**Cleon’s Pederasty of the *Demos*? The Case of Aristophanes’ *Knights***

Aristophanes, at *Knights* 732, has Paphlagon, a thin gloss of the demagogue Cleon, announce to the personified Demos, ἐραστής τ’ εἰμὶ σός (**“I am your lover,”** 732), which the Sausage-Seller later claims is the sort of language that speakers used in the Athenian assembly (1340-44). A range of scholars has accepted that such expressions of fondness for the *demos* could easily have been **“flowers from Cleon’s rhetorical garden” (Rogers 1910; cf.** Wohl 2002, Monoson 2000**, Crane 1998, Hornblower 1991, Sommerstein 1981,** Connor 1971), consistent with other examples in classical Athens of pederastic desire being associated with politics (see below). Yet *Knights* offers a more complex case than the others, in that Aristophanes, unlike other authors, very carefully has Paphlagon use the language of *philia* where that of pederasty would have been expected. Parody requires not just hyperbole, but also that the object of ridicule be recognizable (Phiddian 1995). The pervasive language of *philia*, instead of *eros*, suggests Aristophanes’ awareness that Athenians perceived Cleon as presenting himself as a *philos* to the *demos*. This reading underscores a suggestion about Cleon’s political approach that Connor (1971) made cautiously forty years ago, and to which few scholars (e.g., Scholtz 2004) have offered revisions in the meantime.

Where other portrayals of pederastic imagery in politics differ from *Knights* is in their use of the language of *eros* beyond the identification of a suitor as an *erastes*. Pericles asks Athenians to gaze upon (θεωμένους) the power of the city, as a lover does (Thuc. 2.43.1). The pro-Athenian Sitalces writes Ἀθηναῖοι καλοί (“Athenians are beautiful”) on walls (Ar. *Ach*. 144). The new residents of Cloudcuckooland feel passion (ἔρωτες) for it (Ar. *Av*. 1316). And Polynices says that all men must passionately love (ἐρᾶν) their fatherland (Eur. *Phoen*. 359). Yet Paphlagon is strangely short on passion. He expresses fondness for Demos, but it is always in terms of *phileo* (732, 773, 791, 821, 1341); there are no uses of *erao*, *epithumeo*, their derivatives, or other terms that communicate desire (Halperin 1986; Dover 1978). While *phileo* can express part of the feelings of *erastai*, the more sexualized terms are far more common during courtship (Davidson 2007).

This noteworthy use of the language of friendship where erotic terminology would have been more suitable underscores other indications that a large part of Cleon’s appeal was his presentation of himself as a *philos* to the *demos* and its members. His public associations with common people, treated in Aristophanes as insincere flattery on both sides (*Eq*. 852-57; *Vesp.* 1033-34=*Pax* 756-57), more than likely struck the individuals whom Cleon allowed in his midst as friendly interactions (Smith and Zipp 1983**)**. Furthermore, while Aristophanes satirizes Cleon’s political actions that benefited the *demos* as gifts to an *eromenos* (*Eq*. **773-76,** 797-800, **923-26**), the people would obviously not have seen them as such without being offended (Konstan 1993).

Connor (1971) thought of the pederasty in *Knights* as **“the most intense *philia*”; though this mischaracterizes the connection between two distinct relationship types, it is the juxtaposition of pederasty and *philia* in this play that reinforces Connor’s thesis that Cleon and other demagogues were transferring their *philia* ties from personal *philoi* to the *demos* as a whole. If Cleon had genuinely presented himself as a figurative *erastes* to the *demos* in his political life, Aristophanes could simply have fully literalized that image in the play. The fact that he stopped short of a full pederastic portrayal of Paphlagon suggests an intention to mock Cleon’s expressed personal fondness for his main constituency by distorting Cleon’s method of outreach, but not so much as completely to obscure it.**

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