THE SENSE OF OPEN-ENDEDNESS IN THE ANCIENT NOVEL

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> It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards.
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> Kierkegaard

Of the many fictions academics foist upon unsuspecting students, the most transparent is surely the principle that the first step in producing a written composition is to prepare an outline.[1] The assumption behind this advice is that one should somehow have finished the entire composition before actually beginning to articulate it in writing, so that it can be brought forth whole, with all the parts organically connected to each other. But anyone who has ever written anything knows that one of the best ways to defeat the blank page is to plunge in somewhere with some general idea and see where that beginning leads. After something has taken shape, it is then possible to reflect on the outcome and produce an outline or, better yet, an introduction that recasts the entire writing process as a teleological one aimed at what is now known to be the actual *telos*.

What interests me here is the analog that exists between this notion of how texts ought to be composed and the practice of reading by literary critics. For the assumption that texts are brought forth as a

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completed totality requires and authorizes critics to focus on the way each part is infused with and resonates with some "main idea" that the author had from the start, as though the unfolding of a text were the progressive revelation of a predetermined content. Most modern readings of ancient literature have proceeded on the basis of some such teleological assumption. Whether an author's "main idea" is construed to be a philosophical statement or an assertion about social reality, or whether the author is thought to be titillating or instructing the reader, somehow the author is trying to convey something by some means that it is the critic's task to identify. And certainly such a critical procedure has produced many interesting and fruitful ideas about literature. However, a teleological approach is not necessarily the best one for every text, and, in fact, it is my contention that such a model of reading is prejudicial to the ancient novels and obscures what Bakhtin considers one of their distinctive features: "maximal contact with the present in all its open-endedness."[2] The title of my paper refers both to this critical term and to Frank Kermode's book, *The Sense of an Ending*, a work that makes a classic case for the teleological idea of reading. Here is a statement of that idea from an article on Heliodorus by John Morgan, entitled "A Sense of the Ending" (1989a.299):

> [T]he meaning of a story flows back from its ending, which constitutes a goal towards which the narrative can be seen to have been directed. Because an omniscient narrator in the past tense by definition knows how the story ends, his narrative discourse is itself an act of implicit structuration towards the ending, retrospective for himself, prospective for the reader, who is led back along an already mapped path through the maze of contingencies and unrealized possibilities and follows eagerly in his desire to achieve the meaning which only the end can bring.

Morgan blends two ideas of omniscience in this statement: the narratological pose of omniscience, a narrator who knows more than the characters and shares this knowledge with the reader, and the omniscience of the author who, having finished his novel, knows the story from beginning to end.

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2 Bakhtin 1981.11. For the ancient novels' "openness" see Fusillo 1996 and 1997.

That the two go together is a natural enough assumption, but brings us back to the paradox with which I began: namely, that the omniscient narrator has essentially finished the entire work before actually beginning. One could, of course, argue that the ancient novels evolved in a number of drafts that required substantial rewriting and rethinking of the meaning and the end of the work, resulting in a novel that is in this way grasped by the author all at once as an organic whole. But the fact is that we know as little about the compositional practices of the ancient novelists as we know of their purposes and intentions in writing these stories: that is, they must be deduced from the texts themselves.

Indeed, it is my view that one of the things that makes the ancient novels important is the fact that they are experimental and heuristic: the end is *not* fully contained in the beginning. Such an assumption will demand a different critical approach, one that would attend more closely to the *process* of the articulation of a text, the way it moves forward step by step, and one that would, in this way, reflect the actual compositional practice of many of our students: namely, to plunge in somewhere and never, ever look back. In their book on the rise of prose in the middle ages, Godzich and Kittay suggest the terms "poetics" and "prosaics" for the two contrasting approaches:

> Trained as we are to perceive texts as totalities, we seek to apprehend their structure and, in the description of that structure, to assert our mastery over the text. Prosaics seeks instead to espouse the movement of the text as it manages the economy of its discourses, to establish where the thresholds of decision arise, what the decisions are, and what their motivations and determinations as well as their consequences have been. In other words, we must learn to follow the processive threading of the text.[3]

I propose to attempt such a "prosaics" reading of three very different examples of the ancient novel and to draw a contrast with more "poetics" readings by attending to the way one thing leads to another—on the assumption that the actual linear unfolding of each story will reflect in some

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3 Godzich and Kittay 1987.48. For the term "prosaics" see also Morson and Emerson 1990. For an account of its application to the ancient novels, see Nimis 1994 and 1998.

way its actual composition. This means that the narrative is not necessarily an "act of implicit structuration towards the ending," but rather a more tentative, experimental movement, feeling its way towards an end that is not yet fully realized, that may not in fact emerge in a satisfactory way and that hence may have to be imposed or manufactured with some difficulty and with some ambiguity. And here I am referring not only to the technical problem of imposing "closure" on a text, but also to the meaning of "end" as the author's purpose in writing, which may very well be transformed in the very process of composing.[4]

I will begin with Xenophon's *An Ephesian Tale,* which has been argued by some to be an epitome of a longer story because of certain infelicities in the plot.[5] It has also been argued that Xenophon's story is a *contaminatio* in which a story originally focused around Isis was later converted into a piece of religious propaganda for the sun god Helios, an argument based on the uneconomical multiplication of divine interventions and causes in the story of the two lovers (Merkelbach 1962.91–113). Assertions of epitomizing or *contaminatio* are examples of a negative "poetics" of narrative, for they take for granted some standard for a properly-made story. Faced with a narrative farrago such as *An Ephesian Tale,* one solution is to assert the existence of an *Urtext* that did have the qualities that would satisfy our notion of a well-made story. Although the epitome theory has been answered on its own terms,[6] I would like to reconsider this question from the standpoint of prosaics, focusing on the way the story begins and ends.

The beginning of the novel describes the hero Habrocomes as a handsome man so devoted to his own beauty that he denies Eros to be a god. This reminds us of mythical figures, like Hippolytus, who are doomed to suffer for their hubris. Eros indeed resolves to punish Habrocomes, not by attaching him to someone inappropriate, as Aphrodite does to Hippolytus, but by attaching him to someone who is reciprocally attached to him, the heroine Anthia. This hardly seems like a punishment and, indeed, this angry

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4 On the vast literature on strategies of closure, see now the collection of essays in Roberts, Dunn, and Fowler 1997, prompted in part by Fowler 1989.

5 Bürger 1892. There is also the external evidence of the Suda, for which see O'Sullivan 1995.134–35.

6 Against Merkelbach, see Gärtner 1967.2076–80; against Bürger, see Hägg 1966, 1971. O'Sullivan 1995 argues forcefully for a unified compositional technique by Xenophon, many of whose peculiarities stem from his proximity to an antecedent oral tradition.

Eros, after getting things going in the beginning, is for the most part forgotten in the rest of the story. Shortly afterwards, an oracle of Apollo is given to the parents of the two lovers that warns of harrowing adventures abroad for the young couple. This, too, is a familiar kind of story in which a person like Oedipus spends his life trying to avoid a prophecy, only to fulfill it thereby. However, the heroes' parents do not try to forestall the ominous events, but decide to marry their children to each other and send them off on a trip in order to "palliate" (παραμύθομαι) the oracle.[7] As in the case of the angry Eros, there is no commitment by our author to tell a certain kind of story just because he started out in a certain way. Other divinities are introduced in very conventional ways in order to move the action forward, but none of them can be seen as central to the overall plot. Rather than assuming this to be the result of redaction, I would argue this typifies the way "novel" plots are destined to be established: by recombining fragments of traditional stories to establish temporary trajectories for the action (Reardon 1969.299–301).

A good example is the sequence of events in book 2 of *An Ephesian Tale* leading up to the introduction of Hippothous, who serves as a hinge character between the stories of the two lovers after their separation, for this sequence contains a medley of traditional story types involving numerous loose ends and inconsistencies. The hero Habrocomes is victimized by their captor's daughter, Manto, in the manner of the so-called "Potiphar's wife" story type.[8] The heroine, Anthia, is then married off to a poor but kindly goatherd, who pities Anthia and complies with her wish to remain a virgin, recalling the circumstances of Euripides' *Electra*. This goatherd is then ordered to kill Anthia, which he does not do—another common motif in drama and legend—but instead sells her to some Cilician merchants. These merchants are then shipwrecked and captured by the robber band led by Hippothous. Anthia is about to be sacrificed when she is freed by the magistrate Perilaus, who exacts from her a promise of marriage, although Anthia first secures a grace period of thirty days with a Penelope-like ruse. Meanwhile, Habrocomes has been acquitted of the false accusations of Manto, and he sets out to search for Anthia. During his

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7 See the discussion of παραμύθομαι in Ruiz-Montero 1994b.1100–01. She cites the Psyche story in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* as a parallel for this action by the parents. Griffiths 1978.411–14 argues for a religious meaning for the term.

8 For the other traditional motifs in this section of the story, see Ruiz-Montero 1994b.1102.

search he encounters the only survivor of the robber band, the leader Hippothous, who talks him into a trip to Cappadocia, though Habrocomes has been led to believe that Anthia is in Cilicia.

The vagaries of this section are only partially captured by this brief summary. Kytzler remarks on the Kafkaesque quality of Xenophon's world, where characters set out, but don't arrive, suddenly leave without explanation, adopt goals but then abandon them (Kytzler 1996.343). Nevertheless, most of the motifs of this section have parallels in other parts of the novel, so they are clearly themes upon which Xenophon is focusing. In any case, it is the abrupt introduction of Hippothous that has been a key argument for excerption;[9] and indeed this figure, who assumes increasing importance as the story unfolds, seems to be a *deus ex machina* interjected into the story in order to mediate issues of both theme and action. As his role grows to fit the story's needs, he seems to be a stage device Xenophon rolls in to extricate himself from various difficulties, rather than something the author had planned from the start. It is significant that Hippothous is one of the only characters in all the Greek novels actually to undergo a transformation in the course of the novel: his progress from tragic lover, to murdering robber, to confidant of both heroes, to bourgeois husband is thus a strong contrast to Habrocomes and Anthia, who resist personal change no matter what happens.[10] The introduction of Hippothous is thus singular in a number of ways, suggesting a more intense focus on the thematic preoccupations of this part of the novel. For as David Konstan has shown, the gay tragic subplot of Hippothous and his lover Hyperanthes, as an example of the older "unequal" homoerotic model of sexuality, is a foil to the reciprocal and equal heterosexual relationship of Habrocomes and Anthia.[11] And Konstan sees the articulation of this difference as one of the key thematic concerns of this and the other novels. That this tragic gay subplot, related by Hippothous to Habrocomes in a flashback at the beginning of book 3, is preceded by a succession of other episodes of more pointedly

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9 Bürger 1892.42–44, Hägg 1966.126–30, O'Sullivan 1995.125–26.

10 Scarcella 1996.251 notes that the frequent association of caves with Hippothous suggests a symbolic resonance with the themes of *catabasis* and transformation.

11 Konstan 1994. He notes, for example, the play on the names of Anthia and Hyperanthes. The episode of Aegialeus and Thelxinoe (*Eph.* 5.1) closely parallels the story of Hippothous and Hyperanthes. This pattern of reciprocal heterosexual love that transcends death seems to be another case of limning the ideal relationship of Habrocomes and Anthia.

predatory relationships, suggests that it is a kind of climax and exemplary rendition of such "unequal" forms of eros. In this way, the seemingly random and arbitrary series of earlier episodes can be seen as preliminary versions of the unequal eros more fully represented by Hippothous and Hyperanthes, against which the heroes will emerge as an ideal alternative. This accumulation of repetitions produced by what Margaret Doody calls "thematic pressure"[12] is a good example of the way a main idea takes form in the actual telling of the story. Rather than progressively unveiling a pre-existing idea, the author seems to be "working out" his conception of the key difference between these two patterns of eros by creating a series of "first drafts."

In this way, the episodes of book 2 are similar to the opening gambits with the angry Eros and the oracle. They are not deployed as part of a global narrative strategy that is fully articulated from the beginning; instead, characters, events, and divinities are introduced in an *ad hoc* fashion as part of a more local strategy to propel the story forward and to contribute in some way to the working out of the preoccupations of the author. This is possible precisely because such events, characters, and divinities carry with them from past narrative traditions ready-made vectors of narrative movement. The forces inherent in the heterogeneous material marshaled by the novelist may at times carry him along in unforeseen ways and into contradictions and inconsistencies that may only be partially resolved. Such heterogeneity, however, is endemic to the novel, making possible the exploration of new kinds of narrative combinations as well as contributing to its lack of unity and closure.

In the final book of *An Ephesian Tale*, there is another passage that has been considered evidence of epitomizing (5.5). In this case, there occurs a series of summary remarks in which episodes are concluded with such haste and characters disposed of in such a perfunctory fashion that, according to Bürger, it sounds almost like a table of contents (Bürger 1892.58). Similar episodes in Xenophon led him to believe that something should have been here that is not, an intuition I believe to be correct. But it is not because something has been dropped out by a redactor, but because another impulse is beginning to emerge more strongly here: namely, the impulse to bring the story to an end. Here are the next paragraphs:

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12 Doody 1996.93, discussing *Apollonius, King of Tyre*.

> Now Hippothous had completed his voyage and put into Sicily, not at Syracuse [where the hero is], but at Tauromenium, and was looking for a chance to support himself. And now that Habrocomes had spent a long time in Syracuse, he was terribly distressed and in despair, because he could neither find Anthia, nor reach his homeland again, so he decided to sail from Sicily to Italy, and from there, if he could find no trace of what he had been looking for, to make the unhappy voyage back to Ephesus.
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> By this time the couple's parents and all Ephesus were in great distress, since no messenger and no letters had come from either of them. They sent out men to look for them everywhere. And, in despair of old age, the parents of both were unable to endure and took their own lives.
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> Meanwhile Habrocomes was en route for Italy; but Leucon and Rhode, the companions of Habrocomes and Anthia, decided to return to Ephesus now that their master had died in Xanthus and had left his large estate to them; they thought that their masters had already reached home safely; and they had their fill of the rigors of exile. They put all their goods in a ship and sailed for Ephesus, and after only a few days reached Rhodes. And when they found out there that Habrocomes and Anthia had not yet been rescued, while their parents had died, they decided not to return to Ephesus but to stay some time there, until they could hear news of their masters.[13]

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13 *Eph.* 5.6.1–4 (trans. G. Anderson in Reardon 1989): Ὁ δὲ Ἱππόθοος διανύσας τὸν πλοῦν κατήχθη μὲν εἰς Σικελίαν, οὐκ εἰς Συρακούσας δ°, ἀλλ᾽ εἰς Ταυρομ°νιον, καὶ ἐζήτει καιρὸν δι᾽ ο τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἕξει.

Τῷ δὲ Ἀβροκόμῃ ἐν Συρακούσαις ὡς χρόνος πολὺς ἐγ°νετο, ἀθυμία ἐμπίπτει καὶ ἀπορία δεινή, ὅτι μηδὲ Ἀνθίαν εὑρίσκοι μηδὲ εἰς τὴν πατρίδα ἀνασ≈ζοιτο. Δι°γνω οὖν ἀποπλεύσας ἐκ Σικελίας εἰς Ἰταλίαν ἀνελθεῖν κἀκεῖθεν, εἰ μηδὲν εὑρίσκοι τῶν ζητουμ°νων, εἰς Ἔφεσον πλεῦσαι πλοῦν δυστυχ∞

Ἤδη δὲ καὶ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ Ἐφ°σιοι πάντες ἐν πολλῷ π°νθει Σσαν, οὔτε ἀγγ°λου παρ᾽ αὐτῶν ἀφιγμ°νου οὔτε γραμμάτων· ἀπ°πεμπον δὲ πανταχοῦ τοὺς ἀναζητήσοντας. Ὑπὸ ἀθυμίας δὲ καὶ γήρως οὐ δυνηθ°ντες ἀντισχεῖν οἱ γονεῖς ἑκατ°ρων ἑαυτοὺς ἐξήγαγον τοῦ βίου.

Although we are still several pages from the end, this accumulation of conclusion-sounding sentences suddenly and dramatically narrows the narrative possibilities of the story, at the very place where, after the novel's horizons "have slowly and steadily broadened geographically and scenically," the story exhibits the "widest divergence of plot" (Kytzler 1996.342–54). This explicit exercise of authorial orientation is indicative of a new "novelistic" problem: how to end a story properly. Whereas in the epic, for example, beginnings and ends have a certain arbitrariness because the whole cycle of myth is already in place and thus is, as Bakhtin notes, a sort of "perennial middle," the novel creates a greater investment in the questions what will happen next? and how will this be sorted out? (Bakhtin 1981.31–32). Just as the novel must establish new ways to get and keep things going, it must establish ways to end things properly. This means creating dead ends to the innumerable narrative possibilities that are available at any particular stage of the story. Xenophon ends his story without making reference either to the angry Eros or the oracle with which he began, but instead deploys a number of motifs from New Comedy, a tradition with ready-made formulas for producing closure. As is typical of other novelists, Xenophon invokes such conclusive events as death and marriage to produce the sense that nothing more could be narrated about these characters.

In contrast to Xenophon's *An Ephesian Tale*, Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* is sometimes viewed as an ideal example of the genre: "Greek romance as it should be written," according to Perry (1967.129). But some characteristics of Chariton's text can best be explained by a prosaics perspective. Like Xenophon, our author plunges into the beginning in a way that will allow maximum choices as the story progresses and thus necessitate the least amount of revision later on. We have a political rivalry between the parents of the lovers, a mischievous god, Eros, the stunning

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Καὶ ὁ μὲν Ἀβροκόμης ᾔει τὴν ἐπὶ Ἰταλίας ὁδόν· ὁ δὲ Λεύκων καὶ ≤ Ῥόδη, οἱ σύντροφοι τοῦ Ἀβροκόμου καὶ τ∞ς Ἀνθίας, τεθνηκότος αὐτοῖς ἐν Ξάνθῳ τοῦ δεσπότου καὶ τὸν κλ∞ρον (Σν δὲ πολὺς) ἐκείνοις καταλιπόντος, δι°γνωσαν εἰς Ἔφεσον πλεῖν, ὡς ≥δη μὲν αὐτοῖς ⟨ἐκεῖ⟩ τῶν δεσποτῶν σεσωσμ°νων, ἱκανῶς δὲ τ∞ς κατὰ τὴν ἀποδημίαν συμφορᾶς πεπειραμ°νοι. Ἐνθ°μενοι δὲ πάντα τὰ αὐτῶν νηὶ ἀνήγοντο εἰς Ἔφεσον, καὶ ≤μ°ραις τε οὐ πολλαῖς διανύσαντες τὸν πλοῦν Πκον εἰς Ῥόδον, κἀκεῖ μαθόντες ὅτι οὐδ°πω μὲν Ἀβροκόμης καὶ Ἀνθία σῴζοιντο, τεθνήκασι δὲ αὐτῶν οἱ πατ°ρες, δι°γνωσαν εἰς Ἔφεσον μὴ κατελθεῖν, χρόνῳ δ° τινι ἐκεῖ γεν°σθαι, μ°χρις ο τι περὶ τῶν δεσποτῶν πύθωνται.

and fatal beauty of the lovers, the rivalry of suitors, and numerous comparisons to legendary and historical figures. Chariton returns to some of these allusions elsewhere in the novel, but none of them is a real parallel to this novel story as a whole.[14] Like the opening sentence identifying the author, which recalls the opening sentences of Herodotus and Thucydides, these paragraphs are at the beginning because they are the kind of beginnings that are available to Chariton. This is not to say that Chariton's opening is completely arbitrary and devoid of any thematic and compositional design, only that this beginning does not necessarily anticipate everything that the author eventually chooses to include or everything that he might discover in the very act of composing the work.[15]

The actual end of Chariton's novel is also similar to that of Xenophon's story in falling back on New Comedy motifs to produce a sense of closure. But a more particular feature of Chariton's text is his use of summaries, provided sometimes by the omniscient narrator, sometimes by characters in the story. Critics occasionally see these summaries as an acknowledgment of the difficulties an audience might have following this novel story.[16] Be that as it may, these summaries can be viewed as symptomatic of the novel's evolving sense of closure. As a narrative event, summary is a place where the forward movement of the text is halted, and units that have been serially represented are surveyed, generally with an aim of taking stock of them in some way, especially to bestow on them some meaning greater than the sum of the parts. It is a larger-scale version of numerous instances in Chariton where a set of actions is closed off by a *sententia*.[17] Like *sententiae*, summaries do not themselves move the story forward, but are non-narrative moments that precipitate some large-scale perspective on the narrative. As such they often occur at a moment when, for some reason, it no longer seems possible or desirable to "let the events speak for themselves."

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14 On other story types in the novel, see Ruiz-Montero 1994a. For an example of how different story forms (chronotopes) produce thematic disparities, see MacAlister 1996.22–23.

15 Hunter 1994 argues persuasively that the opening sentences make a programmatic allusion to the uses of history.

16 So Reardon 1996.335 and Hägg 1994.62. Bowie 1996.97–98 suggests some summaries may have been necessitated by the physical limits of scrolls.

17 Again, it is New Comedy that often serves as a source of ready-made elements suitable for such a purpose. See Fowler 1989.103–04.

Roughly half-way through the novel, there is a summary that consists of an outline-like list of the main events of the story. What made the author feel that it was necessary to produce such a list here? Equally important, what does the author see when he surveys what has happened so far? As far as I can tell, there is only one element of plot-shaping at this point: the statement that "Aphrodite had engineered the marriage" of the protagonists, for this is the first time that Aphrodite is mentioned in that role.[18] This is picked up at the beginning of book 8, where our author again summarizes part of the story; although now he clearly makes an attempt to give a shape to the story as a whole. Invoking the parallel of the *Odyssey*, he asserts that Aphrodite is now no longer angry at the hero, because he has paid for his arrogance by wandering the whole world and suffering:

> But [Aphrodite] was growing less angry with [Chaereas]. At first she had been incensed by his misplaced jealousy: she had given him the fairest of gifts, fairer even than the gift she had accorded to Alexander Paris, and he had repaid her kindness with arrogance. But now that Chaereas had made honorable amends to Love, in that he had wandered the world from west to east and gone through myriad sufferings, Aphrodite took pity on him; having harassed by land and sea the handsome couple she had originally brought together, she decided now to reunite them. And I think this last chapter will prove very agreeable to its readers: it cleanses away the grim events of the earlier ones. There will be no more pirates or slavery or lawsuits or fighting or suicide or wars or conquests; now there will be lawful love and sanctioned marriage.[19]

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18 *Chaer*. 5.1.1 (trans. B. P. Reardon in Reardon 1989): πολιτευσαμ°νης ᾽Αφροδίτης τὸν γάμον. Eros is mentioned in the beginning as arranging the attraction between the lovers.

19 *Chaer*. 8.1.3–4: ≥δη γὰρ αὐτῷ διηλλάττετο, πρότερον ὀργισθεῖσα χαλεπῶς διὰ τὴν ἄκαιρον ζηλοτυπίαν, ὅτι δῶρον παρ᾽ αὐτ∞ς λαβΔν τὸ κάλλιστον, οἷον οὐδὲ ᾽Αλ°ξανδρος ὁ Πάρις, ὕβρισεν εἰς τὴν χάριν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καλῶς ἀπελογήσατο τῷ ῞Ερωτι Χαιρ°ας ἀπὸ δύσεως εἰς ἀνατολὰς διὰ μυρίων παθῶν πλανηθείς, ±λ°ησεν αὐτὸν ᾽Αφροδίτη καὶ ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχ∞ς δύο τῶν καλλίστων ἥρμοσε ζεῦγος, γυμνάσασα διὰ γ∞ς καὶ θαλάσσης, πάλιν ±θ°λησεν ἀποδοῦναι. νομίζω δὲ καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον τοῦτο σύγγραμμα τοῖς ἀναγιν≈σκουσιν ἥδιστον γενήσεσθαι· καθάρσιον γάρ ἐστι τῶν ἐν τοῖς πρ≈τοις σκυθρωπῶν. οὐκ°τι λῃστεία καὶ δουλεία καὶ δίκη καὶ μάχη καὶ ἀποκαρτ°ρησις καὶ πόλεμος καὶ ἄλωσις, ἀλλὰ ἔρωτες δίκαιοι ἐν τούτῳ ⟨καὶ⟩ νόμιμοι γάμοι.

Again, this is the first mention of an "angry Aphrodite" orchestrating, like Poseidon in the *Odyssey*, the adventures and sufferings of the couple, and its mention here indicates that the author felt some such totalizing gesture had become necessary. Equally pertinent is Chariton's statement that this last chapter will "cleanse" (καθάρσιον ἐστι) the grim events of the earlier episodes, for this is the first attempt to link the episodes so far narrated with a conclusion. The particular formulation in this paragraph seems to suggest the end will be a negation of what preceded ("no more of this . . . but rather . . ."). But the apparent reference to Aristotle's notion of *catharsis* also evokes for the first time the necessity of formulating an end that is not only a negation (*peripeteia*), but also an illumination (*anagnorisis*); an end that must both be and not be continuous with the past episodes.[20]

When the lovers finally return home, yet another summative gesture occurs, for which the whole city is assembled in a theater. Whereas throughout the story there has been much plot interest generated by misinterpretation and partial perceptions, now we will have a full account in which the perspective of everyone: characters, fictive audience, and real audience will coalesce. The task falls upon Chaereas, who wishes to focus completely on the end and not to dredge up the earlier events that were so different from that end. However, his audience has a different idea. They want to hear how all the elements of the story from the beginning combine into a whole:

> The crowd kept Chaereas there; they wanted to hear the whole story of his journey. Chaereas started at the end, wishing to spare them the grim episodes of the beginning. "Begin at the beginning," they insisted, "tell us the whole story and don't leave anything out." Chaereas was reluctant to do so; he felt it would be embarrassing to talk about many events that had not turned out to his satisfaction. But [his father] Hermocrates said "Don't be ashamed, for the brilliant end has obscured all the earlier events."[21]

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20 Cf. *Poetics* 1452a: "Such incidents have the greatest effect on the mind when they occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another." And later, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* "should arise out of the structure of the plot itself, so as to be the consequence of the antecedents." See Rijksbaron 1984.306–07 who argues on the basis of this passage of Chariton that Aristotle applies the term *catharsis* to plot construction ("Bearbeitung des Tragödienstoffes").

21 *Chaer*. 8.7.3–4: Χαιρ°αν δὲ κατεῖχε τὸ πλ∞θος, ἀκοῦσαι βουλόμενον πάντα τὰ τ∞ς ἀποδημίας διηγήματα. κἀκεῖνος ἀπὸ τῶν τελευταίων ≥ρξατο, λυπεῖν οὐ θ°λων [ἐν]

This insistence on a full recounting of the novel's events from the perspective of their happy outcome, together with the numerous other partial summaries in book 8, is an intense thematization of "ending properly" that goes beyond any of the pragmatic explanations of recapitulations made by Reardon and Bowie.[22] Rather, these passages are symptomatic of the author's sense that the novel's events have a problematic relationship to the end. The verb that Hermocrates uses for the relationship of the "brilliant end" (τὸ τ°λος λαμπρὸν γενόμενον) to everything that preceded is ἐπισκοτεῖ, "cast a shadow over," a word that generally describes the effect of an opaque object blocking light or vision. Hence his statement that it is the "brilliance" of the end that "obscures" earlier events seems paradoxical. Does the *telos* of the novel provide an illumination of the full meaning of these earlier events? Or does it simply obliterate them from memory by being their negation? If the former, then the end must be the organic outcome of the earlier events. If the latter, there is some kind of disjunction between the narrative and its outcome. This invocation of a summative gesture at the end of the novel is provoked by the sense that the end must simultaneously be different from and yet derived from the rest of the story. For the fact is, the novel has presented life as a series of episodes where anything can happen next. How is this point in the story different from the ending of any other episode? What is going to prevent the fatal beauty of Callirhoe from casting its spell on yet other men? The novel ends with the prayer of Callirhoe that she will now remain forever with her lover. Her prayer is to step out of the world of the novel and to find a final place so that her life can have a stable meaning. But nothing has happened in Chariton's novel to give us any confidence in such an outcome. The world of the novel resists this kind of permanence and finality; it eschews the existence of overarching patterns of meaning for a more local meaning based on transitory relationships. Similarly, as Brigitte Egger has argued,

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τοῖς πρ≈τοις καὶ σκυθρωποῖς τὸν λαόν. ὁ δὲ δ≈μος ἐνεκελεύετο "ἐρωτῶμεν, ἄνωθεν ἄρξαι, πάντα ≤μῖν λ°γε, μηδὲν παραλίπῃς." ὤκνει Χαιρ°ας, ὡς ἂν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς τῶν οὐ κατὰ γν≈μην συμβάντων αἰδούμενος, Ἑρμοκράτης δὲ ἔφη "μηδὲν αἰδεσθῇς, ὦ τ°κνον, κἂν λ°γῃς τι λυπηρότερον μ πικρότερον ≤μῖν· τὸ γὰρ τ°λος λαμπρὸν γενόμενον ἐπισκοτεῖ τοῖς προτ°ροις ἅπασι. In 8.8, Chaereas tries again to leave out grim details only to be urged once again to tell all.

22 See n. 16 above. Between the summary at the beginning of book 8 and the final one given by Chaereas, lie several partial summaries: Chaereas and Callirhoe to each other (*Chaer*. 8.1.17), Statira to the Persian King (*Chaer*. 8.5.7), the King to Dionysus (*Chaer*. 8.5.10), and Dionysus' reading of Callirhoe's letter (*Chaer*. 8.5.13).

the novel seems divided against itself in its treatment of Callirhoe: on the one hand, Chariton foregrounds the potent eroticism of Callirhoe that overwhelms all men who see her; simultaneously, however, he evokes traditional restrictions on femininity that would put Callirhoe in her "proper place." If it is necessary that the novel end on the latter note, it is the other element that drives the narrative forward.[23] In constructing beginnings and ends, the novels of Chariton and Xenophon both lean on traditional narrative formulas, but in between there is a very different set of rules at play that represents a world in which activity means adjusting to ever-shifting environments, "going with the flow."

Heliodorus' *An Ethiopian Tale*, the latest of the extant Greek novels, is the one with the most complicated and intricate plot construction, a narrative time bomb full of red herrings and riddles. Particularly in the first half of the novel, where there are numerous stories within stories, including a lengthy flashback that is clearly modeled on the *Odyssey*, the narration of events has been cleverly folded into new events that happen to those characters telling and listening. Moreover, the novel begins by hurling us *in medias res* with a dramatic tableau that presents to the reader a riddle that is not fully solved until half-way through the novel. Surely here we have an author for whom the end is clearly envisioned from the beginning, and any reading of Heliodorus must take into account these qualities. Hence Winkler argues that Heliodorus' main intention is to heighten the reader's awareness of the "game-like structure of intelligibility" and so it is a principle that "every item must be significant."[24] Morgan's focus on the primacy of storytelling as a source of pleasure and amazement for the reader leads him to view the many vagaries of the plot as carefully contrived manipulations of the reader's response (Morgan 1989a). The use of inscribed audiences makes the *Aithiopika* a text "armored against misreading" that "minutely scripts the responses of its implied reader" (Morgan 1991.99).

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23 Egger 1994. Elsom 1992 discusses the novel's "play of transgression and conformity." Doody 1996.153–54 calls Callirhoe's request to Statira to "write often" (8.4) a quintessential novelistic gesture: "The possibility of letters means that nothing is quite ended, that private self and public self will continue to shift and slide into one another" and hence Callirhoe can imagine "wanting some other communication, a network of personal affections stretching beyond the household, and even beyond romantic love."

24 Winkler 1982.100. Bartsch 1989 makes a similar argument based on the use of description in the novel.

Assuming such a high degree of coherence and mastery for Heliodorus' narrative strategy authorizes elaborate explanations to integrate perplexing features of the text into a general view of the novel. For example, there is a famous crux where the holy man Calasiris gives two conflicting accounts of his reasons for traveling to Delphi. Futre Pinheiro argues that this apparent lapse is emblematic of the deepest concerns of the novel: to reconcile human and divine motivation and that "what looks like an inability of the author to manage the flow of his story" can be seen as a "device which is consciously and systematically exploited throughout the novel."[25] Like the interpretation of Heliodorus as a mystery text, I would characterize these readings as "poetics" approaches to Heliodorus. It may seem perverse to group an allegorical reading of the *Aithiopika* with the more "hermeneutic" approaches of Winkler, Morgan, and others, but these critics—so different in other respects—are similar in this one: in contrast to Bakhtin's view of novelistic discourse as unfinal and open-ended, they see the novel as having a "main point" that is the intention of Heliodorus from the start and to which all the parts of the novel must somehow contribute. In such a case, the author is placed in a position of the highest authority as the master of the novel's effects, a mastery that the critic rehearses in producing "finally" the correct view of the novel's purpose and meaning.

However, if we assume instead that Heliodorus is working out at least part of his story as he goes along, it is possible to read the characteristics identified by these critics as indicative of the anxiety of the author about the intelligibility and readability of his work. For example, Calasiris' conflicting account of his trip to Delphi is just one of many occurrences where characters are provided with more than one motivation. This suggests to me a sense on the author's part that he needed to shore up or supplement something that was lacking or inadequate. Similarly, the obsessive urgency of Heliodorus to make "everything significant" may be a symptom of the difficult task of controlling the polysemous and heterogeneous materials the author is marshaling, so that it signals precisely a *lack* of mastery. And again, the impulse to "armor" his narrative against misreading indicates a strong sense of the multiple possibilities for misinterpretation. It is not my intention to say that Heliodorus is a careless author or to point out occasional nods, but rather to say that, like the other novelists,

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25 Futre Pinheiro 1991.77. For the Delphic incident see Reardon 1969.302, Morgan 1996.443–45.

he is experimenting with a story in a radical way that precludes the kind of total control that we critics prefer to attribute to authors. Like many of the characters in his story, Heliodorus is himself "going with the flow," allowing something to emerge rather than imposing upon events a clearly defined structure (Winkler 1982.130). I focused on the beginnings and ends of the novels of Xenophon and Chariton as places where their innovative activity was most manifest. I would like to begin in the middle of Heliodorus' novel, in book 6, where beginnings and ends are both problematic, and try to identify the measures that Heliodorus takes to begin, continue, and end things, paying special attention to how one thing leads to another. Here, in particular, is a part of the story that is "under construction," and hence can give us a different sense of Heliodorus' preoccupations.

Book 6 is a hinge between the two halves of the novel: the first is dominated by lengthy flashbacks that finally, at the end of book 5, fill the reader in on all that has happened up to this point; the last half then proceeds in a linear fashion to the end of the story. A new intrigue begins in book 7 with the introduction of Arsace, the Persian satrap's lusty wife, whose attempts to compromise the hero end with her death at the end of book 8. The hero and heroine then are delivered into the hands of the Ethiopian king, followed eventually, but not immediately, by their recognition. As Sandy has noted, book 6 contains a strong sense of a new beginning, signaled by such things as the repetition of patterns from the beginning of the narrative, the dropping of the prominent secondary characters of the first part of the book, and an infusion of Odyssean motifs such as the transformation of Calasiris and Charicleia into beggars and the necromancy scene at the end of the book where a revenant's prophecies send the characters on their way (Sandy 1982.15–16).

As book 6 begins, three characters: the wise old man Calasiris, the merchant Nausicles, and Cnemon, all of whom have had complex interactions with the two young lovers Charicleia and Theagenes, set out from Chemmis to recover the hero Theagenes, based on the information provided by the merchant Nausicles. One of the three, Cnemon, is prompted to tell his story to his two fellow travelers, a story that has already been narrated in segments to other characters earlier in the novel. Its presentation here in the form of a summary parallels the use of summary in Chariton: it serves to give form and shape to the life of Cnemon, in this instance as a prelude to his exit from the novel in one of the most potent forms of finality in the world of the romance: marriage. Cnemon's story has a powerful effect on Nausicles, who now realizes that he and Cnemon have shared a lover in the past. But his reaction is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a new character, a friend

of Nausicles, who happens to be in possession of the one piece of news that the travelers need: the new whereabouts of the hero Theagenes, who has been captured by the brigand Thyamis for the second time. The sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance of this unnamed figure is unusual in Heliodorus. Although introducing a new character is a standard way of moving a story forward in all the Greek novels, Heliodorus tends to recycle characters and cross-reference relationships in complex ways. When the author tells us that the hand of god was manifest in this chance encounter, he is acknowledging that the motivation for this event is weak and telegraphing that this chance encounter is a more patent instance of authorial orientation. It is significant that one of the few unexplained irregularities in the story is put into the mouth of this character: for back in book 1 we were told that the band of brigands who had captured Thyamis did so with the intent of turning him over to his brother Petosiris for ransom (1.32–33). However, Nausicles' friend now tells us (6.3) that Thyamis is the newly elected leader of these very brigands, and later they help Thyamis right the wrong done him by Petosiris. Both Thyamis' role as a mediating character between the lovers and his transformation in the course of *An Ethiopian Tale* recall Xenophon's Hippothous, the other reformed brigand of ancient fiction.[26]

The characters return to Chemmis and over dinner they are invited to make known their plans, which provokes Cnemon to burst into tears and once again to summarize his misfortunes, this time shaping his story as an example of Fortune's vicissitudes, prompting the question: what will be the conclusion of his story?

> Which way should I turn? What am I to do? . . . If the future is uncertain and merely holds yet more misfortune, then it is also uncertain what end there will be to my misfortunes.[27]

In response, the heroine Charicleia encourages Cnemon to leave her story, in part because she no longer considers him a worthy traveling companion.[28]

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26 Fusillo 1996.298 notes the parallel between Heliodorus' Thyamis and Xenophon's Hippothous, as does Billaut 1996.120. See above p. 220.

27 *Aeth.* 6.7.5 (trans. J. Morgan in Reardon 1989): Ποῖ γὰρ τράπωμαι; τί δ° με καὶ χρὴ πράττειν; . . . εἰ δὲ ἄδηλον τὸ μ°λλον καὶ πλ°ον τὸ δυσχερ°ς, ἄδηλον ποῖ ποτε καὶ στήσεταί μοι τὰ τ∞ς ἄλης.

28 *Aeth.* 6.7.8: . . . καὶ ἅμα οὐδὲ εὐπρεπ∞ λοιπὸν τ∞ς ὁδοῦ κοινωνὸν οὐδὲ ἀνύποπτον ≤γουμ°νη τὸν Κνήμωνα.

This sudden revision of Cnemon's character is as unexpected and unprepared for as the introduction of Nausicles' acquaintance earlier in the book. Such narrative turns seem to be impromptu adjustments made by the author as he moves forward step by step, rather than being examples of the articulation of an already finished plan. Cnemon is brusquely betrothed to the daughter of Nausicles and "everything he ever hoped for was suddenly being granted." An "impromptu wedding feast" ensues and soon after both Nausicles and Cnemon leave the story for good.

After the disposal of these characters, Calasiris and Charicleia transform themselves into beggars, an explicit reference to the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey*. The consequences of this transformation will not become manifest until the next book, when their disguises contribute to a dramatic *anagnorisis*. Here in book 6, however, the allusion seems to reinfuse the narrative with a forward movement, for Odysseus' arrival in Ithaca brings to a conclusion one set of adventures, and his transformation into a beggar initiates a second. The mission of the characters is once again immediately interrupted by another encounter with a character *ex machina*: an old woman who, like Nausicles' acquaintance at the beginning of book 6, has just the information they need: the location of Theagenes has changed and he is now to be sought in Memphis. Here too, there is ample evidence of plot readjustment. The old woman renarrates what Nausicles' acquaintance had told them earlier: that Thyamis and the villagers had stolen Theagenes from the Persian Mitranes—she adds a possible pretext that Theagenes was the friend of Thyamis—and that Mitranes had marched to the village to reclaim Theagenes. Then she completes the story: the Persians were defeated and the villagers set out for Memphis, taking Theagenes with them. This time the old crone suggests two possible reasons for this mission: first, so the villagers could save themselves from the danger of reprisal by the Persians by making a preemptive strike against this city; and second, to restore their leader Thyamis to his stolen priesthood there. This strange brew of fact and speculation from a questionable source resembles a brain-storming session on the part of our author. The first reason she gives for the mission to Memphis doesn't make a lot of sense as a motive, but does make mention of the fact that Memphis might be undefended because the satrap is engaged with the Ethiopians, which looks forward to the action of books 9 and 10. When the villagers arrive at Memphis, this motive is dropped and the issue becomes entirely a matter of restoring Thyamis to his priesthood, but not without a significant amount of exposition, some of which dovetails with what we already know (7.2–4; cf.

1.33).[29] As in the case of other novelistic beginnings, a number of narrative possibilities are being opened up here by making reference to situations that can be developed later.

Next the old crone is observed at a distance by Calasiris and Charicleia while she performs a necromancy to reawaken her dead son. The awakened corpse gives an impassioned speech condemning his mother and prophesying her death by sword. He also prophesies a happy ending to the stories of Calasiris and Charicleia. The book ends when the old woman impales herself on a sword "bringing instant and fitting fulfillment to her son's prophecy."[30] Her death exhibits the most banal sort of finality in the novel and acknowledges the necessity of such "fitting conclusions," of telling the story "all the way to a satisfactory end." It echoes the deaths of other minor characters like Thermouthis, who in book 2 dies "in a way befitting his character,"[31] or the Phaedra-like figure Arsace, who hangs herself in book 8 in the fashion of her literary model.[32]

The sensational infusion of predictive material by the talking corpse, however, thematizes an opposite characteristic of the novel, its "open-endedness." He puts me in mind of the minor character Thisbe, whom Sandy calls a "narrative revenant," who keeps reappearing in different stories in new roles, even returning once after she is dead in the guise of her *Doppelgänger*, Charicleia.[33] As Cnemon contemplates her corpse back in book 2, he wonders what scheme she was concocting before she died: "Even dead I regard you with suspicion, and I am haunted by the fear that . . . you have come across the sea to make me victim of another Attic tragedy!"[34] The awe Cnemon feels at the "open-endedness" of

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29 Significantly, it is the omniscient narrator who gives this exposition from the past of Thyamis, something almost entirely lacking from the first part of the story.

30 *Aeth*. 6.15.5: τὴν ἐκ τοῦ παιδὸς μαντείαν οὕτω παρὰ πόδας ἐν δίκῃ πληρ≈σασα.

31 *Aeth*. 2.20.2: πρὸς ὕπνον τραπεὶς ὁ Θ°ρμουθις χάλκεόν τινα καὶ πύματον ὕπνον εἵλκυσεν ἀσπίδος δήγματι, μοιρῶν τάχα βουλήσει πρὸς οὐκ ἀνάρμοστον τοῦ τρόπου τὸ τ°λος καταστρ°ψας. In his translation, Morgan's note *ad loc*. explains that the character's name makes reference to a poisonous snake.

32 *Aeth*. 8.15.2: τ°θνηκεν Ἀρσάκη βρόχον ἀγχόνης ἁψαμ°νη. Cf. Euripides *Hippolytus* 802.

33 *Aeth*. 5.1–2, Sandy 1982.37.

34 *Aeth*. 2.11.2: Ἀλλὰ τί Σν ἄρα, ὃ καὶ πάλιν σε κατ' ἐμοῦ τεχναζομ°νην καὶ σοφιστεύουσαν διὰ τοῦ γράμματος ≤ δίκη προαφείλετο τῶν ἐγχειρημάτων; Ὡς κἀγ≈ σε καὶ κειμ°νην ἔχω δι' ὑποψίας καὶ σφόδρα δ°δοικα μὴ καὶ πλάσμα ἐστὶν ≤ Δημαιν°της τελευτὴ κἀμὲ μὲν ±πάτησαν οἱ ἐξαγγείλαντες σὺ δὲ καὶ διαπόντιος ἥκεις ἐτ°ραν καθ' ≤μῶν σκηνὴν Ἀττικὴν καὶ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ τραγῳδήσουσα.

narrative possibilities is thematized repeatedly by Heliodorus. When Calasiris reads the truth of Charicleia's origins he marvels at the subtlety of the god's governance of things and is filled with a strange feeling of sadness and joy: grateful that the riddle has been solved, but troubled about the future and filled with pity for human life "whose instability and insecurity, whose constant changes of direction were made all too manifest in the story of Charicleia."[35] Like other references to divine governance of human affairs, this statement is self-reflexive. The uncanny feeling (πάθος τι καινότερον) that overtakes Calasiris is perhaps a projection of the author's own feelings when he contemplates the multiplicity of paths open to him before he arbitrarily brings the story to an end.

A dialectic of closing and opening operates throughout the *Aithiopika* and is much in evidence at the novel's end. Morgan gives a good account of the profusion, at the end, of narrative *cul-de-sacs* (the tokens, the bullfight of Theagenes, the wrestling match with Meroebus' giant), new information (Charicleia's birthmark, her likeness to the portrait of Andromeda), and new or "returning" characters (Sisimithres, Meroebus, Charicles). It may be that Heliodorus is having a good time teasing the reader, as Morgan suggests, but it may also be the case that what Barthes calls "discourse's instinct for self-preservation" (Barthes 1975.135) is making it difficult to end this story in a satisfactory way. Efforts to move the story to its conclusion keep opening up new narrative possibilities, resulting in a surplus of narrative energy.[36] For me, there is a hint of authorial surrender in the climactic assertion, analogous to that at the end of Chariton's novel, that suddenly everyone understands everything (10.38), a development that flies in the face of what the novel has led us to believe about human understanding.[37]

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35 *Aeth*. 4.9.1: Ταῦτα, ὦ Κνήμων, ὡς ἀν°γνων, ἐγν≈ριζον μὲν καὶ τὴν ἐκ θεῶν οἰκονομίαν ἐθαύμαζον ≤δον∞ς δὲ ἅμα καὶ λύπης ἐνεπλήσθην καὶ πάθος τι καινότερον ὑπ°στην ὁμοῦ δακρύων καὶ χαίρων, διαχεομ°νης μὲν τ∞ς ψυχ∞ς πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀγνοουμ°νων εὕρεσιν καὶ τῶν χρησθ°ντων ≥δη τὴν ἐπίλυσιν, ἀδημονούσης δὲ πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐσομ°νων ἔκβασιν, καὶ τὸν ἀνθρ≈πινον βίον οἰκτειρούσης ὡς ἄστατόν τι καὶ ἀβ°βαιον καὶ ἄλλοτε πρὸς ἄλλα τρεπόμενον τότε δὲ ὑπερβαλλόντως ἐν ταῖς Χαρικλείας τύχαις γνωριζόμενον.

36 So, for example, we are left wondering what becomes of poor Meroebus. Morgan 1989a and Sandy 1982 cite other loose ends.

37 Winkler 1982.157. In this way it parallels the sudden betrothal of the daughter of Nausicles to Cnemon and the "impromptu wedding feast" that ensues in book 6 (see above p. 232).

The accumulation of religious issues at the end of Heliodorus has often been associated with the seriousness of the religious preoccupations typical of the age,[38] and such a reading would certainly fit in well with the "poetics" view of the composition process with which I began: seeing the novels as the rearticulation of some prior knowledge or secret wisdom. This would, in turn, correspond to one characteristic often attributed to the second sophistic, its preoccupation with vapid imitations of traditional material and traditional models. This I would link with that banal kind of teleology represented by the death of the old crone in book 6. But an opposite and equally powerful impulse is also legible in this age of prose experimentation, what we might call a kind of compositional Darwinism, a process ruled not by a specific teleology, but by the desire to see what new and better mutations might arise from an open-ended exploration of any and all possibilities.[39] Such an agenda would place the ancient novels firmly among what Bakhtin calls the "centrifugal forces of language" that resist the unity and closure that we reading experts are so eager to find.

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38 For a balanced discussion, see Beck 1996.

39 Reardon 1969, 1974. Doody 1996, whose work I came across too late to consider fully here, writes: "the novels are not superficial statements of obvious premises, but explorations" (166); and later: the novels are interested in "trying to evolve some new responses or definitions" in moral life (170).

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