

Narrating *paideia*: Competitive Learning and Homer in Lucian's *Symposium*

Among Lucian's parodies of Second Sophistic performances of *paideia*, his *Symposium* seems to occupy the most negative end of his satiric spectrum: as the competitive conversation and interaction of educated elites at this symposium descends into a reenactment of the Trojan War, the text appears to unequivocally condemn *paideia* and see it not only as a bad deal for the participants but also a farce (Branham 1989, Whitmarsh 2001, König 2010, Hobden 2013). It has been insufficiently appreciated, however, how the narrator's own participation in the symposium's games of *paideia* concerning the Homeric epics calls the text's apparent rejection of this competitive display into question. Building on the rich recent work treating Second Sophistic intellectual culture as a social phenomenon (notably Eshleman 2012 and 2013), I show how the text parodies competitive learning around Homer and yet presents the rejection of such learning as ultimately impossible.

I begin by presenting new evidence for how the text parodies Homeric learning as leading to unethical behavior: its practitioners are either skilled but nakedly competitive, or incompetent and the butt of the symposium's joke. The Cynic Alcidas exemplifies the first category of exegete, when he crashes the symposium uninvited and "wittily" (12: ἐπιχαριεντισάμενος) justifies his intrusion with a novel interpretation of *Il.* 2.408 (αὐτόματος δέ οἱ ἦλθε βοῆν ἀγαθὸς Μενέλαος). Here the response of the crowd is one of condemnation: they express their disapproval through the medium of Homeric quotation, picking out verses that suggest an alternative understanding of *Il.* 2.408. Alcidas is nonetheless not turned away from the symposium, but rather his knowledge of Homer and willingness to exploit it violently grants him entry and allows him to enjoy the luxuries available there.

In the latter two examples, I argue that in Lucian's parody tensions inherent in the symposium are displayed more candidly than usual, as inept invocations of Homer are openly laughed at. Here the snubbed philosopher Hetoemocles' inappropriate comparisons of himself to Oeneus and Artemis are ironically called "in excellent taste, all of it, and just the thing for a festive occasion" (31: εὐφημα πάντα καὶ ἑορτῇ πρέποντα), and the grammarian Histiaeus' virtuosic but culturally inferior displays of Homer have more in common with the symposium's acrobat than with the other, more philosophically-inclined symposiasts. Histiaeus' cento (17), borrowing from relatively low-status rhapsodic traditions (Usher 1998, Wilshire 2015), is 'entirely laughable' (παγγέλοιον) to the symposiasts, while his archaizing wedding song (41) bumbles an invocation to Nireus, the most beautiful man at Troy, and hence is the butt of laughter for both the internal and external audiences (a reading that complements Vergados 2010-2012).

In the third part of the paper, I analyze the narrator Lycinus' characterization of the fight that closes the *Symposium*, where he repeatedly compares the characters in the text to Homeric figures, commenting particularly on the similarity of their fighting to mythic brawling and the Trojan War (*Symp.* 35: οὐ μείω τῆς Ἰλιάδος κακὰ; 45: Λαπίθας οὖν καὶ Κενταύρους εἶδες ἄν). Here the narrator is participating in the same games of Homeric allusion that characterizes the use of Homer in the text overall, where the learned elite compare one another to Homeric figures like Menelaus or Oeneus. In this reading, despite his explicit statements declaring its uselessness, he seems unable to avoid the use of Homer himself and reveals himself as an effective and skilled Homeric exegete. The text establishes Homer and *paideia* more generally as fundamentally inescapable: no matter its faults, one cannot celebrate a symposium or live life without it.

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