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Sidney's Two Roads to Arcadia: Romance and the Narrative of Experience

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The large, diverse group of narratives we today call Renaissance romances are populated by the young. Nobly born, brave, and courteous, these youths face terrible trials and marvelous adventures, often to be rewarded at the last by marriage and a triumphant integration into the adult community. Marriage and the founding of a family represent the promised end of even the most errant of Renaissance narratives: heroic poems such as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* or Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, pastoral books like Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrée*, or recovered Greek tales like the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus.

Yet though they are about youth, few of these romances are narratives of "becoming"—at least, not in the modern sense. As modern readers, we may expect a story about youth to focus above all on experience: that is to say, trials and tribulations that change our heroes and allow them to learn something. Such expectations have been shaped largely by the influence of the *Bildungsroman*, the genre that Franco Moretti has called the symbolic form of the modern age.¹ In Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister* (1795-6), for example, a gifted but naive young man runs off with a troupe of actors, commits a series of mistakes, but eventually improves himself in both wisdom and social standing. Though he is only the son of a merchant, he ends by marrying into the nobility and putting his energies and talents to their use. Experience is important because it allows the bourgeois Wilhelm to cultivate himself, to improve upon his original situation and character. When Wilhelm laments his many errors towards the end of the novel, his teacher assures him that they all were necessary:

¹ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 3-13.

“Everything that happens to us leaves its traces, everything contributes imperceptibly to our development.”²

Imagine a narrative where everything that happens to the hero leaves its trace, where every experience contributes imperceptibly to his development. In this strict sense, there are few true *Bildungsromane* in the Renaissance. The age is full of stories about young people, many of whom must leave the safety of their homes to find their place in the world. Indeed, we might call this the quintessential plot of the Renaissance romance. But unlike Wilhelm, the heroes of romance often find that their trials exist not to improve and cultivate their faculties, but to affirm the innate virtue and nobility that has always been theirs. Even if they are, like Spenser’s Pastorella or his Redcrosse knight, unaware of their noble origins, their happy ending nevertheless awaits them; they have already been chosen, as it were. Nobility will always out, and nobility remains the essential precondition for one’s success. And if you do not possess noble blood, no amount of experience will ever make up for its lack.

Experience is thus, at best, rather secondary for a romance hero. Nor was it a form of knowledge held in high esteem by Renaissance humanists. Experience denotes knowledge gained by trials (and often hard ones) rather than knowledge learned from books or by precept. Erasmus notes that the ancients called it “a wretched sort of wisdom,” acquired through the kind of mistakes and misfortunes that a Christian prince could little afford.³ Even for the Renaissance schoolmaster, experience was a little-trusted form of education. As Jeff Dolven has argued, for the early modern schoolmaster “experience [is] the opposite of school; what school is intended to prepare for, or perhaps to prevent.”⁴ Early modern poets and writers, for their part, seem to have shared in this ambivalence until at least the eighteenth century. For wherever we may turn, it is rare to find a narrative wherein character is formed through the accumulation of experiences. It is, perhaps, the kind of story that is difficult for an early modern culture to fully imagine

² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. and ed. Eric A. Blackall and Victor Lange (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 257. On the difference between Goethe’s *Bildungsroman* and older narratives where youth is tested and tried, see Moretti, *Way of the World*, 15-74, particularly 42-48.

³ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. Lisa Jardine, trans. Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.

⁴ Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 65. My exploration of experience in Renaissance romance is indebted to Dolven, though my reading of *New Arcadia* diverges from his.

and endorse. It would take the birth of a new science and a change in the way we think about knowledge—not to mention a revolution against aristocratic society itself.

How do we measure the distance between the Renaissance romance and the bourgeois *Bildungsroman*, between the early modern and modernity proper? The two genres seem to pose vastly different pictures of youth, experience, and the process of growing up. I want to ask about the space between them—if any indeed exists. The task would mean exploring those early modern fictions that try to imagine youth differently, that wander outside the narrative patterns common to so many bestselling romances of the age. I want to propose, furthermore, that Philip Sidney's *New Arcadia* (1590) stands out as one such unique and precocious experiment.⁵ For Sidney's text has not one, but two young heroes, each with his own way of narrating the past. And if Sidney recounts romance tales of exemplarity and innate virtue through Musidorus, he uses Pyrocles, on the contrary, to explore what a narrative of experience might look like. It is a thwarted experiment, as we will see, given with one hand even while taken away with the other. But more than any other Renaissance romance, Pyrocles' tale pushes at the boundaries of a typical story of youth, moving beyond episodic narrative into a territory new and strange. In his unique account of complex trials and irreversible decisions, Pyrocles may be a distant forerunner of that most modern of novel protagonists: the hero whose path is determined by *Bildung*, by the weight of his accumulated experiences.

I have claimed that most Renaissance romances are not primarily about experience, that they are motivated instead by the innate nobility of their protagonists. This pre-given excellence of the hero has narrative consequences: it lends itself easily to an episodic plot structure. The early modern fiction market was dominated by such episodic narratives. By the end of book one of the popular *Amadis of Gaul* (1508), our chivalric hero has discovered his royal parentage and saved his childhood sweetheart. But there will still be misunderstandings, wars, and three more books of quests and exploits before they are allowed their happy ending. Honoré d'Urfé's pastoral lovers are separated within the opening pages of his *Astrée* (1607-1627), and then face five long volumes of estrangement, disguise, and wandering until they are reconciled at last. Between youth and marriage, adventures can

⁵ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*, ed. Victor Skretkowitz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Further references will appear parenthetically by page number in the main body of the text.

unfold like the pleated bellows of an accordion. Many of these books, like Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) and Montemayor's pastoral *Diana* (1559), were even expanded in later editions, with new stories and new adventures added to the middle.⁶ Such is the endlessly errant, digressive nature of romance that critics such as Patricia A. Parker and David Quint have described.⁷ But errancy and the inevitable happy ending are two sides of the same coin: the middle of the story can be dilated precisely because the ends have been firmly fixed in place.

While I have compared a romance to an accordion bellows, the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin coined a better phrase for the way episodes unfold in romances. He argued that romances were ruled by "adventure-time," a kind of extratemporal hiatus that opens up between two moments of biographical time.⁸ Between these two moments—between falling in love and getting married, for example—our heroes might endure one or two ordeals, or they might endure two hundred. Add one more shipwreck, one more encounter with bandits, and still our heroes would escape unscathed. The well-born protagonists of such a narrative do not change and grow, *per se*. Instead, they exude virtue, devotion, and nobility from the very beginning, and their many trials and tribulations merely allow them to showcase what they already are.

⁶ The 1532 edition of the *Furioso* adds six new cantos, whereas the 1561 edition of the *Diana* adds the interpolated tale of the Abencerraje. See Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (Ferrara: Francesco Rosso da Valenza, 1532); and Jorge de Montemayor, *Los siete libros de la Diana* (Valladolid: Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, 1561).

⁷ Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). For the contrary argument that romance is defined by restoration, happy endings, and coming full circle, see Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-41; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 186-206; and James Simpson, *Oxford Literary History Vol. 2, 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 257-302. The usefulness of Bakhtin's concept of adventure-time, discussed below, is that it allows for both errancy and endings.

⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258, particularly 84-110. Bakhtin is here speaking primarily about ancient Greek romances, though he later extends his comments about adventure-time to early modern pastoral and chivalric romances. For his analysis of Greek and chivalric romances in relation to the *Bildungsroman*, see Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 1-59, particularly 1-25.

As Bakhtin puts it, “The hammer of events shatters nothing and forges nothing—it merely tries the durability of an already finished product. And the product passes the test.”⁹

The romance would thus seem to represent the extreme opposite of a modern genre like the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of self-formation.¹⁰ For adventure-time leaves no trace, as Bakhtin argues. Many of the romance’s intervening episodes—battles, quests, pirate attack, and so forth—could be reversed or removed without damaging the overall arc. Such narratives may be sophisticated in other ways, of course. Yet this episodic logic tends to de-emphasize the kind of character development we have come to expect from the modern bourgeois novel. It de-emphasizes, too, the meaning of experience within a narrative. For if adventures can always be added or removed from the middle, then nothing that happens within such episodes is essential to the development of our protagonists. Episodes, we might say, are the opposite of experience.

I raise this dichotomy between episodic and experiential narrative because it gives us two ends of a spectrum for exploring early modern fiction. All Renaissance romances navigate between episode and experience. Even a highly episodic text like *Amadis of Gaul* has its irreversible actions and moments of responsibility, events that give weight and direction to the rest of the narrative. Amadis falls in love with Oriana; he discovers who his parents are; he and Oriana spend a clandestine evening together and Oriana conceives a child. His life does not exist purely in adventure-time, for Amadis the boy becomes a man, and the man becomes a father. These life-monuments can neither be reversed nor removed. Yet in between them we find entire books filled with episodes that make no change in either the hero or in his world. If adventure-time, according to Bakhtin, is made up of the weightless episodes that intervene between two moments of biographical time, then *Amadis* and other romances like it proceed like skipping stones across time’s surface, making the briefest contact before flying off on another sequence of adventures.

⁹ Bakhtin, “Forms of Time,” 107.

¹⁰ Bakhtin, “Forms of Time,” 111-129 suggests certain chronotopes that might serve as a middle ground between the weightless adventure-time of the Greek romance and the full biographical and historical time of the *Bildungsroman*. In Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*, for example, events follow an irreversible sequence of guilt, punishment, and redemption. Yet while events in Pyrocles’ narrative prove to be irrevocable, they cannot be so easily divided into cycles of transgression and atonement.

Yet I have also claimed that Sidney's *New Arcadia* starts to do something different. It obeys a strange gravity; its narrative threads do not all weigh the same. I want to draw particular attention to the tales in book two told by Sidney's main heroes, Musidorus and Pyrocles, and to show how Sidney uses these competing histories to explore two very different narratives about youth and development. One element separates Sidney's heroes straightaway from their previous romance counterparts: our need to learn about them second-hand, through their own self-presentation. This is a huge departure from Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, whose narrator simply declares that our protagonists are "two young princes ... both like in virtues, near in years, near in blood, but nearest of all in friendship."¹¹ The changed structure of the *New Arcadia* allows Sidney both to showcase multiple storytellers and to shine an intense light on his heroes' past, one that emphasizes the precise sequence of events that has led them to their present predicament.

Readers have long known that Sidney borrowed this innovative plot structure from an ancient Greek prose tale, the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus. Dating from the 3rd or 4th century C.E., the *Aethiopica* had been lost to Western Europe for hundreds of years, only to be rediscovered in 1526 when an enterprising German mercenary "liberated" the volume out of the king of Hungary's library after the sack of Buda by the Turks.¹² By the late sixteenth century, Heliodorus' work had become an international bestseller published in all the major languages of Europe. Sidney knew and admired the *Aethiopica*, praising its constant lovers in his *Defence of Poetry*.¹³ His Heliodoran borrowings in the *New Arcadia* were quickly recognized by contemporaries such as John Hoskins: "For the web (as it were) of the story, he followed three, Heliodorus in Greek, Sannazaro's

¹¹ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

¹² On the early modern reception of Heliodorus and the *Aethiopica*, see Victor Skretkovicz, *European Erotic Romance: Philhellene Protestantism, Renaissance Translation and English Literary Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 111-165; Alban K. Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the Persiles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 49-87; and Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England: The Rise of Prose Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 47-71.

¹³ Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 73-121; the reference to Heliodorus is on p. 81. See also Victor Skretkovicz, "Sidney and Amyot: Heliodorus in the Structure and Ethos of the *New Arcadia*," *The Review of English Studies* 27.106 (1976), 170-4.

Arcadia in Italian, and Diana of Montemayor in Spanish.”¹⁴ The Frenchman André Mareschal, who adapted the *Arcadia* into a tragicomedy in 1640, even lauded Sidney as the “Helyodore d’Angleterre.”¹⁵

The *Aethiopica* centers on the hapless lovers Theagenes and Charikleia, narrating their many adventures and misfortunes before Charikleia is restored to her royal birthright and the two are allowed to marry. Its opening is unique amongst the ancient Greek prose tales, dropping us in the middle of a mystery. A group of Egyptian thieves happens upon a lavish feast strewn over a beach, but instead of revelers, they find only corpses scattered amongst the bounty. Amidst the carnage a beautiful woman sits perched atop a rock, with a wounded young man lying at her feet. The thieves watch “like the audience in a theater, unable to comprehend the scene,” nor can they understand the woman’s strange lament.¹⁶ Before they can explore further, their entire group is attacked by a rival troupe of marauders. A bloody skirmish quickly leads to victory for the newcomers, and the stunning young couple is enslaved and carried off as part of the spoils.

Heliodoran fictions do not simply begin *in medias res*—they begin in mystery, shipwreck, even chaotic violence.¹⁷ Much of their narrative energy is devoted to discovering who these enigmatic protagonists are, as well as how they ended up on this blood-soaked beach. This ingenious method of plot construction won the *Aethiopica* much praise in Sidney’s day. Heliodorus’ earliest vernacular translator, Jacques Amyot, noted that he began in the middle of his story, “just as the heroic poets do,” and that this ordering inflamed the reader with desire.¹⁸ Spain’s leading literary theorist, Alonso López Pinciano, named Heliodorus the

¹⁴ John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style* [1599] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 41.

¹⁵ André Mareschal, “À très illustre seigneur Messire Robert Sidney,” in André Mareschal, *La cour bergère, ou L’Arcadie de Messire Philippes Sidney* (Paris: Toussaint Quinet, 1640), a2v.

¹⁶ Heliodorus of Emesa, *An Ethiopian Story*, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon, trans. J.R. Morgan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 354.

¹⁷ I use the term “Heliodoran fiction” to refer to a tradition of narratives in the early modern period by such writers as Sidney, Miguel de Cervantes, and Madeleine de Scudéry that seek to imitate the *Aethiopica*: they begin *in medias res*, are dominated by retrospective narration, and feature common events like shipwreck, pirate attack, disguised and reclaimed identities.

¹⁸ Jacques Amyot, “Proesme du Translateur,” in Heliodorus of Emesa, *L’Histoire aethiopique* [1547], trans. Jacques Amyot (Paris: Champion, 2008), 160. This and all other unattributed translations are my own.

master at narrative knotting and unknotting; he increases his story's tension little by little and never lets up until the spectacular end.¹⁹ This strong sense of suspense brings with it certain structural advantages. As Julius Caesar Scaliger observed, it allows the plot to be occasionally interrupted by new material (*rerum novitate*) without destroying the unity of the work. And though the *Aethiopica* was a fiction in prose (and thus not a true heroic poem in Scaliger's mind), he believed it showcased a nearly perfect plot: "You observe this most splendid manner of constructing a work in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, a book which I think should be read with great attention by the epic poet and which should be proposed to him as the best model possible."²⁰ The *Aethiopica*'s intricate structure and retrospective narrations may have thus appealed to Sidney because they solved a problem of unity he had lamented in contemporary English theater: how to "set forth a story which containeth both many places and many times."²¹

Heliodoran fictions are driven by the mystery of identity, and the search for answers moves us into a rich world of back-story, into the past. Such an emphasis has consequences for the ways we perceive our heroes, consequences that Sidney will exploit in the *New Arcadia*. In Heliodorus' text, we are given not merely one version of the past, but many. That is to say, we hear several accounts of who our heroes are and how they have arrived here. Some of these histories are true, some are incomplete, and some are merely made up to escape a tight situation.²² As a result, identity can never be taken for granted in a Heliodoran narrative. Rather than being revealed straightaway by an omniscient narrator, identity can only be reconstructed and revised by the curious reader as she considers the retrospective accounts that the heroes give of themselves, as well as the accounts that others give of them.

¹⁹ "Pinciano then said, 'Heliodorus' story is an epic, but if you look well, it ties its plot tighter and tighter, and never loosens it until the very end ... Fadrique said, 'Heliodorus means gift of the sun, and in this matter of knotting and unknotting no one is better, and in other matters, almost no one.'" Alonso López Pinciano, *Philosophía Antigua Poética* [1596] (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 1998), 208.

²⁰ Julius Caesar Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem* (Lyon: Antonius Vincentius, 1561), 144. Translation modified from Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the Persiles*, 66.

²¹ Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, 114.

²² The first description that Charikleia gives of herself, for example, is false. Desperate not to be separated from Theagenes, she tells the bandit leader that she is Theagenes' sister: Heliodorus of Emesa, *An Ethiopian Story*, 371. Later we discover that she and Theagenes are not siblings, but a boy and a girl in love, and that Charikleia is herself a foundling who has never met her true parents.

At the same time, if Heliodorus' tale is centered on the mysterious past of our protagonists, that past is not primarily shaped through human agency, or through hard experience. Nor is it an account ever narrated by Charikleia and Theagenes themselves. Rather it is Charikleia's guardian, Kalasiris, who tells us not only who these beautiful youths are, but what the final shape of their tale will be. The specter of Odysseus himself appears to the old man, outlining the path the *Aethiopica* will take:

Ordeals like mine shall you undergo; land and sea
you shall find united in enmity against you.
However, to the maiden you have with you my wife
sends greetings and wishes her joy, since she esteems
chastity above all things. Good tidings too she sends
her: her story has a happy ending.²³

Many ordeals, but a predetermined happy ending: in such a story, knowledge, decision, and action seem almost not to matter. No amount of preparation can prevent the trials and tribulations to come, just as no amount of missteps can derail the promised end. Seen from above, the travels of Theagenes and Charikleia appear determined not by choice, but by Providence—that friendly but irresistible force that reunites Charikleia with her royal parents and allows the lovers to marry. Heliodorus' tale too, in spite of its unique organization, is ultimately governed by adventure-time. Add another shipwreck, another unlucky encounter with pirates, and still the lovers would escape with their lives and their virtue intact.

Experience thus counts for little in Heliodorus' narrative. The same could be said of other Renaissance fictions that borrowed elements from the *Aethiopica*. Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589) features Heliodoran shipwrecks and mysterious protagonists, but places little emphasis on the unique decisions and consequences that have brought its royal heroes to their present predicament. Miguel de Cervantes called his last work, *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda* (1617), "a book which dares to compete with Heliodorus."²⁴ But in the *Persiles*, Cervantes' two noble protagonists tell labyrinthine tales not to explain who they are, but to buy themselves time to escape their enemies. Their

²³ Heliodorus of Emesa, *An Ethiopian Story*, 462.

²⁴ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Novelas Ejemplares*, ed. Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce (Madrid: Castalia, 1982), 65.

retrospective narrations do not establish an identity so much as continually defer and frustrate our desire.²⁵

Philip Sidney's *New Arcadia* also begins with a mysterious shipwreck, in self-conscious Heliodoran fashion. Gone is the omniscient and chatty narrator of the *Old Arcadia*, who tells us everything we need to know right from the beginning. Instead, we open with a puzzling scene: two shepherds are deep in their Platonic musings, only to be interrupted by a baleful "thing" that washes up on shore. It is, they gradually realize, a gorgeous human figure, the victim of some unhappy shipwreck. The beautiful man is not quite dead; his companion is soon discovered perched on a fallen ship's mast, floating amidst a sea turned dark with blood and wounded bodies. We witness these enigmatic events as the shepherds do: it is "a sight full of piteous strangeness" (7), an astounding tableau of wreckage to which we are only later given the key.

Like the *Aethiopica*, the *New Arcadia* will depend upon tracing out the past, upon uncovering both the mystery of our protagonists and the events that led to their catastrophe. But Philip Sidney will take this retrospective focus and use it to tell a different kind of story. His heroes, as unknown strangers who each wish to woo a princess, are soon compelled to give an account of themselves. Their challenge is not to conceal who they are, but to demonstrate their worth and character through the histories they tell. This gives their tales a different value from the clever distractions told by the *Aethiopica*'s protagonists, for Musidorus and Pyrocles must each construct a persuasive narrative about their identity. They are allowed to interpret their own past for us, and to suggest what that past reveals about each of them.

Do the previous exploits of Musidorus and Pyrocles truly matter to the *New Arcadia*? That is, do they function more like the necessary experiences of *Wilhelm Meister*, or the weightless adventures of *Amadis*? I want to pause for a moment and consider how Sidney might have approached this question in early modern literary terms. It is worth remembering that Sidney and his contemporaries had their own reasons for thinking hard about the shape of a story, thanks not only to the *Aethiopica*, but to the excitement over Aristotle's *Poetics*. In Aristotle's language, the past exploits of Pyrocles and Musidorus could be understood as episodes: not merely discrete units of the plot, but supplements to the main story. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle had described the perfect

²⁵ On games of deferral in the *Persiles* more generally, see Mary Randel Gaylord, "Ending and Meaning in Cervantes' *Persiles y Sigismunda*," *Romanic Review* 74. 2 (1983): 152–69.

plot as a single complete action, giving Homer's *Odyssey* as his example. The plot must be skillfully unified, its events joined such that "when a part is transposed or removed, the whole becomes different and changes. For whatever makes no noticeable difference if it is added or not added is no proper part of the whole."²⁶ And yet soon afterwards, Aristotle also speaks of the plot of the *Odyssey* as divided into main events and mere episodes, action and adornment:

The account of the *Odyssey* is not long: Someone is abroad for many years, watched by Poseidon, and he is alone, and further, the affairs at home are such that his goods are being used up by suitors and his son plotted against; having suffered through storms, he returns. After he makes himself recognized to some, on launching an attack, he himself is saved, and he destroys his enemies. This is peculiar to it; the rest are episodes.²⁷

The episode thus occupies a paradoxical artistic position. Without episodes, the *Odyssey* is still, at its heart, the story of a man trying to get home to his wife and child. But how many episodes can we remove and still keep the poem complete? Or conversely, can we add anything to the poem without distorting Odysseus' narrative arc?

Aristotle's remarks on episodes and epic poetry were as puzzling to Renaissance commentators as they remain to scholars today.²⁸ What could be added or removed from a poem without damaging the whole? In Italy, such questions were fueled by the success of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, prompting learned readers to ask whether the poem met Aristotle's ideals. To critics such as Camillo Pellegrino, the epics of Homer and Virgil were perfectly unified precisely because none of their parts could be rearranged or removed. The *Furioso*, on the other hand, possessed a flawed, episodic plot (*favola episodica*), since many of its adventures could be subtracted without consequence. But Pellegrino's antagonist Lionardo Salviati felt otherwise. He argued that the *Aeneid* and the

²⁶ Aristotle, *On Poetics*, trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 26 (1451a).

²⁷ Aristotle, *On Poetics*, 44 (1455b).

²⁸ For a modern interpretation of *episodeion* in the *Poetics*, including a survey of the critical controversy surrounding the term, see Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121-8.

Odyssey were full of episodes that might be excised or transposed: one could reverse the sequence of Aeneas' landings in Sicily and in Carthage, for example, or the order of Odysseus' first and second voyages, and Telemachus' journey could be done away with entirely. Salviati's point was that all poems had episodes, and their inclusion was not a flaw, but the main strength of a work. Aristotelian unity was a myth nowhere to be found: rather, Homer, Virgil, and Ariosto all strived for a kind of narrative variety that was to be praised, not denigrated. In Salviati's view, a greater number of episodes only amplified the beauty of a poem, turning a mere ribbon of a story into a rich poetic tapestry.²⁹

Such epic theorizing was a widespread phenomenon, by no means limited to Italy. Edmund Spenser's announcement that his *Faerie Queene* will have "many other adventures ... intermedled, but rather as Accidents, then intendments" informs us that he too has thought carefully about the proper construction of a heroic poem.³⁰ In Spain, meanwhile, the participants in Alonso López Pinciano's dialogue *Philosophía Antigua Poética* (1596) revel in Aristotle's enigmatic descriptions. If the poem itself is like an organism, Pinciano's friends take the metaphor to its logical limits. Ugo first proposes that episodes are like a bandage or a poultice: the poet can easily stick them to the body of the poem, but he must be able to unstick them just as easily. But then rethinking his position, he suggests that episodes are rather like the intestines or the guts of a creature, and the essential fable like the membrane to which these intestines are attached. His companions offer up other metaphors, which all jostle for consideration: the episodes are like the petals on a rose; or like a sash on a garment so well-placed that it seems naturally to belong where it is.³¹ Of course, not all these analogies are perfectly equivalent. A body without bandages is normally considered integral and sound, whereas a body with all its intestines removed is in a dire situation indeed. And is a rose without any petals still worth calling a rose at all? Pinciano's

²⁹ Pellegrino's arguments originally appeared in *Il Carrafa* (1584) and in the *Replica alla risposta de gli Accademici della Crusca* (1585); Salviati's in his *Difesa dell'Orlando Furioso dell'Ariosto* (1585). Their arguments are reprinted in Giovanni Rosini, ed., *Opere di Torquato Tasso colle controversie sulla Gerusalemme* (Pisa: Presso Niccolò Capurro, 1827), 18: 40-53. On Pellegrino, Salviati, and other participants in the debates surrounding Ariosto and Aristotle, see Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 106-122. Also useful is Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 2: 945-1073.

³⁰ Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 718.

³¹ Pinciano, *Philosophía Antigua Poética*, 179-80.

playful sequence of metaphors recognizes that episodes pose an ontological paradox: they confound any easy division between the part and the whole.

By comparison, Sidney's own *Defence of Poetry* seems relatively uninterested in such academic Aristotelian debates. Yet Sidney's revisions of the *Arcadia* during the 1580s reveal him to be as deeply concerned with episode and epic plotting as his Continental counterparts. He kept the main plot of the *Old Arcadia*, focusing on the princes Pyrocles and Musidorus, their shipwreck in Basilius' kingdom, and their subsequent wooing of the king's two daughters. But the *New Arcadia* is one and a half times as long as the old, its Heliodoran narrative enlarged with various storytellers and varied ways of telling a story. Sidney even slips in a humorous commentary on episodic storytelling at the center of his revised narrative. At the midpoint of the *New Arcadia*, the serving girl Mopsa tries to tell a story of her own.³² It is a variant of the Cupid and Psyche myth: a princess runs off with her enchanted lover, loses him, and then goes off on a quest to recover him. In Mopsa's own inimitable words:

And she lay down, casting forth as pitiful cries as any shritch-owl. But having lain so, wet by the rain and burned by the sun, five days and five nights, she gat up and went over many a high hill and many a deep river, till she came down to an aunt's house of hers, and came and cried to her for help. And she, for pity, gave her a nut, and bad her never open her nut till she was come to the extremist misery that ever tongue could speak of. And so, she went, and she went, and never rested the evening where she went in the morning, till she came to a second aunt. And she gave her another nut. (214)

Mopsa is able to go no farther in her story, for Philoclea interrupts her. Perhaps Philoclea is afraid of an infinite series of aunts, and of nuts. If this is true, the story bores because the sequence in the middle seems endless and irrelevant. The aunts and the nuts that

³² On the structure of Mopsa's fairytale and its relation to the rest of the *Arcadia*, see Clare Kinney, "On the Margins of Romance, at the Heart of the Matter: Revisionary Fabulation in Sidney's *New Arcadia*," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 21.2 (1991): 143–52; and Alex Davis, "'The Web of His Story': Narrating Miso's Poem and Mopsa's Tale in Book 2 of the *New Arcadia*," *Sidney Journal* 26. 2 (2008): 49–64.

follow the first one are all episodes, and could easily be removed without damaging the tale.

The *New Arcadia* may share the same basic plot as the *Old*, but the new version is far more self-conscious about the act of storytelling itself. Other characters serve as audiences, passing judgment not only on the story, but on the manner of its telling. This metacritical awareness lends the issue of episode and main plot, parts and wholes, a far more complex dimension. The largest additions to the *New Arcadia* come from the princes' own past, told through retrospective narration over the course of book two. But where does the main plot end and the episode begin? Are the added adventures merely poetic inessentials, or are they vital to the account that the princes must give?

Sidney, I think, proposes two answers to this question. Musidorus and Pyrocles each plot their history in their own way, allowing Sidney two divergent experiments in epic structure. At the same time, the stories they tell are their own, meant to illustrate their life and character. Through these narratives, the princes also suggest two different perspectives on youth, with two different interpretations of the past and their own development. The first is a narrative where the past is episodic: the princes' adventures showcase their inherent virtues, but their ordeals neither shape them nor have much to do with their arrival in Arcadia. The other is a narrative where the past is hard experience: our heroes have reached this country only through a series of difficult decisions and ongoing trials, and this critical sequence can neither be reversed nor removed. These rival possibilities, I would suggest, are embodied in the retrospective narrations told by Musidorus and by Pyrocles, respectively.

How did our two heroes end up shipwrecked in Arcadia? It all depends upon whom you ask.³³ According to Musidorus, the princes could have been brought here by storm:

These two young princes, to satisfy the king, took their way by sea towards Thrace, whither they would needs go with a navy to succour him, he being at that time before Byzantium (with a mighty army besieging it) where at that time his court was. But

³³ For an alternative view of the shipwrecks in the *New Arcadia*, see Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale*, 73-103. Mentz also proposes a difference in the two princes' accounts of the Arcadian shipwreck, reading Musidorus as a hero who values works, and Pyrocles as more willing to put his faith in Providence. My reading will argue the opposite: Musidorus' narrative is essentially providential, whereas Pyrocles gives an account that stresses individual action and choice.

when the conspired heavens had gotten this subject of their own wrath upon so fit a place as the sea was, they straight began to breathe out in boisterous winds some part of their malice against him, so that with the loss of all his navy, he only with the prince, his cousin, were cast aland, far off from the place whither their desires would have guided them. ... To tell you what pitiful mishaps fell to the young prince of Macedon, his cousin, I should too much fill your ears with strange horrors; neither will I stay upon those laboursome adventures, nor loathsome misadventures, to which and through which his fortune and courage conducted him—my speech hasteneth itself to come to the full point of Musidorus' infortunes. For as we find the most pestilent diseases do gather into themselves all the infirmities with which the body before was annoyed, so did his last misery embrace in the extremity of itself all his former mischiefs. Arcadia, Arcadia was the place prepared to be the stage of his endless overthrow. (135-6)

Musidorus does not say that the storm and shipwreck cast him directly upon Arcadian shores. But he passes over as irrelevant everything that happened between the shipwreck and his Arcadian arrival. For this we might call him a more aware storyteller than Mopsa. His story too has its implied episodes, its aunts and nuts (which he calls “laboursome adventures and loathsome misadventures”). But he knows his audience's interests, and he feels it best to skip straight to the point. Musidorus thus makes it seem as if a tempest drove him to Arcadia—that is to say, as if it were an act of Fortune (or perhaps of Providence) entirely out of his control, having nothing to do with his prior choices or his participation in the events that came before.

Musidorus, in effect, tells a highly abridged version of his travels, treating his past encounters as mere episodes to be removed. At the princess Pamela's request, he then begins a longer, more complete account of his journey, filling in the many laboursome adventures he chose to pass over before. We discover that the princes did not, in fact, land directly in Arcadia after the storm, but were cast up first upon the shores of Asia Minor. Yet Musidorus' complete version never makes it as far as the princes' Arcadian arrival. Precisely how the princes get from Asia Minor to Arcadia is a matter left for Pyrocles to tell.

Pyrocles gives a different account of the Arcadian shipwreck, and perhaps a more accurate one. The younger prince narrates his half of the Asian adventures, and at the end relates how he and his cousin put their trust in a man named Plexirtus, a vanquished foe who now promises them safe passage home. The second ship, like the first one, sinks. But this time, it is not because of a sudden storm, but because of purely human treachery:

[T]he captain (who had been a pirate from his youth, and often blooded in it) with a loud voice sware that, if Plexirtus bad him, he would not stick to kill God himself, and therefore called his mates, and in the king's name willed them to take us alive or dead, encouraging them with the spoil of us, which he said (and indeed was true) would yield many exceeding rich jewels ... And yet the truth is there were some whom either the authority of the counsellor, doubt of the king's mind, or liking of us, made draw their swords of our side, so that quickly it grew a most confused fight; for the narrowness of the place, the darkness of the time, and the uncertainty in such a tumult how to know friends from foes, made the rage of swords rather guide, than be guided by, their masters ... But while even in that little remnant, like the children of Cadmus, we continued still to slay one another, a fire which (whether by the desperate malice of some, or intention to separate; or accidentally, while all things were cast up and down) it should seem had taken a good while before, but never heeded of us who only thought to preserve or revenge, now violently burst out in many places, and began to master the principal parts of the ship. (274-5)

Misplaced trust, infighting and betrayal all combine to create a scene of chaos. The captain tries to slay his passengers. A man-made fire breaks out on deck, but the skirmish onboard prevents anyone from noticing in time. The two princes throw themselves into the sea, thinking it their best chance of survival. What tosses them into Arcadia is no tempest, but a series of all-too-human decisions and failings.

The two accounts of shipwreck also reflect the prince's divergent narrative styles. On the whole, Musidorus' history is more episodic, presenting a clearly bounded series of actions and accompanying moral lessons. Pyrocles pushes away from such

episodic structure, narrating a tangled, ambivalent sequence that we might venture to call experiences. The division is not absolute; each storyteller has moments where he resembles the other, as we will see. But they veer towards opposite ends of this spectrum, largely because of their different audiences and rhetorical needs.

Musidorus, the elder and more bookish of the two, also faces the more difficult rhetorical task. Disguised as a humble shepherd, he must woo his princess indirectly. Even his life story must be told in the third person. His audience is a woman of both majesty and severity, and he does not have her favor in advance. Yet in spite of these obstacles, he must “manifest both [his] mind and estate” (129), and his mistress Pamela will measure him every step of the way. She dictates the subject of his tale, commanding that he begin not with himself, but with his uncle Euarchus and his “rightly royal virtues” (158). Nor does she hesitate to question Musidorus’ facts or cut him off if he strays onto a topic she dislikes. Musidorus is keenly aware of this process of judgment, and narrates the events of his life for maximum pedagogical effect.

I mentioned earlier that the heroes of romance can sometimes seem static and unchanging. Yet this same constancy could lend them an exemplary quality. Sidney himself suggests as much when he praises the unwavering “picture of love” embodied by Theagenes and Charikleia in the *Aethiopica*, or the model of “courtesy, liberality, and especially courage” present even in a flawed book like *Amadis*.³⁴ Musidorus’ life story pushes this potential romance exemplarity to its limit. Like any hero of chivalric romance, Musidorus partakes in his fair share of bold adventures, terrible ordeals, and courteous deeds. At the same time, he carefully frames each element of his tale into a clear picture of virtue or vice. A good king, he tells us, “should give a fatherly example unto his people,” and his uncle Euarchus succeeds in ruling his kingdom precisely by “making his life the example of his laws, as it were his actions arising out of his deeds” (160-1). When Musidorus wishes to point out some notable feat he has performed, he uses a similar language. His cousin’s execution in Phrygia, for instance, is “prevented by a rare example of friendship in Musidorus” (171). In case we miss the point, Musidorus himself often tells us how we are to read his acts. So his deed of giving away the Phrygian crown and his establishment of a good government, we are told, “set[s] forth no less his magnificence than the other act did his magnanimity” (175). Musidorus’ final tale lays out his didactic purpose most explicitly;

³⁴ Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, 81, 92.

the princes' adventure in Paphlagonia is "not so notable for any great effect they performed, yet worthy to be remembered for the unused examples therein, as well of true natural goodness, as of wretched ungratefulness" (179).

Musidorus has read his audience well, taking his cue from Pamela's own preferences. After all, Pamela herself had praised the value of imitating models of virtue: "'Truly,' said Pamela, 'Dorus, I like well your mind that can raise itself out of so base a fortune as yours is to think of the imitating so excellent a prince as Pyrocles was'" (158). What Musidorus thus highlights in his life story are patterns of human behavior: those to be emulated and those to be avoided. This observational stance can often give Musidorus' narrative a distancing effect, as if he were merely a bystander rather than a participant in his own life's actions. We might take, for example, his description of another shipwreck encountered off the coast of Thessalia:

There was to be seen the divers manners of minds in distress. Some sate upon the top of the poop, weeping and wailing till the sea swallowed them. Someone, more able to abide death than fear of death, cut his own throat to prevent drowning. Some prayed, and there wanted not of them which cursed—as if the heavens could not be more angry than they were. ... But the princes, using the passions of fearing evil and desiring to escape (only to serve the rule of virtue not to abandon oneself), leapt to a rib of the ship ... (167)

In the midst of such catastrophe, Musidorus gives little mention of his own emotions or decision-making process. Rather, his anaphoras make the list-like, methodical quality of his observations especially apparent. Some men abandon themselves to fear, some appeal to the higher powers, some resort to suicide, and so forth. (The best response, of course, is the princes', who turn their fear into a motive for courageous action.) Sidney's friend Fulke Greville once stated that the purpose of the *Arcadia* was "to limn out such exact pictures of every posture in the mind."³⁵ Musidorus' catalogue of behaviors could easily fulfill such a purpose. His entire description seems motivated by an encyclopedic impulse, as if what were most important about this moment were not his feelings and reactions, but the variety of

³⁵ Fulke Greville, *Sir Fulke Greville's Life of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 16.

human responses to disaster.³⁶ This encyclopedism too is a way of displaying Musidorus' noble mind and estate, as much a proof of his character as his slaying of the bear or his skilled horsemanship.

At the same time, Musidorus' focus on example means that character and narrative complications are often kept to a minimum.³⁷ Certain persons flicker into existence only to highlight some particular virtue. The brothers Leucippus and Nelsus appear amidst a shipwreck only to sacrifice themselves for the princes' sake; their brief lives seem designed solely to demonstrate the true loyalty of devoted servants. The king of Phrygia is melancholy and mistrustful, whereas the king of Pontus is inconstant and cruel. Neither tyrant has a name, nor are they described with any traits other than the bare minimum necessary to advance the story. Between them they embody two sources of despotism, two ways in which human vice can lead to the declination of princes.³⁸ In both cases the kings commit some unconscionable wrong, Pyrocles and Musidorus depose them, and then establish better rulers in their place. The princes act exactly as they should, and the stories themselves are neat and self-contained, with no unsightly repercussions. Their clearly bounded nature makes the stories seem like lessons, a matched set of cautionary tales that "maketh kings fear to be tyrants," to borrow a phrase from Sidney's *Defence*.³⁹

Years ago Edwin Greenlaw observed that Musidorus' tales imitate the organization of the *Cyropaedia*.⁴⁰ Like Xenophon's text, Musidorus' history follows his own origins and education, his first journey as a teenager coming to the aid of his uncle, and the manner in which he has reformed kingdoms and won allies for himself. Yet Musidorus' history resembles Cyrus' in another respect: examine any piece in isolation and it can serve as an example of right conduct. We may remember that the episodic units of Mopsa's fairy tale carried little meaning in and of

³⁶ Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 173-206 calls this pedagogical drive the *New Arcadia*'s "methodizing impulse" (181), and argues that it is characteristic of the *New Arcadia* as opposed to the *Old*. I propose that this methodizing impulse runs strongly in Musidorus' narrative, yet slowly disintegrates by the time Pyrocles begins his account.

³⁷ On Sidney's sketch of character types in the *Arcadia*, see Forrest G. Robinson, *The Shape of Things Known: Sidney's Apology in Its Philosophical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972), 137-73.

³⁸ According to Greville, *Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, 16, Sidney intended "first on the Monarch's part, lively to represent the growth, state, and declination of Princes, change of Government, and lawes."

³⁹ Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, 96.

⁴⁰ Edwin A. Greenlaw, "Sidney's *Arcadia* as an Example of Elizabethan Allegory," in *Anniversary Papers by Colleagues and Pupils of George Lyman Kittredge* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1913), 327-37.

themselves—one more aunt, one more nut, and that is all. Musidorus, on the other hand, is careful to make each episode of his tale signify a moral lesson. His stories are detachable and self-sufficient, perhaps because Musidorus is unsure of how long his stern mistress will allow him to continue. (Pamela is not afraid to cut him off or redirect his narrative energies; she has no need to hear of his exploits in Erona’s kingdom, for example.) In case she stops him, every piece of his story can stand alone, and stand as evidence of his noble mind and estate. Each unit exemplifies the whole.

Like a Cyrus or even an Amadis, the young Musidorus seems to have been from the beginning courageous, liberal, and wise. His youthful adventures have not shaped him so much as tested and affirmed who he already was. And yet, this repeated exemplarity also makes Musidorus’ history episodic in the Aristotelian sense. His tales have no consequences, no further mentions. Once over they no longer seem terribly important to the plot. Musidorus even seems to think it unnecessary to relate all his exploits, for he merely mentions in passing the defeat of two giants as well as numerous other “cruel monsters and monstrous men, all which in short time, by private combats, they delivered the countries of” (177). The precise number or sequence of episodes that Musidorus narrates matters little. They serve more as amplifications of a theme rather than advancement of the ongoing story.

In fact, such episodic structure may be vital to Musidorus’ didactic purpose. For his stories to work as he intends, each example must remain neatly framed and bounded. Too much narrative can work against the pictorial clarity that such examples are intended to provide.⁴¹ Even Xenophon’s “portraiture of a just empire” could only be painted through a rigorous process of exclusion, strategically excising the less praiseworthy portions of Cyrus’ life as recorded by Herodotus.⁴² The clear framing of Musidorus’ tales provides a stark contrast to the lives we will later encounter in Arcadia. In that strange country, even figures once praised as exemplary begin to overspill their bounds. Nowhere will this difficulty be more clearly illustrated than in the life of Amphialus, who exists both as a rival to the princes and as a kind

⁴¹ On the contradictory relationship between exemplarity and narrative, see Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1-30.

⁴² On the competing Cyrus narratives circulating in the Renaissance, see Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 27-69.

of dark double.⁴³ When we first learn of Amphialus, Helen of Corinth is clutching his picture, and praises him as the image of all virtues: “Who follows deeds of arms, but everywhere finds monuments of Amphialus? Who is courteous, noble, liberal, but he that hath the example before his eyes of Amphialus?” (61). Yet the more we hear of Amphialus’ actions, the more ironic Helen’s statement becomes, for his rebellion and his darkening life story eventually contradict his perfect portrait. The longer and more complex a life narrative, the more difficult it becomes for each individual piece to signify virtue.

Happy stories in the *Arcadia* are all alike (and thus replaceable, expendable); but every hapless story is hapless in its own way. Musidorus’ tales of Pontus and Phrygia could be reversed or even removed, and no harm done to the larger narrative. But his cousin Pyrocles’ tales are more difficult to classify. Each one is different, and each requires a uniquely difficult decision. Their sum total, one consequence leading right to the next, is to put the princes on Plexirtus’ treacherous ship, full of enemies waiting to depose them. Remove any one of the key events in the sequence Pyrocles tells and the chain would be broken. The princes would never have ended up on that boat, and thus never in *Arcadia* at all.

Unlike his cousin, Pyrocles has the luxury of telling his life story to a woman whose loving favor comes pre-given. Philoclea already believes in Pyrocles’ inherent worth and nobility, and has even promised him her hand in marriage. She does not seek to evaluate him so much as to take pleasure in him: “for what can mine ears be so sweetly fed with, as to hear you of you?” (233). If Pamela wants tales that might instruct, Philoclea seeks only those that might delight. Between them Sidney may be imagining the range of audience responses to his own *Arcadia*: those who look to it in judgment, seeking to measure its worth in the wise examples of virtue it embodies, and those who look to it for something beyond pedagogy.

Given his more forgiving audience, Pyrocles’ tales are largely exempted from the stern, wise judgment that Musidorus must face. This is not to say that Pyrocles repudiates his cousin’s values—only that his stories will strike out in some other direction, freed from the burden of pedagogy and proof under which his elder cousin labors. He does not need to tell a tale whose moral lessons are at all times apparent, nor one whose heroes and villains are so

⁴³ See Nancy Lindheim, *The Structures of Sidney’s Arcadia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 82-6; and Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 194-9.

easily discerned. And he is free to represent his own past not as a series of successful trials, but as an open-ended process, one that leads him to unexplored places and ongoing challenges.

The contrast between Pyrocles' and Musidorus' stories has been brilliantly explored by critics like Nancy Lindheim.⁴⁴ But scholars who recognize the difference between the princes' tales often focus on the ethical universe they each describe: a world of virtue and vice in Musidorus' tales, versus a more murky moral landscape in Pyrocles'. I want to pivot the terms of this discussion and propose that Sidney uses his inherited Heliodoran tradition to explore two different ways of narrating youth and selfhood. Youth, in Musidorus' exemplary account, is no time for open-ended growth, hesitation, and development. Faced with proving himself to his serious audience, Musidorus tells no tale of "becoming." Instead, he tells a history that demonstrates he is already worthy, the fully-formed product of a princely origin and upbringing. His past can thus be represented as a series of episodes, independent and interchangeable, each one able to exemplify the whole. With Pyrocles, however, Sidney pursues a different kind of story. For Pyrocles tells a history that is decidedly not episodic, one where his actions are less bounded, their effects more ambiguous, each deed punctuated by agonizing moments of decision. Nor can any of the events in his retrospective narration be reversed or removed without damaging the logic of his story. Pyrocles narrates a past wherein each of his actions carries weight and importance, for good or for ill—a series of choices whose significance still echoes in the present.

There are many points in this intricate sequence where Pyrocles could have simply chosen otherwise. His first major moment of choice arrives when Pyrocles decides he must test his virtue on his own, abandoning Musidorus in order to meet Anaxius for a duel:

[I was], I must confess, desirous to do something without the company of the incomparable Prince Musidorus, because in my heart I acknowledge that I owed more to his presence than to anything in myself, whatsoever before I had done; for of him indeed, as of any worldly cause, I must grant as

⁴⁴ Nancy Lindheim, *Structures of Sidney's Arcadia*, 87-108. See also Peter Lindenbaum, *Changing Landscapes: Anti-Pastoral Sentiment in the English Renaissance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 62-9; and Walter R. Davis, *A Map of Arcadia: Sidney's Romance in Its Tradition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 119-26.

received whatever there is, or may be, good in me. He taught me by word, and best by example, giving me in him so lively an image of virtue as ignorance could not cast such mist over mine eyes as not to see and to love it, and all with such dear friendship and care as, O heaven, how can my life ever requite unto him; which made me indeed find in myself such a kind of depending upon him as without him I found a weakness and a mistrustfulness of myself, as one strayed from his best strength, when at any time I missed him; which humour perceiving to overrule me, I strave against it—not that I was unwilling to depend upon him, in judgement, but by weakness I would not, which, though it held me to him, made me unworthy of him. (235-6)

Musidorus' influence has been formative for Pyrocles. While Musidorus learns through books, Pyrocles has learned by imitating his cousin's "lively image of virtue." And yet imitation has also made Pyrocles doubtful of his own strength, unsure if the copy could survive without the original. If Musidorus' narrative style often assumed an encyclopedic authority, Pyrocles slips instead into syntactic hesitancy. Clauses are interrupted and qualified (he strives against dependency—though he judges Musidorus to be perfectly dependable), their back-and-forth motion mirroring Pyrocles' own tortuous process of decision.

Pyrocles is unique. Within the *New Arcadia*, he is the only main protagonist allowed to recount his life story in the first person. There is nothing like Pyrocles' intimate moment of self-doubt anywhere within Musidorus' tale. Perhaps this is because Musidorus is the elder; or perhaps it is because the disguised Musidorus must tell his life story in the third person, as if it belonged to another. Yet Pyrocles' decision to strike out on his own is only the first of a string of agonizing choices that the young man will face. En route to his duel with Anaxius, he quickly encounters new situations that require swift and decisive action—but each decision he makes only opens up a new stage of complications. Their effect is cumulative, a chain of cause and effect, intended and unintended, leading him ultimately to betrayal at sea. If he had decided that the cruel Pamphilus was not a man worth saving, for example, he might never have been diverted from his duel with Anaxius, never met Dido or been brought to Iberia, and thus never ended up on that ship. Or again, if he had decided that Dido's predicament was less important than his reputation, he

would have never been ambushed by Dido's father and saved by the Iberian king, never encountered Palladius or Zelmane, and once again never made it aboard ship. Or if he had decided that his promise to the dying Zelmane was less binding than his obligations to his best friend, or the punishment of Plexirtus' crimes, then Plexirtus would never have lived long enough to plot the princes' watery demise.

I do not mean to raise these what-ifs merely on a whim, for every one of Pyrocles' decisions is presented to us as the best available choice—but highlighted as a challenging moral choice nonetheless.⁴⁵ We have already seen how difficult it was for Pyrocles to decide he must leave his friend and teacher in the first place. But even a decision like breaking off the duel with Anaxius is a protracted ordeal, for a crowd of country folk witnesses his dishonor, and their chasing and taunting fill him with such shame that “[he] was some few times moved to turn back again” (243). Similarly, when Pyrocles must ultimately decide between his obligation to Musidorus and his promise to Zelmane, he describes the forces pulling him in two ways:

Now the day was so accorded as it was impossible for me both to succour Plexirtus and be there, where my honour was not only so far engaged, but, by the strange working of unjust fortune, I was to leave the standing-by Musidorus (whom better than myself I loved) to go save him whom for just causes I hated. But my promise given, and given to Zelmane—and to Zelmane dying—prevailed more with me than my friendship to Musidorus, though certainly, I may affirm, nothing had so great rule in my thoughts as that. (269)

Pyrocles' speech rests on a carefully weighted pair of antitheses. He must choose between one “whom better than myself I loved,” or one “whom for just causes I hated.” Behind them lie two equal but exclusive claims: the bonds of friendship to Musidorus, or the bonds of promise to Zelmane. Such balance is typical of Sidney's conceptual and rhetorical style.⁴⁶ Balanced antitheses appear everywhere in the *New Arcadia*, particularly when describing contrasting characters or ideals. Pamela and Philoclea, for example, are introduced as two distinct models of feminine beauty:

⁴⁵ Cf. Lindheim, *Structures of Sidney's Arcadia*, 106-108.

⁴⁶ On Sidney's use of anthesis and antimetabole, see Lindheim, *Structures of Sidney's Arcadia*, 13-41.

“Philoclea’s beauty only persuaded—but so persuaded as all hearts must yield, Pamela’s beauty used violence—and such violence as no heart could resist” (17). In many of these situations, we need not choose between options. Certainly we need not decide which of the two princesses is better. But when faced with his balanced antitheses, Pyrocles must constantly choose—and the consequences of his choice are irreversible and significant.

It matters, too, that Pyrocles is not narrating the action on the scene, but in the safety of Philoclea’s Arcadian home, long after the events have already taken place. He thus has the time and the distance to describe not merely the choices available to him, but the justification for his choice at each stage—not merely what happened, but how he was feeling as it happened. His emotional response, though rarely witnessed at first, grows in intensity as he nears the end of his tale. At the moment of Zelmane’s death, his narrative briefly adopts a more tragic cast, and for an instant we see the ghostly image of a very different kind of love story:

[H]er words and her manner, with the lively consideration of her love, so pierced me that I, though I had divers griefs before, yet methought I never felt till then how much sorrow enfeebleth all resolution; for I could not choose but yield to the weakness of abundant weeping, in truth with such grief that I could willingly at that time have changed lives with her. ... And then kissing me, and often desiring me not to condemn her of lightness, in mine arms she delivered her pure soul to the purest place, leaving me as full of agony as kindness, pity, and sorrow could make an honest heart—for I must confess for true, that if my stars had not wholly reserved me for you, there else perhaps I might have loved, and, which had been most strange, begun my love after death. (267-8)

It is strange to hear Pyrocles himself suggest a road untaken, another Pyrocles who might have spent his life mourning a lost love. Thanks to the Heliodoran device of retrospective narration, inflection points like these can be turned into interiorized moments. The events of his story are given meaning by his commentary, colored by his process of choice and his grief at the consequences that ensue. Such flickerings of awareness give Pyrocles’ account of himself the potential for a narrative of self-

formation.⁴⁷ Each step of the way has led him to a particular place, and been the outcome (intended or not) of a felt and deliberate decision.

In the *Old Arcadia*, Pyrocles and Musidorus began as two princes alike in virtue, years, and friendship. The *New Arcadia* heightens their differences, though there still remain moments where each slips on the narrative habits of the other. When Musidorus relates his brush with death upon a scaffold in Phrygia, for example, he cannot help but describe his fear and confusion, even falling briefly into the first person (173). But this Pyroclean turn towards emotion and interiority is quickly aborted; Musidorus blushes at his error, and continues his narrative in the more measured third person. Pyrocles, for his part, sounds most like Musidorus when he describes the events of the Iberian tournament. It is the one occasion where Pyrocles seems content to play the distanced observer, even employing his cousin's didactic language of example. Yet Pyrocles puts his own spin on the exemplary lesson: he urges his beloved to be as passionate as Helen of Corinth, "because you may see by her example (in herself wise, and of others beloved) that neither folly is the cause of vehement love, nor reproach the effect" (254). Their two histories ultimately contrast strongly enough to lend each prince a distinct personality and attitude. But more than that, they allow Sidney to tell two different stories about youth and education, two versions of the mysterious passage between adolescence and adulthood.

Pyrocles and Musidorus, we remember, set out on their grand tour originally to test their prior training: they desired "the practice of those virtues which they before learned" (164). When Musidorus describes to the princess Pamela how he was taught, he elaborates a process very much like the one Sidney himself described in the *Defence of Poetry*. In his upbringing there was always a place for stories:

[T]he delight of tales being converted to the knowledge of all the stories of worthy princes, both to move them to do nobly, and to teach them how to do nobly, the beauty of virtue being set before their

⁴⁷ As Moretti notes, an event in the *Bildungsroman* is never meaningful in and of itself. Rather, "it becomes so because someone—in the *Bildungsroman* usually the protagonist—gives it meaning. He prolongs the encounter, he probes into the conversation, he recalls it, he puts his hopes in it ... The novelistic plot is marked by this curvature toward interiority, which dispenses meaning and thereby creates events." Moretti, *Way of the World*, 45-6.

eyes, and that taught them with far more diligent care than grammatical rules. (163)

Virtuous images and studious emulation lead to virtuous action in the world. Musidorus' education is seamless and successful, and his initial account of the princes' deeds would make any schoolmaster proud. For Musidorus, growing up seems almost an effortless, invisible process, an inheritance of the estate one was always meant to possess. Pyrocles, on the other hand, recounts situations wherein good and ill are unexpectedly intertwined, and no amount of preparation can make moral choice any easier. Such lessons must be learned not in the schoolroom or from books, but only out in the world. His tales, furthermore, recount circumstances where innocent young people keep dying even in spite of his best attempts. Dido, Palladius, Daiphantus/Zelmane: all these would have lived had Pyrocles never ridden into their lives.

Pyrocles bears the mark of their deaths when he lands in Arcadia, for he and his cousin take up their names as their own. He will no longer be called Pyrocles, but Daiphantus (and later Zelmane); his friend is no longer Musidorus, but Palladius. His past encounters, too, provide some context for his odd behavior in Arcadia. They resonate with his new situation in a way that Musidorus' stories do not. It is no wonder that of the two princes, Pyrocles is quicker to devote himself to love. His own encounter with Zelmane has, in some sense, prepared him for the task: as he tells Philoclea, "Yet something there was, which, when I saw a picture of yours, brought again her figure into my remembrance, and made my heart as apt to receive the wound, as the power of your beauty with unresistable force to pierce" (268). In Arcadia, Pyrocles will adopt not merely Zelmane's name and her attitude of loving service, but her habit of cross-dressing.

Are Pyrocles' stories merely "loathsome misadventures," a forgettable series of episodes like Mopsa's aunts and nuts? Or are they experiences that give shape to his very life? The *New Arcadia* is famously unfinished, cut short by Sidney's own death, so that the effects of the princes' hard trials can only be partially known.⁴⁸ Perhaps we have a choice in the matter. Much may

⁴⁸ Critics like Nancy Lindheim have argued that we can see the repercussions of these new experiences in the hybrid 1593 version of the *Arcadia*. In the *Old Arcadia* Pyrocles consummates his relationship with the princess Philoclea before they can be wed, and Musidorus makes an attempt on Pamela's virtue as she sleeps. But in the hybrid *Arcadia*, these two outrages have been rewritten or removed; the princes seem to have improved themselves. Their difficult adventures in Asia Minor may have taught them to be better heroes after all. See Lindheim, *Structures of Sidney's Arcadia*, 132-63, particularly 140-7.

depend on whether we give more interpretive weight to Musidorus or Pyrocles on the events of the Arcadian shipwreck. If we choose to privilege Pyrocles' account, then the misadventures of Asia Minor become essential, for we cannot change them, reverse them, or remove them without also tampering with his life story. Experience has brought Pyrocles to a precise place in life—an experience punctuated by tragic deaths and hard choices. The wonderfully Heliodoran opening of the *New Arcadia* has, in some sense, been created by Pyrocles. The accumulated weight of his complicated moral decisions has brought him to this awesome moment of shipwreck. But if we skim over the many tangled tales of book two—if we take the shortcut of believing, as Musidorus implies, that a storm might as well have landed them in this country—then what's past is merely prologue, and none of it really matters. Musidorus' account is a narrative that hews close to the weightless adventure-time of the chivalric romance or the ancient Greek tale. But Pyrocles' narrative could someday open the way for *Bildung*—for something novel.

As it so happens, however, the narrative of self-formation turns out to have a predetermined end. By offering us two interpretive paths, but by having all roads lead to Arcadia at last, Sidney arguably forecloses the question of individual growth and unique self-determination. The two ultimately converging accounts imply that the princes' arrival is inevitable—that is, providential after all. The presence of two accounts means that their experience isn't necessary, for they could have gotten to the same place another way. The hard trials that Pyrocles has accumulated are not required for his story. Even the name Zelmane, the weighty reminder of his past tribulations, reverts confusingly back to Pyrocles in the last few pages of the narrative. Sidney, that is to say, toys with Pyrocles' retrospective narration as if it might be a story of self-formation. But he also slowly erases the marks of the past, or perhaps shields Pyrocles from the full weight of such a history. In the *New Arcadia*, the awareness that every action of one's life has been building toward the present moment can only be a tragic form of self-knowledge. It is the kind of revelation reserved only for Arcadia's enemies: young men like the melancholy prince Amphialus, who cannot escape the consequences of his life's choices. When Amphialus at last gains a full understanding of his life and deeds, it leads him not to maturity, but to suicide.

The very structure of Heliodoran fiction places an unusual emphasis on retrospection, on tracing out the sequence of events that has brought our heroes to its enigmatic opening moment. This

gives the Heliodoran narrative an enormous potential—an opening, as it were, for provocative new explorations of youth and self-development. Philip Sidney, I have proposed, saw in this unique narrative form the outlines of a new kind of story: one wherein the past becomes an irreversible sequence of difficult decisions and ongoing challenges, their consequences always rippling outward into the present. In such a tale, nothing is episodic. Every experience would have its proper place. It is a narrative that breaks away from the adventure-time of the Renaissance romance and begins to reach for something unknown—almost what we might call a narrative of *Bildung*. But Sidney left himself a loophole in the form of Musidorus: the trusty old friend who assures us that experience need not make the man, and we can always get into Arcadia some other way.