It is hardly surprising to find among Michael Drayton’s early poems an attempt at the epyllion—*Endimion and Phoebe, Ideas Latmus* (1595). An avid experimenter in genre, Drayton continued throughout his career to try his hand at virtually every form that came along—from sonnet to fairy poem. But it is a bit startling to see what Drayton did with his epyllion. Instead of writing an erotic poem, replete with the titillating details and circumventions that marked the fashion, Drayton decided that what the form needed was a good allegorical line—hardly an element of the earlier successes of Lodge’s *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (1589) or Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* (1593). Though suspected by many of his readers, Drayton’s allegory has never been satisfactorily described. Indeed the effort to impose a serious meaning upon a basically frivolous genre seems to have run the poem amuck, causing it finally to dissipate into an un-poetic display of erudition. Nevertheless, Drayton’s attempt to re-fuse allegory onto the form of the Ovidian erotic elegy is interesting, and its implications are important for the understanding of Drayton’s early conceptions of poetry.

Significant clues to the fact and intent of the allegory have already been assembled. Douglas Bush has pointed to the “insubstantiality” of the settings and to the idealistic treatment of what are usually voluptuously concrete characters; Hallett Smith has indicated the Platonic bias of Drayton’s choice of subject (Endymion is the symbol of high contemplation); and J. W. Hebel has roughly outlined the poem’s congruence with the Neoplatonic ascent of love. But
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it is Joan Grundy who has hinted at the most crucial point, the poem's identification of this "way of love" with the "way of the poet."" Offering as evidence the prominence of the Muse's and Phoebe's double identification with Urania, the poetic Muse, and with Idea, Drayton's own celestial source of inspiration, Grundy concludes that the poem presents as near a statement on the making of poetry as Drayton ever provided. However, what is still left unexplained is the precise pattern itself of this pronouncement and what it reveals about Drayton's aesthetics.

Superficially at least, the action of the poem closely follows the traditional myth: disguised as a nymph, Phoebe woos her shepherd-lover Endymion, who, failing to recognize her in mortal garb, at first rejects her advances, only to find after her departure that he has fallen in love with this earthly being. Later Phoebe returns to the sleeping Endymion to lavish him with kisses and infuse his soul with "fiery nature of a heavenly Muse." She then awakens her lover who, still deceived by her disguise, excitedly begins to court her "like a man whom Love has learned Art." Pleased by his inventions, Phoebe reveals her identity, and then laying Endymion's head in her lap, transports him to her own sphere where she imparts the secrets of the universe. Once more on Mt. Latmus, Endymion finds his shepherd world transformed; "at length" a pageant of the Muses is even held in his honor. Finally, Phoebe conveys him again to Latmus, where she lays him "under a bushie Lawrells pleasing shade," keeping him there "ever beautifull and yong"—not necessarily a bad fate for an aspiring poet!

Clearly, at the heart of this allegory lies the Neoplatonic enticement of the poet-lover from an appreciation of the earthly to the recognition of the Ideal itself. Phoebe, both as love-object and as heavenly Beauty, is the means by which Endymion is drawn to the contemplation of those universal truths that constitute the central revelation of the elegy. Like the Idea of the sonnets, Phoebe is initially unavailable to her lover in her true form; she participates in that world of perfection to which humans have no direct access. Even Endymion's allegiance to her is at first blind, based on a