Noting similarities between patriotic erōs in the Periclean Funeral Oration (Th. 2.43.1) and erotically inflected captatio benevolentiae in Knights (“O Demos, I am your erastēs,” Ar. Eq. 1340–2; cf. 732–5), several scholars detect in the latter a snapshot of late fifth-century rhetorical practice—“flowers culled from the oratory of Cleon,” as some have put it (Connor New Politicians quoting Rogers). There is, however, reason for doubt. In the surviving corpus of Attic oratory and related evidence, we find but a single, rather unusual instance (Pl. Ap. 29d) of an emotional effusion at all like what Knights exemplifies—that is, one where a speaker professes a heartfelt attachment or partiality to his audience (“you”), or to the collectivity (polis, dēmos) to which that audience belongs. It is, then, a curious fact that speakers, though reluctant to employ such love talk in their own behalf, readily impute such love talk to others. But it would seem we are dealing with a red herring of sorts if matching instances of speakers actually saying such things in so many words fail to materialize in the expected contexts. I therefore posit an element of exaggeration, even distortion, for what I call the “demophilia topos” (“So-and-so claims to love you / the dēmos / the polis, but in fact does not”; cf., e.g., D. Prooem. 53.3). Key to its impact is the power of affective vocabulary to magnify and problematize an opponent’s professions of civic eunoia and the like (cf. Arist. EN 1166b30–4 on eunoia versus philia; D.H. Th. 45 and Plut. Moralia 540c–d on Pericles’ avowal of polis-love in Th. 2.60.5). But the problem was not dēmos-oriented philia as such, but the notional performance and betrayal of a love-bond between opponent and audience (“I love you” as Austinian speech-act). By “performing” philia, albeit at a mimetic remove, the topos would have excited a listener’s thumos, the psyche’s “spirited” dimension; the sense of philia betrayed would have then incited the thumos to anger (cf. Ar. Pol. 1327b40–1328a15).

Thus we can view the “demophilic” politician as a rhetorical construct—a scare-figure playing on fears lest persuasive logos, though the very foundation of Athenian democracy, prove its undoing.