage of decomposition and be born anew, so Christ endured humiliation and death upon the Cross, and yet by virtue of the indwelling Spirit of God, returned to His celestial glory. The separation of body and soul within the hermetic vessel, and the latter's ascent to pure spirit and repeated descent to give nourishment to the body constitutes the central dynamics of the alchemical operation. The fact that Christ took upon Himself human flesh—that Spirit descended into matter for the latter's perfection—results, in the view of the spiritual alchemists, in his miraculous powers of transforming sinful opposites into a like purified essence. It is this dynamic injection of purifying Spirit which Querles heralds in the epigram to Emblem IV.4, with, however, a transference of Christ's role from that of the Stone itself to the artist of the 'Great Work':

Lord, what art thou, whose skill
Transmutes to perfect good, from perfect ill!

(p. 199)

In Canto I Benlows identifies Christ with the final transmutative act of the Stone, that of projection, in which vast quantities of lesser substances are transformed into gold. The Johannine context with its implications of spiritual rebirth is conveyed by a preceding

12 Ibid., pp. 99-100.
13 Ibid., p. 100.
allusion to Christ's miraculous curing of the blind. Thus the poet urges Christ to

Turn Sense to Spirit; Nature's chang'd alone
By GAlGS: THAT is the Chymick-stone:
And thy all-powerful GOD is pure Projection; ...
(I, xc, p. 12)

That the contemplative, like the alchemical compound, must pass through a rigorous period of purification in order to extract "in earthly Heav'n; An ounce of heav'nly Earth" is affirmed by Quarles in concluding his second book of emblems:

SO, now the soule's sublim'd: Her soure desires
Are re-calcin'd in heav'n's well-temper'd Fires:
The heart restor'd and purg'd from dressy Nature,
Now finds the Freedom of a new-born Creature: ...

(ii.15, p. 121)

However, the 'spiritual death' which removes the stigma of the sensible world and brings the converted soul to a "new-born" quest for God by no means heralds the end of the contemplative journey. The soul now enters into its intimate relationship with Christ, the bearer of the divine pneuma which refines and softens the common gold of the aspirant's soul until it is receptive to the imprint of the Divine:

By soule, Thy gold is true, but full of dresse;
Thy SAINTLY breath refines thee with some losse;
His gentle Furnace makes thee pure as true;
Thou must be melted, erc th' art cast anew.

(Epigram V.5, p. 263)

Similarly, Theophila's spiritual betrothal is preceded by the refining action of the divine fire and thus brought closer to that perfection which alone can unite with pure Spirit. Addressing Christ, she says,

Though nought but dross I in my self can spie,
Yet melted with THY beaming EYE,
My Refuse turns to Gold, by mystick Alchymic, ...

(IV, lxxix, p. 62)

14 Quarles, Emblemes, II.15, p. 122.
Being purified to a state which will, like gold, endure the trials of divine fire, and filled with such love of the divine that it can with Paul claim to be conscious not of self but only of the indwelling presence of Christ, the soul welcomes those fires which will transport it to eternity. It is at this stage of the contemplative's journey that both Quarles and Benlowses call upon the familiar emblematic symbol of the phoenix to convey the soul's conviction of and desire for the life of the spirit, unhampered by the bodily prison. Here desire for the sight of God merely underlines the restrictive curtain which keeps the soul from its fulfilment, and the soul cries for the dissolution which will enable his true self to return to its celestial home:

Let me behold and die; for my desire is, Phoenix-like, to perish in that Fire.

(III.7, p. 150)

This emblem, which for Horapollo represented "a long-enduring restoration," is employed by both poets in order to distinguish the divine love from its rival, the lust of the Petrarchan poets. The latter they convey by means of the Petrarchan conceit of the moth which singses itself in the flame. Benlowses' satirical passage in Canto XI regarding the "exquisite gallant" Volupto carries the notion of the fire which destroys:

How's Courtesan appears, who blows Loves Fire,  
Her prating Eyes speak vain Desire;  
To catch this art-fair fly the following Trouses aspire.  
The gamesome Fly that round the Candle playes,  
Is seerchd to Death i'th courted Blaze:  
Thus is the Amourist destroy'd by lustful Caze.

(XI, xliv-xlv, p. 191)

The contrast between the two emblems of fiery love is made by Bruno in the De Gl! Eruci Furoj, and provides an informative prose commentary.

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on the usage of the devotional poets. "The phoenix," he states, through the sun's presence, changes death into life, and that other [the earthly lover], by the presence of love, transmutes life into death. The one kindles his fire on the aromatic altar, the other finds it ever present with him and carries it wherever he goes. The one again, has certain conditions of a long life; but the other, through the infinite differences of time and immemorial circumstances, has the mutable conditions of a short life. The one kindles with certainty, the other with doubt as to whether he will see the sun again.\(^\text{15}\)

This ecstatic sense of the soul's ability to participate in spirituality during this life by virtue of its indwelling eternal Principle is evident in Benlopes' opening lines of Canto IX:

Whose delights to burn in holy Fire
Of VISION Fair THEOPHILA,
Joy, Salutation, in that Plane;
Thou so, diuana born,\(^\text{16}\) may'st like the Phoenix burn,
That to PHOENIX thou rise,
Not losing Life, but gaining well the same: . . .

(11. 1-3, p. 125)

Thus the fire of Divine Love within man represents the act of coniunctio whereby the opposites of matter and spirit are reconciled. As the text of St. Bonaventure which accompanies Emblem V,5 states, "It makes God man; and man, God; things temporall, eternall; mortall, immortall; it makes an enemy a friend; a servant a Son; vile things, glorious; cold hearts fiery, and hard things liquid."

The personage of the deified Theophila bears an important relation to the poet in this alchemical work of transformation. She parallels in some respects the role which Christ bore in her own ascent to salvation, namely that of bestowing grace through a visionary descent. Through her eyes and "voice-music" the poet sees and hears the

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\(^{15}\) The Heroic Enthusiasm ..., transl. L. Williams, I, 137.

wonders of the Intelligible world. As the medium by which the poet experiences Reality, Theophila bears a striking resemblance to the Sophie-like presence in Vaughan's poem "The Night". In his poem Vaughan describes a nocturnal visionary experience:

Through that pure Virgin-shrine,
That sacred vail drawn o'er thy glorious noon
That men might look and live as Glo-worms shine,
And face the Moon:
Wise Nicodemus saw such light
As made him know his God by night.

The effect of Theophila's communicated vision again parallels the poet's identification of alchemical projection with the Word in Canto I. In this way Theophila assumes the role of the Godhead in performing the alchemical operation which stimulates the poet to his subsequent union with the Esity. The poet refers to her as the

PROJECTION to my Soul! Thy SIGHT'S a Breath
Of GLORY; Thou dost VIRTUE breath;
Thy Words, like sacred Incense, Fuel & Flame besueth.
(VIII, i, p. 109)

Through her "gold-twist lines" he is enabled to wind his way through the labyrinth of the sense-world and finally, like the bearer of the golden bough, to attain the long-sought Elysium. Canto IX witnesses the fruition of the "Burnings" of divine love in the poet, a conclusion of the mystical route motivated by Benlove's desire to imitate the supercelestial pilgrimage of Theophsila.

"Dwell on This Joy, my Thoughts," the poet exclaims upon her disappearance towards the end of his contemplative cantos,

. . . react her Part;
Such Suntures on thy shuddering Heart
Make Thee all-Ascension by Spirit-seizing Art!
(VIII, xcix, p. 121)

The "Argument" introducing Canto VIII reveals that this microcosmic projection of spiritual potency from Theophsila to the poet is seen against a background of universal regeneration:
The Elixir centuples It self. But, O
Lyrics of lyrics must she do,
'T express GODS ESSENCE which no Intellect can show!

Theophila, then, depicts the neo-Platonic vision of the return of creation to its original perfection on three planes, each of which is underlined by the redemptive pattern of Christ. First, Theophila personifies the experience of the saintly soul in achieving glorification and a place amongst the heavenly hierarchy. Then the poet's own experience of the unio mystica illustrates for his readers the manner in which the individual's contemplative devotion may lead to the vision of grace. Confirming this happy outcome is the engraving prior to Canto X which depicts the author reaching up to receive the ring of grace descending from the Heavens. Finally, the poet's powers of effecting a similar transformation in others and of bringing them within the aura of illuminative grace are suggested by the above quote and by the poet's "Address to the Ladies" which repeats the alchemical imagery of transformation:

As, sir'd Affections to your Beauties move
So, Still Natures be of Love;
That, what was Vainour, may, by VIRTUE, Essence prove.

Survey THEOPHILA; her Rule apply,
That You may live, as You would die;
VIRTUE enamels Life; 'Tis GRACE does glorifie.

For Benlowes the poetry of devotion is itself an artistic coincidentia oppositorum which channels sacred truth to the wider realms of humanity. This notion is implicit in his divinus furor concept of creativity as a manifestation of the sympathetic operations of the macrocosm. "Divine Poesy," to repeat Benlowes' discussion in his Preface, is a "Divine Rapture" which chains the Linde with harmonious Precepts from a divine Influence, whose Operations are as subtle and resistless as the Influence of Planets; . . . " Theophila is the elixir of Benlowes' "chemic art". In creating his heroic epic in imitation of the divine and the saintly pattern, he both effects his own ecstatic union with Deity in this life and provides, it is anticipated, the stimulus for the reader to follow suit.
In his vision of the projected effect of the poetic word

Benlopes dons the inflated garb of the alchemist by suggesting that
the work of perfection on which he is engaged constitutes a co-
creatorship with God. In Canto I, for example, sacred poetry is

described as a transforming art which informs the cultured world

with that radiant divine beauty of which Theophila is (for the poet)
the model and thus inspires that world to pursue Christian perfection:

Hymns ravish those who Pulpets fly;
Convert dull Lead to active Gold by LOVE-TRYME.

As Nature's prime Confectioner, the Sea,
By her flour'ning-sibling Chymistrie,
Turns Vert to Cr. So, VERSE gross Prese does rareifie.

So, BEAMS of Poesie give Light, Life, Soul to Arts.

(lxvi-lxvii, pp.9-1c)

Like the alchemical dreams of the Renaissance which nurtured
the outmoded procedures and assumptions in the face of a new society
and a new philosophy, Benlopes' theme of universal regeneration
through Divine Love is tinged with nostalgia. In an age of factious
ills his contemplative poetry is produced in the vain hope that the
Golden Age might thereby be recreated:

Lifes hecstick Fits finde Cordials in Pray'rs Hive,
Transcendently Restorative,
Which might our Iron Age to its first Gold retrieve.

See, listening Time runs back to fetch the age
Of Gold, when Pray'r does Heav'n engage;
Devotion is Religions Life-blood; 'tis God's Page, ...

(XIII, xciv-xcv, p. 243)
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The rigours of the exiled soul wending its way back to God is a subject which holds a great attraction for the metaphysical religious poets generally, and for those writers with a particular esteem for neo-Platonic concepts and the continental meditative genre. It encompasses both the melancholy state of earth-ridden man so beloved by the Jacobean poets and the great Renaissance vision of the glory which can be attained by the philosophical lover who seeks a "deific excellence" through imitation, knowledge and love of God. The greatest of the metaphysicals employ their pens in the delineation of this all-important relationship, and it is in comparison with their contemporaries, Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw, that the performance of Quarles and DeLowes can best be evaluated.

What is noticeable at once in the Emblemata and in Theophila is their failure in terms of that blend of intellect and passion which characterises great metaphysical poetry. They are inadequate, however, in differing respects. For whereas the Emblemata display neither exceptional intellectual or emotional depth, Theophila indicates an excessive pre-occupation with abstract theological detail and hyperbolic intensity at the expense of poetic expression.

The Emblemata bear a superficial relationship to Herbert's poetry: They are simple in diction, varying in style and metre, and characterised by a personal tone established between the authorial "I" and the "Thou" pertaining either to the worldly reader or to God. Yet they evoke neither the intimacy nor profundity of Herbert's spiritual monologues. In spite of Quarles' use of the subjective
persons, the reader is curiously distanced from the poetry. The \textit{Emblems} conspire to remain cinematic and objective. The emblem vogue, as Freeman notes,\footnote{Freeman, p. 99.} itself bears some of the responsibility for this effect. Tied to the elaboration of a given scene and subject, the individual poems are frequently didactic and repetitious. The three evils of pleasure, wealth and fame are all too familiar to the reader by the conclusion of the work.

Quarles' talent is rather that of the showman than of the devotional poet who distills his personal experience in a rich and unique manner. Within the English emblem tradition, it should be noted, he is extraordinarily successful in providing the static and monotonous form with a certain dynamic and psychological flavour. A master of the epigrammatic and vivid phrase, the timely parenthetical comment, startling word or teasing riddle which keeps the reader's attention, Quarles is more capable than Ether or Arucker in establishing a point of contact between reader and emblematic scene. And yet this is hardly sufficient to sustain one's interest in the work as poetry. The striking intellectual concept is absent in his verse, the conventional themes merely dressed up and made entertaining. His use of visual emblems and varied rhythm is again in striking contrast to that of Herbert. For where the latter proves a master of rhythm and a simply worded but deeply meaningful idiom, the explorative treatment of metre in the \textit{Emblems} can itself degenerate into a mere attempt to render the familiar concepts more palatable. In this respect Freeman writes that "Quarles' poetry, full of variety as it is from the purely metrical point of view, has very little rhythmical scope, and the ear, if not offended, is certainly wearied by the monotony of the obvious and inevitable ..." \footnote{Ibid., p. 115.}
One can find in the *Makelar*, as well, instances of the choppy
metrics which mar the poetry of Benloves.

In Theophilus all is intensified—the visual emphasis in art
and metaphor, the concern with instruction, the wit and emotion of
the combined meditative and emblematic voicings—with the result that
the reader again finds little substance for empathy or inspiration.
The poet indulges in a fondness for the intricacies of theological
and philosophical thought without approaching the intellectual
brilliance of Donne. Again one meets with didactic or inflated
doctrines of a rich and complex tradition without the feeling that
the creative imagination of the poet evinces an individual experience
or view of life. Butler's motto, that imitation defines Benloves' 
mode of heroic poetry, is all too true. His borrowing of vivid
descriptive passages and clever phrases from Sylvester, Quarles,
Herbert, Donne and Milton (to name a few), render Theophilus as
fascinating a form of literary quiz as any modern equivalent. As
an example of an outmoded aesthetic based on imitative and numero-
logical principles, however, Theophilus can yield fruitful results.
It is in this respect that Qvarnström qualifies the neo-classical
reaction to the poem. "The critics of the new fashion," states
Qvarnström,

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\text{hold up poor Benloves' Theophilus to ridicule in the}
\text{merciless light of neoclassicism and a dawning}
\text{Enlightenment. The principles of exact calculation}
\text{underlying Theophilus are by no means alien to neo-}
\text{classical aesthetics in the French vein, so successfully}
\text{introduced in England. But, of course, Benloves' way}
\text{of realizing them glaringly differs from classical}
\text{French standards. The rigid critics brought Édouard}
\text{Benloves to the literary court of Boileau, as it}
\text{were, and there the poet was sentenced to death for}
\text{neglecting the indispensable neoclassic appeal to}
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\text{Jenkins, pp. 111-117, 162-3, at passim, discusses the poet's}
\text{borrowings.}
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common sense in euphemious stanzas. . . . Through the efforts of Saintsbury and Jenkins the poet has made a kind of come-back in an atmosphere of revived interest in metaphysical poetry. . . . From our point of view the exaggerations of Theocritus, its hyperbolical character, make the poem very useful as a pedagogical example. Its embodiment of a lost and forgotten poetical theory is carried to such an extreme that we can aptly call it abnormal but the normal can be elucidated by means of the abnormal. 4

And yet with respect to Bonloues' limited skill, one cannot deny the truth of the eighteenth-century dictum that the 'grand defect' of this Christian epic is its 'grand liose theme. It is composed on the basis of lofty aesthetic and mystical principles but without sufficient poetic skill to sweep the reader, as Vaughan so movingly can in his shorter lyrics, up to the majestic realms of the contemplative vision. While Vaughan successfully integrates in his devotional poetry the syncretistic themes of the Renaissance with his orthodox Christian worship and endows his expression with a sense of reality and immediacy, Bonloues tends to catapult the reader from the roar and fire of passion to the rocky bed of pedantry.

Bonloues' fondness for elaborate form and decoration infused with irrepressible enthusiasm reveals his affinities with the baroque poetry of Crabbeau. Like the latter, Bonloues can be at once "abstract" and "vivid"; creating in the reader a sense of remoteness from the intense emotional display and the wordy erudition of the poetry. He suffers from the excessive enthusiasm which one also finds in Traherne's poetry and which is happily absent in Vaughan's moments of intensity. One senses, in other words, a degree of "facile, expansive, emotional optimism" 5 and, at the opposite pole, of over-bearing.

4 Qvamström, Poetry and Numbers . . . , p. 57.


6 Bush’s description of Traherne’s verse, English Literature . . . , p. 149.
The two poems are of most value to the contemporary reader as guides to the contemplative and emblematic genres. They demonstrate how both traditions could draw upon mystical and neo-Platonic precepts in order to bring to their readers the rapturous element in worship and the details of ascent from worldly vision to a higher spiritual perception through which man can realize his potential for divinity. Quarles and Benlowes are "interesting, rather than . . . sublime" poets. But through their schematic treatment of an outdated worldview one can usefully trace the contemplative themes in the realms of both the "market-place" and the cultured world of the esoteric virtuoso.

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7 Beachcroft, "Quarles and the Emblem Habit," p. 80.
8 Ibid., p. 94.
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