

The Metonymic Voting Life

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Maybe you're like me and are just getting around to voting. The official day is Tuesday, November 6, but I always get an absentee ballot so that I have lots of time to ponder the unchecked boxes while I'm throwing away the extra-large, humongous, super-size-me postcards with a picture of the smiling candidate standing in front of -- take your pick -- lush green fields, the Carquinez Strait, a dried-out patch of scrub, smiling police, Benicia Main Street, a big-box threat, smiling firefighters, but never, as far as I can remember, a gaggle of happy teachers who also save lives, one little mind at a time. But then, I might not have been paying attention to everything that came my way this election season.

Well, you get these postcards, too. You know what I'm talking about. We're supposed to associate the smiling face with the picture and maybe read the text, but probably not since words usually read flat on saturated vistas.

Then I got this smaller card with a vicious looking bald eagle, its curved yellow beak like a sharp knife suspended between its eyes, one of which was giving me the kind of look you don't want to get when you're standing all alone out front of your house innocently picking mail from your box, which was exactly what I was doing when I became alarmed.

But I'm a stalwart kind of guy who can handle most scary situations, even the occasional bump in the night or the "gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door," whether I'm napping or not. So I took the card back inside and set it down safely at a distance on the kitchen counter, waiting for a few brief moments, covering my eyes to shield them from the predator's terrifying stare, to see if the bald eagle would leap from the card and attack.



But nothing happened.

Which got me to thinking that the card might not be a terrorist attack at all. These days you can never be too careful what with evil doers lurking everywhere, even in out-of-the-way places where you'd only expect to find loose change, prehistoric dust balls, and an occasional lost sock. I was right, I'm sure you'll agree, to be concerned.

But I'm no dummy. My fear began to subside when no attack seemed imminent, and I remembered that the eagle is, after all, a symbol of the United States of America. Maybe, I reasoned, it was an invitation to an IRS get-to-know-your-neighbor cookie fest or a Post Office pot luck award ceremony. I thought for a few fleeting, foolish seconds that it might also be a coupon for a tax-discount or for 10% off my next purchase of Forever Stamps, regardless the valuation.

Or maybe, and this was what really got my mind working, it was a coupon from an extermination company that used predators -- lions, tigers and bald eagles -- to rid one's residence of rats. You see I'm having this problem again that I seem to have ever few years with rats in my attic. Maybe -- and now my enthusiasm for a rat-free home was driving me to the card -- someone was promising to rid me of rodents for a reasonable price.

You can imagine how shocked I was -- if you got this card, I bet you were too -- when I turned the vicious eagle on its face and discovered not a way to save money, but a list of three candidates for public office: Elizabeth Patterson, who's running for Mayor, and Mike Ioakimedes and Scott W. Strawbridge, who are running for City Council.

This is the problem with the metonymic voting life: when you think you're getting one thing, you're getting something else entirely.

To remind you just in case it has been a while since you've fried

metonymy in butter with a little salt and pepper, you use metonymy when you replace one thing with another that's closely related to it: the Stars and Stripes for the U.S.; bucolic fields for one who cherishes the environment; George Bush for the Iraq War; Monica Lewinsky for Bill Clinton; and Al Gore for global warming. (By the way, wouldn't it be grand to have a Monica Lewinsky scandal in the news each night rather than the death and destruction of the War in Iraq?)

Of course I'm going to vote for Elizabeth Patterson for Mayor. She's exactly the kind of person who will never build a defensive wall around the dais, who will never keep citizens away with a 10-foot personality pole, who will be well-informed and will always keep the environment, the community and her neighbors' best interests central in her understanding and deliberations. Elizabeth Patterson is great.

Why Elizabeth was on the list, however, I find perplexing.

So I recycled the card, feeling sad that I hadn't got a discount for anything, and went back to thinking about how I might rid my attic of rats. I'm thinking I could gas the house. Or if I go online, maybe I could buy some radioactive waste that I could imbed in the insulation. Would that lead to dead or mutated rats?

This could get ugly.

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