Abstract: *Table-Talk* 1.2, on whether guests should have reserved seating in the sympotic space, has been recognised as programmatically establishing the political discourse of the QC generally, as the question ties in with various larger issues: Roman vs. Greek, democracy/egalitarianism vs. tyranny/hierarchy. Little attention, however, has been paid to the close of Plutarch’s speech (617D–E) for his self-represented negotiation between these poles. I argue that his misreading of *Il.* 23 there allows him to have it both ways. I first set out the problem. Plutarch recommends choosing a family member if one cannot choose between two similarly important guests. He justifies this practice with reference to *Il.* 23.534f., where, he claims, Achilles gives his fellow Thessalian Eumelus second place to forestall a conflict between Menelaus and Antilochus. This misreading, however, reverses the order of events in *Il.* 23. I suggest that a very learned audience may have interpreted this misreading as prioritising Greek *paideia* over Roman political power. According to Σ *II.* 23.536–537 ‘T, Achilles’ gift to Eumelus teaches us to follow the ‘natural’ hierarchy, as ordered by ‘excellence’ (ἀρετή), not the actual result, which the scholion calls ‘chance’ (τύχη). Parallels in diction and thought suggest a connection between the scholion and Plutarch. By comparing his family members and other intimates to Eumelus, Plutarch hints that these figures are in another, more authentic hierarchy superior to the figures who by chance appear to be better. For an unlearned audience Plutarch respects the social hierarchies of the external world, but to the *pepайдеуменои* he asserts the superiority of Greek *paideia*. Homeric quotation and interpretation map out social hierarchies, physically in the sympotic space and verbally in the legitimisation of elite status.

What is at stake when characters quote and interpret Homer in Plutarch’s *Table Talk*? Much recent work on quotation in Plutarch has richly explored the breadth and patterns of Plutarch’s reading and deployment of quotations, as well as the *Quellenforschung* of individual quotations, but comparatively little attention has been paid to the interpersonal dynamics of quotation of ‘the poet’. Such dynamics are particularly important in the special environment of the sympotic space, where implicit social hierarchies become plainly visible in seating arrangements and where symposiasts legitimise these hierarchies by offering the appropriate quotation and interpretation of canonical poetry.¹ I intend in this chapter to suggest the possible stakes by looking at a single rich moment—the end of Plutarch’s own contribution—in *Table Talk* 1.2. I first set the scene by connect-

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¹ Important recent contributions specifically on Homeric quotations in Plutarch include Cannata Fera (1996); Alexiou (2000); Bréchet (2003); D’Ippolito (2004); Sluiter (2005), and Díaz Lavado (2010).

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ing the dialogue to some larger questions related to symposia and politics. I then argue that the close of Plutarch’s speech can be read ironically, and that the interpretation has consequences for our reading of the Table Talk.

As Oikonomopoulou observes, Table Talk 1.2 is ‘a programmatic chapter of crucial significance for our understanding of the political discourse of the Table Talk as a whole’. The dialogue’s topic, the proper way to seat guests, asks whether the symposium’s own spatial organization should mirror the hierarchy of the external world: should guests choose their own seats, or should hosts seat their guests according to their social status? In the character Timon’s own words, should their symposium be one governed like a Persian satrapy (616E: σατραπικόν) or a democracy (616F: δημοκρατικόν)? Following the common Second Sophistic habit of referring to Roman Imperial institutions with Persian names, like ‘satrap’ for proconsul or ‘Great King’ for emperor, we might imagine that σατραπικόν here alludes in particular to Roman administration, especially since σατραπικόν in its sense here of ‘formal’, ‘official’, ‘strict’, as Teodorsson glosses it, is unparalleled. Furthermore, this juxtaposition evokes the following 1.3, which distinguishes Roman and Greek places of honor at the symposium and calls the Roman the ‘consul’s place’. Timon then suggests that the different ways of spatially arranging a symposium map onto an opposition between Roman hierarchical rule and Greek democracy.

The vignette that opens this dialogue makes this political question even more loaded by directly connecting it to the Roman presence in Greece. Plutarch’s brother Timon is holding a symposium to which he has invited ‘foreigners, citizens, friends, relatives, and altogether all sorts’ and has directed them to sit where they want. After everyone is seated, a new guest arrives and is unhappy not to find a seat that he deems he is worthy of:

This outlandish figure has no place at Timon’s symposium. The comparison to an εύπάρφυος, which I translate ‘arriviste’, is particularly suggestive: the term refers originally to an ornate piece of clothing with a purple border, but elsewhere Plutarch uses the term pejoratively to refer to newcomers to elite society who refuse to learn its rules.

2 Oikonomopoulou (2007) 175.
4 Teodorsson (1989) 73.
6 615D: ... καὶ ξένους καὶ πολίτας καὶ συνήθεις καὶ οίκείους καὶ ὅλως παντοδαπούς ... (All translations are my own).
7 Cf. the wealthy but tactless foreigner at Luc. Nigr. 13.
This use is most clear in the *On Praising Oneself*, when Plutarch characterises the obnoxious discourse of soldiers and the *nouveaux riches* as ‘pompous and haughty’ (ἐὐπάρυφα καὶ σοβαρά). Like them, this character’s flaunting of his ignorance of sympotic etiquette is revealed in his social blunders (ὑποσολοικότερος) in his clothing and entourage: he either does not know or purposely ignores the customs on what to wear, who to bring, and generally how to act at a symposium. His reaction to the full room is also suggestive: to judge from his unexpected departure and the sympsistas’ subsequent conversation, this character is surprised not to find a space reserved for him. In Alcock’s view, this character expects to find a style of reserved seating that Plutarch often connects to Rome, such as in the immediately following conversation when Plutarch’s father recalls Aemilius Paulus’ highly structured symposia. Different conceptions of the sympotic space are hence connected to Greek and Roman cultural identities, and this elite, boorish outsider, perhaps a Roman himself, but certainly anticipating a Roman-style banquet, is an embodiment of the difficulties Greeks and Romans can have when they dine together.

The opening of the dialogue, then, connects the difficulty Greeks and Romans can have in creating a shared sympotic space with characteristically Greek and Roman styles of government. Four characters take up these questions in turn: Plutarch’s father, in favour of a hierarchical symposium; Timon, who supports an egalitarian symposium; Plutarch himself, who tries to walk a fine line between these two extremes; and finally Lamprias, who ends the dialogue arguing for a mixed symposium.

I briefly summarise Plutarch’s speech before coming to its close, which I will linger on for its importance for understanding the place of early Greek poetry in relationship to these larger questions. Beginning his speech, Plutarch promises to ‘walk a middle path’ between the two types of symposia favoured by his father and brother. He distinguishes between symposia for two categories of guests; it is appropriate for the young, citizens, and friends (νέους ... καὶ πολίτας καὶ συνήθεις) to drink in the egalitarian mode, but it is better to use hierarchical seating in the case of foreigners, rulers, and elders (ἐν δὲ ξένως ἢ ἄρχουσιν ἢ πρεσβυτέροις). He argues for hierarchical seating by providing four examples from Homer and one from Pindar. He then tackles some of the problems with hierarchical seating: if multiple people vie for one seat, how to choose?

It is here that Plutarch advises that if one cannot make a decision between two guests, it is best to honor a family member or somebody with a close connection to the host. He ends his speech by providing an exemplum for this point of social etiquette with his claim that he takes this rule from Homer, citing *Iliad* 23. I provide the relevant quotation:

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8 Plu. *De se ipsum laud.* 547E.

9 For ξένος as ‘foreigner’, cf. QC 76, 707B: ‘But later, in the case of the entertainment of foreigners, especially those of consular rank ...’ (ὑστερον μέντοι περί τάς τῶν ξένων ὑποδοχάς, μάλιστα τῶν ἥγεμονικῶν, ...).

κατακλίνω γάρ εἰς τὸν ἔνδοξον μάλιστα τόπον, ἀν μὲν ἢ πατήρ, τούτον ἁράμενος, εἰ δὲ μή, πάππον ἢ πενθερόν ἢ πατρὸς ἀδελφόν ἢ τινα τῶν ὁμολογουμένην καὶ ἱδίαν ἐχόντων παρὰ τῷ δεχομένῳ τιμῆς ύπεροχήν, ἐκ τῶν Ὅμηρος τῷ θεώρημα τούτῳ λαμβάναν καθήκοντων. καὶ γάρ ἐκεί (Ψ 534 ff.) δήποτεν ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς τὸν Μενέλαυν καὶ τὸν Ἀντίλοχον περί τῶν δευτερείων τῆς ἱππο-δρομίας ὄρων διαφερομένους καὶ δεδοκιώς μή πορρωτέρω προσέλθωσιν ὁργῆς καὶ φιλονεικίας ἐτέρῳ βούλεται τὸ ἐπάθθον ἀποδίδοναι, λόγῳ μὲν Εὐμήλοιο οἰκτίρων καὶ τιμῶν, ἐργῷ δὲ τῆς ἐκκένων διαφοράς τῇ ἀαίτιαν ἀφαιρῶν.

For I set my father into the most honored location, elevating him, if he is there; if not, my grandfather, or my father-in-law, or my uncle, or anyone who has an uncontroversial special claim to honor in the eyes of the host. I take this rule of etiquette from the poems of Homer. For there, I believe, Achilles sees Menelaus and Antilochus at odds over second place in the horse race. Since he is afraid that they will proceed further in anger and rivalry, he wishes to give the prize to another, nominally because he pities and honors Eumelus, but in reality to remove the cause of their disagreement. (QC 1.2, 617D–E)

Several points here should make us question whether Plutarch is being fully transparent. Not only does Plutarch’s version of the Iliadic chariot race greatly differ from Il. 23, as I will show; it is also unclear how Plutarch even derives his rule from the situation as he describes it. How does Eumelus have a special claim to honor in Achilles’ eyes? Rather, Plutarch’s ‘I believe’ (δήποτεν) invites the audience to further consideration of his account. I will first summarise the situation in Il. 23 and its interpretation in the scholia, before analyzing Plutarch’s puzzling reading.

At the conclusion of the chariot race in Il. 23, Diomedes is the un questioned victor who carries off the prize for first place (23.499–513). Antilochus comes in second thanks to tricks, not speed (23.515: κέρδεσιν, οὐ τι τάχει γε), but Menelaus is just a chariot’s length behind (23.517); if the race had lasted any longer, Menelaus would have won (23.526–527). Finally, Eumelus comes to the finish line last, though he is the best racer in the eyes of the narrator (23.289: ἱπποσύνη ἐκέκαστο) and Achilles (23.536: ἄνηρ ὀριστος),\(^\text{11}\) and his early lead is only lost because of the intervention of Athena, who had supported Diomedes by breaking Eumelus’ chariot yoke (23.388–397). In recognition of Eumelus’ inherent excellence Achilles proposes to give him the prize for second place (23.537: δεύτερον). All agree except (naturally) Antilochus, who vehemently objects (23.539–554). Achilles in reply agrees to give Antilochus the prize for second place, giving Eumelus instead an additional prize (23.555–565).

The most relevant scholion for the scene in Plutarch is Σ Il. 23.536–537 T, which I provide here with the appropriate Iliadic passage, where Achilles speaks immediately after the conclusion of the race:

\(^{11}\) Narrator: Il. 23.289; Achilles: Il. 23.536.
The scholion sees the text as providing a moral exemplar for readers to learn from. The scholion’s view is that one should follow inherent virtue, as ordered by ‘excellence’ (ἀρετή), not the actual result, which it calls ‘chance’ (τύχη). The scholion, as preserved in the generally fuller T, then emphasizes one feature of that inherent virtue: Eumelus’ ἀρετή arises especially from his status as a Thessalian.

While this additional detail may hint at a special connection between Achilles and Eumelus thanks to their common homeland of Thessaly—perhaps the special connection Plutarch alludes to in his treatment of this scene—it is more likely that the scholiast at least has in mind Thessaly’s reputation for horses, a theme the scholia often return to.\textsuperscript{12} In particular, the scholion probably refers to Eumelus’ Thessalian horses and his Thessalian expertise in horses, which the scholia repeatedly claim is part of the reason for his excellence.\textsuperscript{13} For example, commenting on the narrator’s assertion at the beginning of the Catalogue of Ships that Eumelus’ horses are the best, the scholion attributes their excellence to their Thessalian origin:

\textsuperscript{12} Thessalians are horse-breeders: Σ. ΙI. 9.123a b T. For the scholia ‘horse-rearing Argos’ (Ἄργος ἐς ἵπποβοτόν) generally refers to the Thessalian Argos: Σ. ΙI. 3.75a T, Σ. ΙI. 3.258 b T. The Myrmidons are ‘swift-horsed’ (ταχύσωλοι) because they are Thessalian: Σ. ΙI. 23.6 T.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Σ. ΙI. 2.763 D, Σ. ΙI. 23.288 T.
This scholion highlights Eumelus’ Thessalian origin and his Thessalian horses as being key to his excellence in horse-racing, as well as seeing the reference to Eumelus in the Catalogue as foreshadowing the chariot race in *II.* 23.

Let us return our attention to Plutarch’s exploitation of this scene. As Teodorsson has previously noted, Plutarch’s reading of *II.* 23 does not match the Homeric text.¹⁴ In the *Iliad*, Achilles’ decision to give the prize to Eumelus *starts*, not ends the quarrel between Antilochus and Menelaus. The conflict is in fact resolved not by Achilles’ action, but by Antilochus’ willingness to yield to Menelaus. Plutarch’s reading reverses the temporal order of these events—intentionally, as I will argue.

On a superficial reading that does not consider the consequences of the intertext and sees Plutarch’s citation as simply a misreading of *II.* 23, Plutarch’s interpretation supports his advice to choose a family member or other intimate when it is difficult to determine who is socially superior. In Teodorsson’s words, ‘Plutarch distorts the story to make it suit his argument’.¹⁵ Assimilating athletic performance in Homer to social standing in Roman Greece, Plutarch reads Achilles as a model for sympotic hosts.

But we may wish to take this misreading of *II.* 23 seriously, as Plutarch appears to signal with his ‘I believe’ (δήπουθεν), which is occasionally used elsewhere in the *Table Talk* to mark a significant engagement with a literary text and Homer in particular. For example, *Talk* 5.4 concerns itself with the problem of why at *II.* 9.204 Achilles orders Patroclus to mix stronger (ζωρότερον) wine. Responding to ‘childish’ (μειρακιώδη) readings of *II.* which deny ζωρότερον its conventional meaning, Plutarch fills in the story by imagining motivations not explicit in the Homeric text:

> ἔπειτα Χείρωνος ᾧν μαθητής καὶ τῆς περὶ τὸ σῶμα διαίτης οὐκ ἀπειρὸς ἔλογιζετο δήπουθεν, ὦτι τοῖς ἀργοῦσι καὶ σχολάζουσι παρὰ τὸ εἰσώθη σώματον ἀνεμένη καὶ μαλακωτέρα κράσις ἄριστει·

Second, since he was a student of Cheiron and not ignorant of proper diet, he was reasoning, I imagine, that for bodies that were unaccustomedly idle and at leisure a relaxed, gentle mixture was appropriate. (*QC* 5.4, 677F)

Plutarch’s daring and inventive solution stands in contrast to the more pedestrian, ‘childish’ solutions of the earlier interlocutors. While Plutarch purports to be merely reading what is implicit in the *Iliad*, he acknowledges the tendentiousness of his reading with the particle δήπουθεν. This particle, also found in *Table Talk* 1.2, can thus be taken as a marker for readings that engage seriously and creatively with the text.

Furthermore, Plutarch’s reading, while not matching the scholion’s interpretation, nonetheless suggests a knowledge of the scholion or perhaps its ancestral commentary. In Plutarch’s reading, the gift to Eumelus is a way out of determining who is superior: instead of choosing the person who is genuinely more worthy of the gift, Achilles gives the prize to someone who has a special connection to him. The scholion, however, adopts the opposite reading: Achilles gives the prize to Eumelus in

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¹⁴ Teodorsson (1989) 78.
¹⁵ Teodorsson (1989) 78.
recognition of his inherent excellence. Despite these differences, both Plutarch and
the scholion see this episode of Achilles and Eumelus as a teaching moment: as if
following the scholion’s advice to learn from Achilles, Plutarch does create a general
rule from this episode, but this rule is not what the scholion advises.

In light of these facts, we might be prompted to attempt an ironic reading of Plu-
tarch’s account of II. 23. Achilles’ choice of Eumelus is in fact the correct choice (even
if that is not what happens in the Iliad), but not for the reasons explicitly given. Ra-
ther, it is a choice to reward ἀρετή over τύχη, to respect inherent excellence over
chance results. In the terms of the dialogue, which thus constructs an analogy be-
tween racing on the race-course and racing at the symposium, it is a choice to
give priority in seating to those who deserve it over those who happen to be quicker.
This reading lines up well with Plutarch’s slightly earlier criticism of Timon’s support
of free seating, when he compares that kind of seating to theft:

ἀφαιρεῖται γὰρ ὁ κοινὸν ποιῶν τὸ ἰδίον (ἰδίου δὲ τὸ κατ’ ἀξίαιν ἐκάστου) καὶ ποιεῖ δρόμου καὶ
σπουδῆς τὸ πρωτείον ἀρετή καὶ εὐγενεία καὶ ἀρχή καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ὀφειλόμενον.

For in making shared what is each man’s own (i.e. what belongs to him according to his merit)
Timon deprives him of it, and Timon gives first place to the footrace and speed, though it is
owed to virtue, good birth, and sovereignty. (QC 1.2, 617C)

Perhaps laying a foundation for the reading of II. 23 that ends his speech, Plutarch here
likewise prefers inherent ἀρετή to the unreliable results of the footrace. The similarity
strengthens the possibility of the ironic reading of the close of Plutarch’s speech.

Who, however, has this ἀρετή? The nature of this coded message suggests one
possible answer: the pepaideumenoi, steeped in, among other things, Homer and Ho-
ermic interpretation. In some ways this is no surprise; for Plutarch, the moral excel-
ence that παιδεία can provide is necessary for successful political leadership, as can
be seen in the emphasis often given to education in the Lives.¹⁶ In this case, Plutarch
subtly sends two messages to two different groups, one to the pepaideumenoi, one to
boorish figures like the elite outsider whose entrance begins the talk. In the case of
reserved seating, Plutarch explicitly suggests assigning seats according to ‘what be-
ongs to him according to his merit’, making use of criteria that the boor would re-
cognise—‘virtue, good birth, and sovereignty’. At the close of Plutarch’s speech,
when he recommends choosing a person with a close connection to the host over
others, this message is intended for the boor and figures like him at this eclectic sym-
posium, and allows them to save face: they might be passed over not out of disre-
spect but because the person preferred has a special tie to the host. To the pepaideu-
menoι Plutarch has another message, however: ἀρετή can derive from and can
include an education that the boor fails to recognize, including a knowledge of sym-

¹⁶ Stadter (2014a) 27 n. 42.
Potetic etiquette and Homer.⁷ Therefore, just as in Plutarch’s reading Achilles rewards Eumelus for his inherent ἀρετή, but with the pretense that he is rewarding him for some special connection to the host, Plutarch recommends elevating those who have acquired ἀρετή through their παιδεία, even if the boor would not recognise it.

In light of the broader stakes of the dialogue, however,—hierarchical rule vs. democracy, Greece vs. Rome—it is tempting to push this reading just a little further. The elite boor whose entrance began the narrative of the symposium, according to the opposition that has structured our reading so far, must possess not ἀρετή but τύχη; his status arises from chance or providence, not any inherent virtue. Successful political leadership, however, requires both, just as at On the Fortune of the Romans 316E it is a combination of ἀρετή and τύχη that leads to the rise of the Roman Empire.¹⁸ If ἀρετή can arise from Greek παιδεία, and some foreigners fail to possess παιδεία, they are unlikely to be effective leaders. Swain has shown that in the Lives Romans are more likely than Greeks to be scrutinized as to their acquisition of παιδεία, and that in the Table Talk ‘Plutarch expects his Roman dining companions to use Hellenic culture in the conversations while paradoxically presenting them as being not fully and absolutely at ease with it’.¹⁹ For Plutarch rulers need not just τύχη but also an ἀρετή that can come from παιδεία, but Romans are less likely to possess that education than Greeks. We see this view again in this passage in the Table Talk. Here, the Greeks and Romans who can recall their Homer—presumably much of the readership of the Table Talk—can flatteringly see that according to Plutarch’s interpretation they would be better leaders than those without παιδεία, while figures like the outlandish, uneducated foreigner who began this dialogue may possess a high social status and can attempt to demand privileges, but are unlikely to be as effective leaders.

Such a reading in the programmatic 1.2 suggests the importance of the use of early Greek poetry and its interpretation in the Table Talk. Characters’ quotation and interpretation of Homer at table is not always simply an innocent attempt to add colour to one’s speech: it can carry further ideological significance in the Roman Greece of the 2nd century CE. When Plutarch proves himself a master sympo- siast through his ability to offer a proper Homeric interpretation that ambiguously caters to multiple audiences, he demonstrates how the social hierarchies of his world are mapped out in the sympotic space both physically, in the seating arrangement of the guests, and verbally, as correct knowledge of poetry legitimises one’s elite status and right to be present at the symposium.

¹⁷ Cf. QC 1.1, 613D–E for a contrast by Plutarch between the pepaideumenoi and ἰδιόται, where the former are characterized by their ability to combine Dionysus (sympotic etiquette) with the Muses (intellectual activity, including engagement with the Muses’ domain of poetry).
¹⁸ Typically of Plutarch’s thought; see Swain (1989c), esp. 509–510, for characters relying on both ἀρετή and τύχη for success in both the Lives and the Moralia.
¹⁹ Swain (1990b) 131.