

THE METAPHOR CLUB

My friend Nick, an artist, a philosopher and a wage-slave, wrote me with a dazzling insight into metaphor. I'd garble it, if I try to summarize it, but take my word for it: it's good. So I wrote him back with an invitation to join an exclusive club. Here is our exchange:

Dear Nick,

You shared with me a powerful insight into metaphor. In return I invite you to join a club whose membership spans the centuries and the continents. We disagree and argue a lot, but we all think (and so live) through metaphor. True, we are a scruffy bunch, but we have a lot of fun. We would love to have you as a member.

Club rules, however, require full disclosure. You should not accept our invitation (or "vocation," as we call it) until you have thought about three possible downsides. (Our club motto is *Caveat emptor*.)

First, if you go this route, you will have to live with Paradox. I don't mean a one night stand or summer romance. We are talking about a long lasting relationship and a powerful one, too. That is because Paradox is able

to take ordinary things and make them seem extraordinary. Most important: Paradox knows how to make tangible things talk about the intangible. This is seductive. *Beware.*

Second, metaphor, unlike its pals, simile, alliteration and others, travels in unmarked cars. You can spot these other “figures of speech,” as they call themselves, way off in the distance. But, you can be cruising along at an exhilarating but perfectly safe speed, when the blue lights of metaphor appear in your rear view mirror. The fact that metaphor is unmarked makes it hard to detect, and can get you into big trouble. So, again, *Beware.*

Third, metaphor puts you on a slippery slope, like the free style ski events in the Olympics. You start off with a rush of enthusiasm for metaphor and the next thing you know you are racing through symbolic territory. Then you find yourself soaring through the air and landing in the race to the finish on the sacramental slope. Yes, sacraments are the extreme form of metaphor. They take tactile things, water or bread or wine, for example, and turn them into life-changers. That’s a long-range danger, but once you start down the slippery slope of metaphor, you may not be able to stop. You never know. So, again, *Beware.*

Let me know if you are really interested in this “vocation.” We’d like to have you as a club member, but only if you are willing to take the risks.

Bob

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Nick replied:

I humbly accept (and suspect that I've been an unwitting member for quite a while). Paradox and I go way back, and she often invites her friend, Absurdity, on our escapades.

What's next? Is this the sort of club that has hooded cloaks and insignia rings?

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Bob:

YES! and secret passwords, a spooky handshake, and a sado-masochistic initiation ritual. Can you stand it?

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Nick:

I can think of few things for which I'd rather risk my life. Imagine if the rest of the world valued simple happiness so highly - if being the cause of another person's smile were more important than ideology or tribe!

It's Paradox's best jokes that we're here (ostensibly, at least) to find happiness, yet we think we can get there by way of dogma and creed; by finding a community equally dedicated to our beliefs at the exclusion of others. Those of us who 'get' her jokes can't help but smile.

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