

While some recent approaches to Plato's literary craft have seen direct cues for the reader's response to the dialogues in the internal audiences they frequently represent, Plato's delicately layered irony often confounds any straightforward identification of internal and external audiences.

Plato's complex staging of a multi-tiered audience in the *Lysis* provides a particularly rich opportunity to consider this more fraught connection between internal and external audiences. The *Lysis* is, furthermore, particularly well suited to exploring the relationship between text and reader because it is narrated in the first person by Socrates, who speaks directly to the reader as if to an interlocutor.

Socrates introduces the problem of audience by offering Lysis' lovelorn admirer, Hippothales, a demonstration (*epideixis*) of what a lover should say to his favorite in order to win him over (206c). The central conversations of the dialogue are thus characterized as a performance for the benefit of the audience comprised of Hippothales and his friends. A second tier is formed by a group of boys gathered around a game of knucklebones, who soon leave their gaming to become the audience for the unfolding dialectic spectacle at the heart of the dialogue (207b). Hippothales, wishing to observe Socrates' demonstration without being seen by Lysis, leaves his friends to form a third audience, hiding behind the crowd (*epêlugisamenos*). This staging suggests the reader's relationship to the internal audience of the dialogue, since the reader, like Hippothales, observes both the conversation and its listeners from behind, as it were, observing without being observed and intended, perhaps, to receive the same lesson in dialectic and the philosophical approach to beautiful boys.

But when Socrates draws our attention to Hippothales at the end of the initial conversation with Lysis, the possibility of identification is substantially undermined. Hippothales' emotional agitation is described in language appropriate to the disturbance of a crowd of spectators in a courtroom or the assembly (*tethorubêmenon*) and, later, in terms of the pleasure (*hêdonê*) he takes in listening to Socrates' conversation. This reaction recalls the initial ironization of Hippothales at the opening of the dialogue, where he blushes in embarrassment and easily falls to a brief *elenchus*. We are then invited to join in Socrates' direct criticism of Hippothales' incompetence: 'That, Hippothales, is how you must talk with your favorite, humbling him and taking the wind out of his sails, not puffing him up and spoiling him like you' (210e). Hence we may imagine ourselves at a further remove, looking at (even down on) Hippothales from a perspective we share with the dialogue's ironic narrator and, ultimately, its author.

However, as Alexander Nehamas has argued, Plato's readers must guard against the easy satisfaction of this ironic position and ask to what degree the *Lysis* ultimately renders us uncomfortably like the buffoonish Hippothales through the pleasure afforded by Plato's prose, the charm of Socrates' flirtatious interaction with Lysis, and the playful staging that makes his boyish conversation parallel to a game of knucklebones.