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Socrates an Unreliable Narrator? The Dramatic Setting of the *Lysis*

The present study reconstructs as completely as possible the physical setting of Plato's dialogue *Lysis*, emphasizing the route Socrates traveled from the Academy to the Lyceum. Plato has Socrates outline a precise path, but a contradiction is present. Part I studies Socrates' description "straight to the Lyceum from the Academy by way of the road just outside the wall and under it." Surveying the topography shows this description to be at odds with the stated intent. "Straight" to the Lyceum from the Academy would have been through the *asty*, past the agora, and through the Diochares Gates. Socrates instead walked wide of Athens-proper, around the *polis* by way of the outer wall, and approached the Lyceum from the north. The initial discontinuity is jarring and heightens the reader's awareness. One should thus be skeptical of Socrates' other statements. Part II concentrates on those other statements and uncovers that the opening is but one in a series of anomalies presented by the philosopher: **i)** Socrates professes ignorance about the construction of a new *palaistra* located near the Lyceum, even though **a)** the latter locale was a frequented haunt of Socrates and **b)** the former locale was a haunt of his close friend and eulogist, the sophist Miccus; and **ii)** Socrates professes ignorance of the young Lysis, even though Socrates knew both **a)** Lysis' family and **b)** Lysis' most ardent pursuer Hippothales. Socrates even notes that he "chanced-by" the new *palaistra* during a *Hermaea*, a ritual within the *Anthesteria* — one of the few days out of the Attic year when men could mingle unmolested about wrestling-schools among unescorted boys and youths. But Socrates exposes his deceptions: first, through his blatantly contradictory opening but also when he openly identifies the "unknown" Lysis across the courtyard of a crowded wrestling-school. Part III stresses a recognizable pattern in Socrates' deceptions: he stresses above all else the *accidental* nature of his encounter at the Fountain of Penops, and, consequently, a careful audience must call the accidental nature itself into question. The paper concludes that the encounter was not accidental but that Socrates in all likelihood contrived the whole episode, purposely taking an indirect route to the Lyceum, so that he would pass by the new *palaistra* on the very day he knew he would be free to enter and converse with Hippothales and Lysis. Thus, the *Lysis*' setting is staged and unstable -- suggesting the dialogue is more complex than has been traditionally entertained.