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## What's So Funny about Plato's *Lysis*?

*Abstract:* This paper aims to identify the sources of comedy in Plato's dialogue *Lysis*. We shall examine elements of this dialogue comparable to those in comic drama and approach *Lysis* from the viewpoint of the incongruence theory. This dialogue centres on Socrates' attempt to teach his friend Ctesippus the proper way of conversing with his favourite. On account of that, he converses with *Lysis* on love and friendship, while Ctesippus observes in secret. Several elements of *Lysis* stand out for their : for their similarity to the motives found in comedy – the depiction of Ctesippus' feelings and his lovesick behaviour, his hiding and excited reactions during the conversation with *Lysis*, and the scene with drunken slaves near the end of the dialogue. These can be compared to their equivalents in Menander's *Dyskolos* and *Perikeiromene*, Aristophanes' *Knights*, and Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. Humour derived from incongruity can be seen during the discussion on love and benefit when Socrates' questions and *Lysis*' answers imply the feasibility of inappropriate or impossible scenarios.

*Keywords:* incongruence, humour, *gradatio*, unreliable narrator, comedy

To determine the comical value of a text, we need to find its comical elements and break them down to their roots – the sources of comedy. For this purpose, we need to choose one of many theoretical approaches to humour and follow it throughout our analysis – that is, we need to identify examples relevant for our chosen approach and examine them according to the criteria applicable to our concept of humour. In this research, we shall apply two methods of discerning the sources of comedy in Plato's *Lysis*. First, we will select scenes and motives akin to those in comic drama, presuming that the events displayed in a comedy were aimed to be considered humorous in the moment of their making. Second, we will attempt to distinguish the features that can be found comical in the light of the incongruence theory.

There are several interpretations of the term incongruence, as well as disputes on the term's applicability and broadness (Cf. Lipitt 1991, 21–22; Latta 1999, 22–40; Morreall 2009, 10–11). For the purpose of this research, we may briefly say that the theory of incongruence is one of the traditional theories of humour, which postulates that humour stems from breaking our mental

patterns, ingrained by familiar experiences. However, we must not identify incongruence with surprise. When something perceived, imagined, or experienced breaches our mental patterns, it can be a surprise only for the first time. If the same thing repeats, it will not be perceived as a surprise, but it will nevertheless break our established mental patterns on each repetition.<sup>1</sup> Surprises can be unpleasant, and so can incongruity, which is often the cause of serious discomfort or fear. In the words of Michael Clark, one must enjoy perceiving the object as incongruous as well as enjoy the perceived incongruity for itself rather than for an ulterior reason. That is the fundamental requirement for humorous rather than terrifying incongruity. Furthermore, whether the perceived, imagined, or experienced thing truly involves incongruity is irrelevant; first and foremost, it is important that the incongruity is perceived (Clark 1970, 25–28).

In this research, we will attempt to analyse the humour in *Lysis*, one of Plato's early dialogues. This text was selected for its engaging content and cheerful narrative structure. However, one must keep in mind that the aim of this paper is not to detect every element of comedy in Plato's *Lysis* but to identify several examples illustrative to the chosen approaches.

To thoroughly understand the setting of *Lysis* as well as its comical features, a brief outline of this work must be given. The dialogue is set outside of the city walls of Athens, near the spring of Panops. On his way from the Academy to the Lyceum, Socrates chances upon several young men, among them his acquaintances Hippothales and Ctesippus, standing in front of a newly opened palaestra (Pl. *Lys.* 203a–204a). Socrates quickly learns the purpose of their visit to the palaestra – boys of different ages celebrate Hermaea together, and Hippothales is hoping to see Lysis, a beautiful and virtuous boy. Entertained by his friend's pursuits, Ctesippus tells Socrates about Hippothales' lack of success at courting young Lysis. According to Ctesippus, Hippothales' technique consists mostly of writing encomia for Lysis and his family, of tiring everyone with stories of Lysis' merits and of melancholic pining after the boy (Pl. *Lys.* 204b–206c). Seeing how Hippothales' approach is futile, Socrates goes on to educate him in the proper ways of conversing with one's object of affection. After entering the palaestra, Socrates engages in a conversation with Lysis and his friend Menexenus,<sup>2</sup> while Hippothales secretly listens to their exchange. Socrates and the boys discuss *φιλία* from the point of view of

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction to the theory of incongruity and a summary of different critiques of this concept, see Morreal 2009, 11–15.

<sup>2</sup> This is the same Menexenus from Plato's *Menexenus* and *Phaedo* (Nails 2002, 203).

various relationships (e.g. parental love, friendship, requited and unrequited love). They set out to define *φιλία*, examine the significance of kinship and likeness for it, determine the original nature of *φιλία*, and overcome the difficulties preventing them from successfully discovering its true character (Pl. *Lys.* 208e–222d). Socrates succeeds at aiding Hippothales in his pursuit. Claiming that affection and friendship arise from the kindredness of souls, he convinces Lysis that one should naturally reciprocate the feelings of their suitor (Pl. *Lys.* 222a). However, Socrates considers their quest a failure as they cannot find the answer to the initial question and discover what *ὁ φίλος* truly is.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Elements of the dialogue comparable to those in comedy

### 1. 1. Love's labour's lost?

The first subdivision of this category includes several motives analogous with features of comic drama. One of the most eye-catching and amusing passages in Plato's *Lysis* must be Ctesippus' portrayal of Hippothales and his futile efforts at courting Lysis (204c–204e). In truth, as we find out from Ctesippus' account, one can hardly say that Hippothales' attempts to pursue the boy were ineffective. It would be more appropriate to consider them non-existent. As Ctesippus' story unfolds, we see that Hippothales shies away from any substantial contact with Lysis. Instead, he bores his friends with numerous stories of the boy and his virtues, writing endless encomia and essays on Lysis' and his family's merits. Furthermore, as stated by Ctesippus, Hippothales torments them with Lysis not only during the day but also during the night, especially after having some wine. Worst of all, according to Ctesippus, is that they have to put up with songs of his loved one, which Hippothales likes to sing in a strange voice.<sup>4</sup> A few lines later, Ctesippus adds a final touch to his description of Hippothales, saying what seems to sum up the entire account of his pursuits – 'you see he's unwell, he's raving mad!'<sup>5</sup> After announcing his newly discovered affection for the old misanthrope's daughter, Menander's Sostrates describes his lovesickness in a similar manner – 'believe me, Chaireas, I'm not well.'<sup>6</sup>

We can notice several interesting features in Ctesippus' account of his friend's pursuits – or lack thereof. In reality, Ctesippus paints a rather melo-

<sup>3</sup> ἐροῦσι γὰρ οἶδε ἀπιόντες ὡς οἰόμεθα ἡμεῖς ἀλλήλων φίλοι εἶναι, καὶ ἐμὲ γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν τίθημι, οὐπῶ δὲ ὅτι ἔστιν ὁ φίλος οἷοί τε ἐγενόμεθα ἐξευρεῖν (Pl. *Lys.* 223b). Those who will leave shall say that although considering each other friends (and I do count myself among your friends), we were unable to discover what a friend is. (All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.)

<sup>4</sup> καὶ ὅ ἐστιν τούτων δεινότερον, ὅτι καὶ ᾄδει εἰς τὰ παιδικὰ φωνῇ θαυμασίᾳ, ἣν ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἀκούοντας ἀνέχεσθαι. (204δ)

<sup>5</sup> οὐχ ὑγιαίνει, ἔφη ὁ Κτήσιππος, ἀλλὰ ληρεῖ τε καὶ μαίνεται. (205a)

<sup>6</sup> Ἐγὼ δέ, Χαιρέα, κακῶς ἔχω.

dramatic picture. Almost every element of Hippothales' infatuation is over-emphasised and theatrical. Most prominent are the constant repetitions of Lysis' merits,<sup>7</sup> the night-time wailing, and numerous depictions of Hippothales' sentiments for the boy. Such a literary device should, without a doubt, be considered a transparent source of comedy. A similar illustration of unrequited love can be found in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, particularly during the matchmaking ploy for Benedick and Beatrice.<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, the falsehood of this exaggerated description amplifies the comedic effect. Another amusing detail about Ctesippus' description is Hippothales' behaviour during the conversation with Socrates. The young man seems to be very shy with regard to revealing the identity of his favourite, and he appears embarrassed by Ctesippus' words, which makes this scene more lifelike and relatable.

Although Hippothales' infatuation is the moving force for the plot of *Lysis*, he displays certain passivity throughout the dialogue. Firstly, he does not exhibit any assertiveness when courting Lysis and chooses to do it from afar and on paper. Secondly, he is not prepared to share his troubles with Socrates and simply stands by as Ctesippus recounts them. His behaviour does not change upon entering the palaestra; he decides to hide behind a column and eavesdrop on the conversation between Lysis and Socrates. Even though he does not influence the further course of events, Socrates occasionally takes note of his reactions.<sup>9</sup> This makes the central part of this dialogue vividly remind the readers of a theatre stage, especially of a scene from a comedy.

## 1. 2. Drunken slaves

At the very end of the dialogue, when the time comes for Lysis and the other boys to go home, their *paedagogoi* make a sudden appearance and ask

<sup>7</sup> ἐκκεκώφωκε τὰ ὦτα καὶ ἐμπέπληκε Λύσιδος. (204d)

<sup>8</sup> CLAUDIO Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses, 'O sweet Benedick! God give me patience!' LEONATO She doth indeed; my daughter says so. And the ecstasy hath so much overborne her that my daughter is sometime afeard she will do a desperate outrage to herself. It is very true. (Shakespeare, *Much Ado*, 2. 3. 145–151)

<sup>9</sup> καὶ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας αὐτοῦ ἀπέβλεψα πρὸς τὸν Ἴπποθάλη, καὶ ὀλίγου ἐξήμαρτον· ἐπῆλθε γὰρ μοι εἰπεῖν ὅτι οὕτω χροῖ, ὦ Ἴπποθαλες, τοῖς παιδικοῖς διαλέγεσθαι (210e) Having heard what he said, I glanced over at Hippothales, and it almost slipped my tongue to say: 'See, Hippothales, this is how you're supposed to talk to your beau.'

Similarly, ὁ μὲν οὖν Λύσις καὶ ὁ Μενέξενος μόγις πῶς ἐπενευσάτην, ὁ δὲ Ἴπποθάλης ὑπὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς παντοδαπὰ ἠφίει χρώματα (222b). Lysis and Menexenus gave a faint nod of approval, and Hippothales, delighted, turned various colours.

them to join their siblings and leave the palaestra (223a–223b):

ὥσπερ δαίμονές τινες, προσελθόντες οἱ παιδαγωγοί, ὃ τε τοῦ Μενεξένου καὶ ὁ τοῦ Λύσιδος, ἔχοντες αὐτῶν τοὺς ἀδελφούς, παρεκάλουν καὶ ἐκέλευον αὐτοὺς οἴκαδ' ἀπιέναι: ἤδη γὰρ ἦν ὀψέ. τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον καὶ ἡμεῖς καὶ οἱ περιεστῶτες αὐτοὺς ἀπηλαύνομεν: ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὐδὲν ἐφρόντιζον ἡμῶν, ἀλλ' ὑποβαρβαρίζοντες ἡγανάκτουν τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἤττον ἐκάλουν, ἀλλ' ἐδόκουν ἡμῖν ὑποπεπωκότες ἐν τοῖς Ἑρμαίοις ἄποροι εἶναι προσφέρεσθαι, ἡττηθέντες οὖν αὐτῶν διελύσαμεν τὴν συνουσίαν.

Menexenus' and Lysis' *paedagogoi* approached us like some kind of demons. They were bringing along the boys' brothers, calling them to return home – it was already getting late. At first, we wanted to drive them away with the help of those around us; however, they paid no attention to us, angrily speaking in broken Greek. They kept on insisting, and it seemed to us that they might be hard to deal with since they had a bit too much to drink at the festival. In the end, we admitted defeat and went our separate ways.

This scene reminds us of the frequent portrayal of slaves in Greek comic drama, seeing that this genre is known to feature slaves and their character flaws as a source of comedy. They can be cowardly, brash, lazy, gluttonous (Krieter-Spiro 1997, 168; Cox 2013, 162), and, what is most interesting in this case, fond of drinking. In Aristophanes' *Knights*, Nicias and Demosthenes discuss the beneficial effects of unmixed wine on one's concentration (Ar. *Eq.* 85–119). In Menander's *Girl with Her Hair Cut Short*, Pataecus and Polemon accuse the slave Sosias of being drunk (Men. *Pk.* 470–480), and in a fragment of Menander's play *The Woman from Thessaly*, a slave seems to be reproached for smelling of wine (Men. *Th.* frag. 170 (192)).

## 2. Humorous and incongruous

### 2.1. ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας εὐθὺ Λυκείου

The foremost element of the comical substratum in *Lysis* is quite prominent from the opening sentence of the dialogue, and it has been written about on several occasions.<sup>10</sup> That is the puzzling use of the adverb εὐθύ three times within the first five sentences. In this opening sequence of the dialogue, Socrates announces his initial intentions twice, first to the readers and second to both the readers and his collocutors:

<sup>10</sup> Planeaux 2001 and Hetherington 2009 give attention to this detail. We will discuss their conclusions below.

(203a) ἐπορευόμεν μὲν ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας εὐθύ Λυκείου τὴν ἔξω τεῖχος ὑπ' αὐτὸ τὸ τεῖχος· ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐγενόμην κατὰ τὴν πυλῖδα ἣ ἡ Πάνοπος κρήνη, ἐνταῦθα συνέτυχον Ἴπποθάλει τε τῷ Ἱερωνύμου καὶ Κτησίππῳ τῷ Παιανιῆ καὶ ἄλλοις μετὰ τούτων νεανίσκοις ἀθρόοις συνεστῶσι. καί με προσιόντα ὁ Ἴπποθάλης ιδὼν· ὦ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, ποῖ δὴ πορεύη καὶ (203β) πόθεν; — ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πορεύομαι εὐθύ Λυκείου. — δεῦρο δὴ, ἦ δ' ὅς, εὐθύ ἡμῶν. οὐ παραβάλλεις; ἄξιον μέντοι.

I was walking along the road just outside city walls, going from the Academy straight to the Lyceum. When I found myself near the little gate, where lies the spring of Panops, I chanced upon Hippothales, son of Hieronymus, Ctesippus from the deme Peania, and other young men standing there with them. When he saw me coming, Hippothales said: 'Socrates! Whereto are you going and wherefrom?' I replied: 'I am going from the Academy straight to the Lyceum.' And he returned: 'Come on then, straightaway with us. Do you not want to? It will be worth it.'

Such intensive repetition of the adverb εὐθύ and, furthermore, of the whole phrase ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας εὐθύ Λυκείου is very pronounced and could not have gone unnoticed by the readers. This could not have been a mistake or a result of the author's ill-considered wording. What is left is to assume that the repetition of εὐθύ was deliberate, chosen purposely to attract the readers' attention. Having come to the same conclusion and seeking to prove that Socrates could be considered an unreliable narrator,<sup>11</sup> Planeaux attempted to determine the reasons behind Plato's decision to emphasise εὐθύ (Planeaux 2001, 60). He considered several possible meanings of εὐθύ. First, he assumed that εὐθύ Λυκείου meant 'taking the shortest route to the Lyceum'. Recreating Socrates' footsteps, he determined that the road outside the city of Athens was not the most straightforward route between the Academy and the Lyceum and that it would have been much more εὐθύ to choose the path through the city instead (Planeaux 2001, 60; 67). Further, the author suggests that εὐθύ might mean 'quickly' (Planeaux 2001, 61), which is compatible with the first rendering of εὐθύ – the shortest path is expected to be the quickest one as well. The conclusion that the use of εὐθύ must be deliberate and that Socrates is not telling the truth from the beginning further deepens Planeaux's doubts as to his true intentions. Moreover, Planeaux suggests that most of Socrates' assertions in the first part of the dialogue are untrue (Planeaux 2001, 62). He

<sup>11</sup> An unreliable or fallible narrator speaks or acts at odds with the norms of the work. The narrator is not always deliberately unreliable but can be mistaken or misled. The reader's task is to evaluate the reliability of the narrator through the assistance of the implied author and his clues for judging the narrator (Booth 1983, 158–159).

claims that it is not likely that Socrates had not heard about the new palaestra since his acquaintance Mikkos is teaching there<sup>12</sup> and that it is even more improbable that he had never heard about Lysis,<sup>13</sup> seeing that his family is well known<sup>14</sup> in the city (Planeaux 2001, 62). Therefore, Planeaux concludes that Socrates' original intent was to go to the new palaestra and talk to Lysis since he is a beautiful and clever boy. According to Planeaux, after encountering the young men, Socrates pretended not to know anything, and he used Hippothales' failure at courting Lysis as an excuse to proceed with his initial plan. Furthermore, Planeaux believes that Socrates' apparent recognising of Lysis in the palaestra proves his argumentation (Planeaux 2001, 64).<sup>15</sup>

There are several issues with this reading of the introductory dialogue between Socrates and the two older boys. One does not have to be an expert in Athens' city area to see how Socrates' path might not be the shortest route, and we must presume that Hippothales and Ctesippus as well as Plato's readers were well versed in topography of the city. As Planeaux noticed (Planeaux 2001, 60–61), if Socrates had wanted to say he was walking along the shortest path to the Lyceum, the untruth would have been evident from the very beginning.<sup>16</sup> However, Planeaux does not notice that Socrates' remark is peculiar when encountering friends. We see Hippothales starting a nonchalant conversation, asking a question not unusual for chance encounters, one we have all asked and been asked countless times: 'Where are you going, and where are you coming from?' There is no reason for spontaneously answering, 'I am going to the Lyceum, taking the shortest and quickest route,' especially when this evidently cannot be so. In addition, we cannot discern a valid motive for such an obvious untruth. Socrates could have proceeded with what Planeaux

<sup>12</sup> ἔστιν δὲ δὴ τί τοῦτο, καὶ τίς ἡ διατριβή; παλαίστρα, ἔφη, νεωστὶ ᾠκοδομημένη... διδάσκει δὲ τίς αὐτόθι; — σὸς ἐταῖρός γε, ἢ δ' ὄς, καὶ ἐπαινέτης, Μίκκος (204α). 'What is this place, and what do you do here?' 'A newly built palaestra,' he answered... 'And who is the teacher here?' 'Mikkos, your friend and supporter.'

<sup>13</sup> ἔστιν δέ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὁ Λύσις νέος τις, ὡς ἔοικε· τεκμαίρομαι δέ, ὅτι ἀκούσας τοῦνομα οὐκ ἔγνω (204ε). I said: 'This Lysis is rather young, it seems. I say that because I do not know who it is, although you have told me his name.'

<sup>14</sup> For more information on Lysis and his family, see Nails 2002, 123, 195–197.

<sup>15</sup> ὧν δὴ καὶ ὁ Λύσις ἦν, καὶ εἰσῆλκει ἐν τοῖς παισὶ τε καὶ νεανίσκοις ἔστεφανωμένος καὶ τὴν ὄψιν διαφέρων (207α). And one of them was Lysis, standing among boys and young men, with a wreath on his head.

<sup>16</sup> There might be a very prosaic explanation for Socrates' choice of route. In the opening lines of *Phaedrus*, Socrates encounters Phaedrus outside the city walls. The young man explains that he chose that path because it is more pleasant than the streets. There is no reason to believe that Socrates did not have the same motive (Pl. *Phdr.* 227a).

believes are his plans just as well without mentioning εὐθύ.<sup>17</sup> Planeaux's interpretation of Socrates' lack of information about the new palaestra and Lysis is questionable as well. In reality, one might expect Socrates to be acquainted with the existence of the new palaestra or to know Lysis by name. However, we must not forget that we are discussing a literary work, not a chronicle of Socrates' everyday experiences. In a dialogue such as this one, the author must set the stage for the central matter, especially by introducing the audience to all aspects of the story. Without a doubt, the conversation in front of the palaestra serves that purpose. Hippothales and Ctesippus do not need to explain things to Socrates; they do that for the audience, which makes further speculations about Socrates' hidden intentions obsolete. More importantly, Planeaux is incorrect when stating that Socrates' identification of Lysis proves his hypothesis. As this work was written in the *ich* form, the narrator is the main character of the dialogue, and he is retelling the event post factum; it would be naive to presume that he would inform us of every interaction between him and other characters of this work. We can assume that somebody had pointed out Lysis after entering the palaestra, but such a detail has no significance to the story. In addition, it might seem excessive from a stylistic point of view.

Instead of *quickly* and *directly*,<sup>18</sup> we should understand εὐθύ as *straight towards, simply, or nowhere else*.<sup>19</sup> This meaning, however, does not allow for the interpretation found in Planeaux's article. Nevertheless, Socrates does not go as εὐθύ as he initially claims. As Hetherington indicates in his dissertation, this points to Socrates' unwavering desire for conversation (Hetherington 2009, 159). Hetherington also suggests that what Socrates initially planned to do could have been quite similar to what had actually taken place in the new palaestra. On such a festive day, the Lyceum would have been brimming with Athenians, ready to converse with Socrates (Hetherington 2009, 159).<sup>20</sup> In addition, we must argue that Socrates does not meet any conditions for being the unreliable narrator, seeing that he is not, in any way, deceitful. He is not lying about his intentions. He really is going from the Academy to the Lyceum; he is also not mistaken or deceived. It seems to us that there is no particular reason for his change of plans. He simply changes his plans when the opportunity for conversation arises. That should be interpreted as an in-

<sup>17</sup> Or even more successfully, one might argue.

<sup>18</sup> Going along the shortest route.

<sup>19</sup> This way, we should interpret Socrates' answer (203b) as something similar to 'I'm heading from the Academy to the Lyceum, nothing more.'

<sup>20</sup> For Hetherington's analysis of Planeaux's article, see Hetherington 2009, 151–168.



stance of consistency in creating Socrates' character as it seems to coincide with what can be said about Socrates from other testimonies.<sup>21</sup>

We might argue that this is where the cardinal feature of the comical subtext in *Lysis* lies. Upon hearing about the trials of Hippothales and the prospects of conversing with interesting boys and, above all, despite the apparent urgency he previously emphasised, Socrates abandons his original plans altogether. The comical value of inconsistency between Socrates' assertions from the first few lines and his decision to help Hippothales is twofold. First, the initial emphasis on εὐθύ prepares the background for Socrates' change of mind – after being assured that Socrates is on a serious quest, one he would not easily disregard, that is precisely what takes place (Pl. *Lys.* 206e). One might find a signal that Socrates' collocutors do not believe that his εὐθύ is something entirely serious, which indicates that the readers should not do so either. This signal is the reaction to Socrates' answer about going to the Lyceum.<sup>22</sup> Hippothales suggests that he should do something completely different from his proclaimed intents, echoing his words in a way that implies a joking attitude towards Socrates' haste. Furthermore, Hippothales proceeds to invite him to join the young men in the new palaestra. The powerful contrast between what is said and what is done constitutes the comical basis of this text. This incongruence is fundamental for the humorous features of *Lysis* because it indicates that the very first premise of the text is untrue. For this reason, we might argue that the foremost component of the comical basis in Plato's *Lysis* is the element of surprise and incongruence. Second, the reasons behind Socrates' change of heart are a good indicator of his character and interests. Modern readers might find his disregard for his original plans amusing as it shows that he cannot resist the temptation of conversing with bright young men. It might have been even more entertaining for the original audience of this work since it was much better acquainted with the real-life Socrates.

## 2. 2. Proposing the unlikely, the improbable, and the impossible

Socrates begins his talk on φιλία with the question of parental love, trying to ascertain whether Lysis' parents truly love their son. Expectedly, Lysis believes they do. When asked about his parents' sentiments, Lysis proclaims that his happiness is their greatest concern (207d). However, Socrates attempts to find out whether they truly prioritise Lysis' happiness or whether they love

<sup>21</sup> Rather than an example of character development or gradual change of the narrator's character during the narration.

<sup>22</sup> δεῦρο δή, ἢ δ' ὄς, εὐθὺ ἡμῶν. οὐ παραβάλλεις; ἄξιον μέντοι (203b). Come on then, straightaway with us. Do you not want to? It will be worth it.

him for for the benefits they might have from him, and proposes that one is happy when allowed to do as one pleases. Further on, Socrates tempts Lysis with several things he presumes a boy of Lysis' age might find alluring but which are hardly suitable for someone of his status (208a–209b), seeking to prove that Lysis' parents do not allow their son to do as he wants and that they, accordingly, do not love him the way he initially believed.<sup>23</sup>

Socrates' enquiry begins with a simple premise: if Lysis' parents love their son (as the boy believes they do), they want him to be as happy as possible. One cannot be happy when enslaved and not allowed to do as one pleases (as Lysis himself concludes). Hence, if Lysis' parents love their son and want him to be as happy as possible, they must allow him to do as he pleases. Suitably, Socrates' first question to Lysis is whether his parents permit him to do as he wants and whether they chastise him or hamper him in any way (207e). Astonished by such a proposal, Lysis rejects the very idea of being allowed to do anything he wants.<sup>24</sup> Feigning surprise at Lysis' response, Socrates goes on to ask him about his father's horses and whether the boy would be allowed to drive the chariot during a race if he wanted to. Once again, Lysis finds that inconceivable, pointing out that his father has a hired charioteer for the races. After making an observation that Lysis' father trusts a hired servant more than his own son (208α–208β), Socrates continues his questioning in a similar manner, asking if the boy would be allowed to lead a pair of mules or whip them if needed. Surprised, Lysis denies that he could be permitted to lead the mules and that his father has a slave muleteer.<sup>25</sup> Noting that a slave has more freedom than Lysis, Socrates asks if the boy is permitted at least to take care of himself (208d). Upon hearing that the boy is always under the supervision of his *paedagogos* or his schoolteacher, Socrates enquires about Lysis' mother and whether she allows him to play with her wool-spinning equipment. Ex-

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<sup>23</sup> The main discussion of Plato's *Lysis* centres on Socrates' conversation with children, namely, Lysis and Menexenus. Even though the boys prove to be very bright and good collocutors, we can still find several instances in which Socrates speaks to them in a different manner than he would with adults. It is obvious that he opens the discussion with a topic that must be relevant to Lysis, one he could easily comprehend. He continues the conversation mostly in a neutral tone, but we can observe a few amusing instances of variation from his usual approach. A very prominent example can be found in 211a–211d, when Socrates asks Lysis to help him talk to Menexenus since he is very fond of arguing.

<sup>24</sup> ναὶ μὰ Δία ἐμέ γε, ὦ Σώκράτης, καὶ μάλα γε πολλὰ κωλύουσιν (207e). By Zeus, Socrates! Of course, they hamper me, very much so!

<sup>25</sup> πόθεν, ἦ δ' ὅς, ἐφ' ἔν. 'How could they let me do that?' said he.

pectedly, Lysis denies it, claiming that he is strictly forbidden from doing so.<sup>26</sup> When asked what he had done to make his parents treat him so badly, the boy simply responds that he is forbidden from doing many things since he is not yet a grown-up.

This concludes the first of three sequences of Socrates' questioning about the relation between love and benefit. We may notice that this line of enquiry concerns one's most intimate relationships and everyday life. Besides, the pattern or rather the general design of Socrates' questioning is interesting or notable. Each time, the boy is asked a question unlikely to yield a positive answer. One does not expect a boy to be allowed to do whatever he likes or to drive his father's chariots and play with his mother's loom. Seemingly, the audience gets exactly what was expected as they should be almost sure of the response as soon as they read the question. There is obviously nothing humorous about that. However, the source of comedy in this part of the questioning is within the enquirer himself, his reactions, and the manner of conducting the enquiry. Socrates asks each question as if anticipating a positive answer and receives each negative response with a great deal of surprise.<sup>27</sup> The comic effect is brought about by the disparity between the readers' expectations, congruent to their reality, and Socrates' purported astonishment at Lysis' reasonable answers.

The following part of the enquiry (209a–209d) on love and benefit concentrates more closely on relations between people and those they find useful or knowledgeable. Socrates continues by noticing that Lysis' parents allow him to do some of the things he likes, as in the case of writing or playing the lyre. Lysis explains that his proficiency in those matters makes his father entrust him with the letters and the chords. Therefore, Socrates supposes that Lysis' father will task him with managing the household and all of their family's affairs when Lysis becomes skilful and knowledgeable enough for such a duty. The boy agrees with him, and Socrates goes a step further. He asks Lysis whether his neighbour would entrust him with his own property, seeing that he is very good at taking care of his parents' estate. Furthermore, Socrates suggests that every Athenian would gladly entrust Lysis with managing their

<sup>26</sup> καὶ ὅς γε λάσας, μὰ Δία, ἔφη, ᾧ (208e) Σώκρατες, οὐ μόνον γε διακωλύει, ἀλλὰ καὶ τυπτοίμην ἂν εἰ ἀπτοίμην. He laughed and responded: 'By Zeus, Socrates! Not only she forbids me from doing that, [but] she would also beat me if I touched them.'

<sup>27</sup> πῶς λέγεις; ἦν δ' ἐγώ. βουλόμενοί σε μακάριον εἶναι διακωλύουσι τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὃ ἂν βούλη; (208a). What are you saying? They prevent you from doing as you please even though they want you to be happy? In a similar manner: ἦ δεινόν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἐλεύθερον ὄντα ὑπὸ δούλου ἄρχεσθαι (208c). Unbelievable! Even though you are a free man, a slave is in charge of you.

estates if they deemed him a shrewd and skilful man. Lysis agrees with Socrates' suggestions, sincerely believing that the proposed scenarios are possible.

This concludes the second sequence of questioning, and one may take note of a change in Socrates' strategy: he begins with a suggestion one might find unremarkable<sup>28</sup> and gradually shifts towards more disputable examples. Although it might be expected for a father to leave the estate in the hands of his son, it is hardly probable that a neighbour would entrust his estate to the same boy, still less that all of the Athenians would follow his lead. However, the boy does not seem to notice anything improbable about Socrates' examples, while the audience must see the real issue with these suggestions. This time, the source of comedy stays the same, but it shifts towards the disparity between the readers' expectations and Lysis' answers rather than the enquirer's reactions.

The third section (209d–210b) of the enquiry on love and benefit must be considered the climax of Socrates' questioning on this part of the general subject and the climax of the comic effect in this part of the dialogue. After suggesting Lysis to go beyond the walls of his own home and examine the behaviour of his neighbours and all the Athenians, Socrates takes the boy even further, to the realm of Persia. The initial assumption is very simple: if the Athenians wanted to leave their affairs in the hands of a man more capable and skilful than they are, the Persian emperor would do the same, believing that that would be in his best interest.

Socrates begins with an amusing question. If the Persian emperor wanted to have lunch, would he allow his son to season it as he pleases, or would he task Socrates and Lysis with that, trusting their cooking expertise? The boy responds that the emperor would surely task them instead of his son. Socrates then asks if the emperor would still allow them, rather than his son, to season his food, even if they decided to add fistfuls of salt. The boy agrees once more. This question is peculiar because it does not entirely cohere with the previous one. In the first example, the emperor believes that Lysis and Socrates can cook better than his son after they prove it,<sup>29</sup> while in the second one, they make

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<sup>28</sup> ἢ ἂν ἡμέρα ἡγήσῃται σε βέλτιον αὐτοῦ φρονεῖν, ταύτη ἐπιτρέψει σοι καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ (209c). On the day he starts believing you are more knowledgeable than him, he will entrust you with himself and his affairs.

<sup>29</sup> εἰ ἀφικόμενοι παρ' ἐκεῖνον ἐνδειξάμεθα αὐτῷ ὅτι ἡμεῖς κάλλιον φρονοῦμεν ἢ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ περὶ ὄψου σκευασίας (209ε). If we go to him and prove to him that we know more about preparing food than his son.

the food inedible by adding too much salt,<sup>30</sup> which indicates that they do not know how to cook or that they do not want to do it properly. Our question must be whether Socrates is speaking about true or perceived competence. Would the emperor allow them to ruin food since they are competent cooks (although, this time, they made a mistake) or because he believes them to be competent cooks (although they are not)? Furthermore, Socrates asks another pair of interesting questions which might shed light on our dilemma: (a) if the emperor's son had eye issues, would he, not being a doctor, be allowed to treat them; and (b) if the emperor considered us (sc. Socrates and Lysis) doctors,<sup>31</sup> would he allow us to treat his son's eyes by pouring ashes into them if we wanted to? Lysis responds that the emperor would surely prefer them over his son for such a task since that is in his best interest. Once again, we must raise the question of perceived and true knowledge. Would the emperor allow them to treat his son, believing them to be doctors, even though their treatment is inadequate or harmful, or would he allow them to treat his son, believing they were doctors and because their treatment is appropriate? Are the ashes proof of their true medical expertise, being an example of a common treatment? Are they rather proof of their incompetence, being an example of a terrible idea? To a modern reader, ashes as an eye remedy must sound horrifying, but that should not impact our judgement.

One way to determine whether it sounded just as awful to Socrates' audience as it does to us is to look into recipes for eye treatments in antiquity. In his *Assembly Women* and *Plutus*, Aristophanes gives several recipes for eye ointments, containing garlic, verjuice, mastic, and vinegar (Ar. *Eccl.* 400–407; *Plut.* 716–722). Aristophanes' recipes might be jocular, but even as such, they prove that ingredients similar to these were used in preparing remedies for eyesight.<sup>32</sup> Compared to these ingredients, ashes do not seem so drastic and improbable. Furthermore, Hippocratic *Epidemics* mention both Aristophanes' garlic and Socrates' ashes as part of an eye remedy.<sup>33</sup> This might be evidence that Socrates' recipe is an example of a usual treatment and that the emperor would trust them with his son's eyesight since they truly know what to do. On the other hand, there is still the question of the fistfuls of salt, which must be an obvious example of a wrong practice. One would expect the following

<sup>30</sup> ἡμᾶς δέ, κἂν εἰ βουλοίμεθα δραξάμενοι τῶν ἀλῶν, ἐφή ἂν ἐμβάλειν (209e). Even if we wanted to clutch handfuls of salt, he would still let us throw it in.

<sup>31</sup> ἡγούμενος ὀρθῶς φρονεῖν (210a). Believing we are proficient at that.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Aristophanes' medical recipes, see Totelin 2008, 295–304.

<sup>33</sup> Ὀφθαλμῶν, σποδίου δωδέκατον, κρόκου πέμπτον, πυρῆνος ἕν, ψιμυθίου ἕν, σμύρνης ἕν τὸ ὕδωρ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ψυχρὸν καταχεῖν, καὶ διδόναι σκόροδα σὺν μάτζη (Hip. *Epid.* 2. 5. 22).

example to be consistent with the previous one, which would mean that both of them point out to perceived (not true) knowledge. Despite the recipe from the *Epidemics*, we ought to presume that Plato chose two corresponding examples as they match each other both in wording and in position.<sup>34</sup> Socrates and Lysis seem to agree that they would be permitted to do as they please as long as they are perceived to be knowledgeable.

Lastly, Socrates goes a step further and asks Lysis if the emperor would entrust them with all of his affairs in which he would deem them more capable than himself. Once more, the boy agrees, and the two proceed to the conclusion of this part of the argumentation: a wise man is well liked because he is useful and good.<sup>35</sup>

Having reached the end of the discussion on love and benefit, we ought to make note of the sources of comedy in the third section of Socrates' enquiry. All the examples which include the Persian emperor (cooking for the Persian emperor, using too much salt, treating his son's eyes with ashes, managing imperial affairs) should be appreciated for their jocular character, seeing that they deftly balance on the edge of absurdity. However, another detail greatly amplifies their comedic value: the boy's willingness to agree with all of them, strictly following Socrates' course of enquiry, and complete disregard for his sense of reality. If we compare the three examined sets of questions, we will notice an interlacing contrast of Lysis' reactions and the *gradatio* of Socrates' examples. At first, the boy firmly rejects the idea that he could be permitted to do whatever he pleased, including tempting things such as driving his father's chariot or using his mother's loom. On the other hand, he is ready to accept the improbable scenarios concerning the Athenians and the Persian emperor. In addition, Socrates' examples become evidently more extravagant, beginning with childish mischief and ending with taking care of the Persian emperor and his affairs. That is the culmination of both Socrates' enquiry and the *gradatio* of his examples. Simultaneously, it is the climax of the comic effect in this part of the dialogue. The incongruence of Lysis' answers with the readers' experience highlights Socrates' memorable examples and brings them to their captivating peak.

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<sup>34</sup> They both come as a second question in a pair after Lysis agrees to the first proposition.

<sup>35</sup> ἔάν μὲν ἄρα σοφὸς γένη, ὦ παῖ, πάντες σοι φίλοι καὶ πάντες σοι οἰκεῖοι ἔσονται — χρήσιμος γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθὸς ἔσῃ—εἰ δὲ μή, σοὶ οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς οὔτε ὁ πατὴρ φίλος ἔσται οὔτε ἡ μήτηρ οὔτε οἱ οἰκεῖοι (210d). If you become wise, my boy, everyone will become your friends and intimates because you will be useful and good. And if not, nobody will be your friend – not even your father, mother, or kinsmen.

We have shown that parts of Plato's *Lysis* can be seen as analogous to motives or scenes from comic drama. One reason for that must be the form of this work, which must envelop a certain degree of dramatisation. On the other hand, these similarities are conditioned by the cheerful nature of the plot. After examining the most prominent comical features of this work, we can conclude that the fundamental sources of comedy in Plato's *Lysis* can be understood from the standpoint of the incongruity theory of humour. In the beginning of the dialogue, we see the example of εὐθύ, which largely determines the tone and character of the entire work because of its position and importance for further story development. Which way we decide to interpret εὐθύ is immaterial as we can always notice that it is the first instance of incongruence-based humour in this text. The εὐθύ issue includes a certain discrepancy between declared and realised intentions, and it evolves as we read the first part of the dialogue. Moreover, if we interpret εὐθύ as *straight towards* or *nowhere else*, we most definitely see an inconsistency between Socrates' words and actions. The comical effect of discrepancy in this situation is augmented by the context as it fits the representation of Socrates and his character that readers often have in mind – a man who enjoys conversing with clever men more than anything else and who cannot resist such a temptation.

The first part of Socrates' conversation with Lysis – divisible, as we have seen, into three stages – provides us with different angles of a single model of incongruity. First, enquiring about what Lysis is and is not allowed to do at home, Socrates violates the readers' mental patterns, asking questions that would not need to be asked since they would, according to propriety, surely yield a negative answer. Moreover, he asks those questions while seemingly expecting a positive answer, but the boy stays true to what is traditionally expected. The following two stages of the conversation bring about a kind of twist. Lysis begins to agree with Socrates' questions and suggestions, although they become more and more detached from reality. Seeing the direction of the discussion, the readers must begin to realise what the following answers could be, which eliminates the element of surprise from Socrates' enquiry. However, since Socrates suggests and the boy agrees on things that would be, according to long-established experiences, considered very unlikely or absurd, we can consider this an instance of humour derived from incongruity.

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## ЗАШТО ЈЕ ПЛАТОНОВ *ЛИСИД* ТАКО СМЕШАН?

*Анстракт:* Овим радом настојимо да пронађемо изворе комедије у Платоновом дијалогу *Лисид*. Размотрићемо елементе овог дијалога, упоредиве са мотивима комедија. Затим ћемо делове *Лисида* сагледати са становишта теорије инконгруенције. У средишту дијалога је Сократов покушај да подучи свог пријатеља Ктесипа вештом разговору са миљеницима. Стога са Лисидом почиње дијалог о љубави и пријатељству, док Ктесип потајно посматра. Више елемената *Лисида* се издваја својом сличношћу са мотивима комедије. То су опис Ктесипових осећања и заљубљеног понашања, његово скривање узбуђено реаговање током разговора са Лисидом. Овде спада и сцена са пијаним робовима, са краја дијалога. Ове сцене се могу упоредити са мотивима Менандрових дела *Намћор* и *Девојка са подрезаном косом*, Аристофанових *Витезова* и Шекспировог дела *Много вике ни око чега*. Хумор потекао из инконгруенције се види током расправе о љубави и користи, када Сократ питањима, а Лисид одговорима указују на остваривост неприкладних или немогућих догађаја.

*Кључне речи:* инконгруенција, хумор, градација, непоуздани приповедач, комедија