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Abstract

An election campaign serves ritual functions for the American political system, beyond its manifest functions of determining which persons and interests will govern the country. The campaign ritual is analyzed in terms of Durkheim's concept of the totem, including its regeneration and sacrifice. The dirty campaign is a sacrificial feast that establishes conditions for a proper mating between the candidate and the electorate. Voters declare their fidelity to the totem victor and receive a sacrificial promise in return.

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An election campaign serves ritual functions for the American political system, beyond its manifest functions of determining which persons and interests will govern the country. The campaign ritual is analyzed in terms of Durkheim's concept of the totem, including its regeneration and sacrifice. The dirty campaign is a sacrificial feast that establishes conditions for a proper mating between the candidate and the electorate. Voters declare their fidelity to the totem victor and receive a sacrificial promise in return.

When I asked the [savage] visitor what advantage he gained by his superior position among his own people – for he was a captain and our sailors called him the king – he said, the privilege of marching first into battle.

-Montaigne, "On Cannibals"

Some years ago Miner (1956) wrote a classic essay on the rituals of the Nacirema. The joke was that the Nacirema were no primitive tribe, but American, spelled backward. The joke signaled how reluctant Americans are to see themselves as a tribe, primitive or otherwise. Miner chronicled the private bathroom and toothbrushing ceremonies of the Nacirema. A more serious account might have been directed to some of the tribe's spectacular communal rituals. A presidential election, for example, is a likely place to focus on American ritual behavior. Because ritual is a communicative form, communication scholars have been among the more devoted observers of presidential election rites (e.g., Bennett, 1980, 1983; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Herzog, 1987; see Gronbeck, 1990, for a review). Perhaps because of the resistance Miner satirized, the scope of the ritual accounts they have developed is surprisingly narrow.

Some analyses take for granted the notion of election as ritual, using it as a descriptive term for aspects of election activity that display attributes such as formality, repetition, and appeal to tradition. Others, including this one, add functional markers, identifying election rituals by their purposes, which are said to include creating socialized sentiment, transforming statuses, incorporating agonistic groups, legitimizing authority, and mobilizing the populace. Unless we explain how and why election ritual does these things, whether it does them remains open to question. A third model in the communication literature conceives of election ritual as a technique used by elites to dominate nonelites (Edelman, 1985, 1988). This model proposes that election rituals are a mystification produced by dominant groups to achieve specific outcomes that should be the real focus of investigation. This is perhaps not a genuine ritual model, because the ritual process is depicted as having no intrinsic importance. Which candidate is elected, or what issues are salient, are not what is most important about election ritual as I intend to discuss it. What is important is that re-creating a leader should transpire properly to reconstitute the group. Successful election rituals make creative use of particular issues and candidates, but these are incidental to the ritual structure of the election.

Rappaport (1979) calls ritual the basic act that re-creates the social. Most anthropological definitions resemble this one, but there is disagreement about how well traditional ritual analysis can be applied to societies such as our own (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). With perhaps too little heed for these risks, I propose such an analysis for the 1992 American presidential election.² I assume that group-renewing rituals are a feature of all enduring groups, although the mechanics of these rituals vary

enormously. I also assume that particular ritual performances vary in effectiveness, and some fail altogether. The issue of effectiveness cannot be framed, however, without identifying significant elements of ritual structure.

Classic analyses (Durkheim, 1912/1965; Girard, 1977; Robertson-Smith, 1889) identify sacrifice as the principal regenerative ritual of enduring groups. It often takes the form of a communal meal that originally consisted of killing and eating the totem of the clan. By feasting on the sacrifice, the community is nourished and reconstituted. I argue that similar themes of sacrifice and regeneration surface in presidential elections, and for the same purpose.

I will show that the application of a ritual model provides a framework for connecting apparently unrelated election events. In a departure from some outcome-oriented analyses (i.e., studies that ask why one candidate won instead of another; see Nimmo & Swanson, 1990), I seek to analyze features of the election as it presents itself, rather than as we might like it to be. I argue that some events that have been considered problems in need of correction may be enduring features of election ritual, elements of a symbolic structure that re-creates group solidarity through a contrived crisis of leadership. For example, the "dirty" campaign can be conceptualized not as evidence of social pathology, but as a constitutive feature of American civic ritual. In the same way, talk about the election that appears metaphorical and frivolous, talk that is often the despair of analysts because it does not address the issues, may also have a constitutive function.

To construct such an account I adopt Durkheim's notion of the totem as the manifestation of fundamental social authority. The totem is symbolic shorthand for the elemental agreement that the group shall exist. Totemic observances are manifest in a variety of ceremonies and arrangements, including a taboo leader who embodies totem authority and force. In the American case, this is the president. I take seriously the Durkheimian claim that totem rites are religious.

By extension, popular elections are a significant ritual within a civil religion of nationalism, in which sacrifice of life for country is the supreme creative act and the supreme act of national renewal. If war is a contingent creation-sacrifice (the term is from Eliade, 1959), election is a contrived one. As ritual leader, the president has important sacrificial functions. (He obviously has other roles, but they will not concern us.) The president oversees the ritual of war sacrifice. At such times, he is chief sacrificer on behalf of the group. If he is the victim of an assassination or dies in office, these events must be absorbed into a ritual narrative of his sacrificial function. Although death is the most dramatic form the sacrifice of a president takes, presidential sacrifice may also take the form of a loss of governing or political authority through scapegoating.

The embodied totem's sacrificial responsibilities are unceasing and must be discharged periodically in ritual. A key ceremonial event in this sequence is the presidential election, a seasonal group rite to regenerate the totem for future sacrifice. As its religious origins suggest, the end of election is raising up a chosen one, a sacrificial hero to do symbolic battle on behalf of the people. I shall explore the ritual themes at work in the 1992 election in the language of sacrifice and regeneration used on network television and in the New York Times.

Election ritual is composed of three separate rites: candidate selection, voting, and inauguration. These are the ritual themes they manifest.

Before the nominations and during the campaign, metaphors of eating and group feasting suggest that candidates nourish the community, which consumes those who offer themselves to it. Pledging to give the people what they want, candidates feed and renew the body of society. It is standard to cast down and humiliate a victim before making a group feast of him (Turner, 1969, pp. 166-172). Candidates are symbolically tortured and brutalized during the campaign to be served up to a rapacious and devouring electorate. The sacrificial carnival creates the conditions for regenerating a totem leader.

The two major candidates constitute a fertile pair in a two-party system of exogamy, an anthropological term that describes group rules about who may mate with whom to regenerate the group. A fertile pair consists of two partners whose purposive association produces a desired outcome for the group. Fertile pairs are everywhere in a presidential election. In addition to the competing candidates, the most important fertile pair is the electorate and the victorious candidate. Although their importance will vary from election to election, other pairs include the candidate and his or her running mate, the candidate and spouse, the candidate and some important confidant or adviser, and the victor and the departing incumbent.

Exogamy requires that suitable mating pairs be generated from nonkin groups. Members of one clan must marry members of another clan. In the American version, two candidates from the same party may not be formally presented to the electorate as competing candidates, that is, as a mating pair. Not only candidates but voters must mate outside their own clan. That is, some voters from one party must unite with the other party's candidate to produce a victor. There are exceptions, as when only one party fields a candidate for elective office. But well-conducted rituals require two. The more significant the office, the stricter the rule. A presidential election with a single candidate would be considered highly improper by the entire group. The two-party system guarantees that combination for totem renewal takes place among suitable partners.

During the primaries and nominating conventions, metaphors of wedding mating, and courting express the regenerative goal of the elections; selection procedures enact it. Candidates are said to "flirt" with political allies, particularly those trying to become running "mates." By mating with willing supporters in each primary contest, the reinvigorated winners, or suitor-candidates, are paired with surviving competitors in their own parties and then with exogamic or opposite-party candidates for trials of increasing sacrificial severity. In an emotionally accelerating choreography of winning and losing, mating and sacrifice, two presidential candidates are chosen at national party conventions. From this fertile pair will come a new president. By tradition, voting is an act of taking vows. Following the campaign drama of courtship, devotees commit themselves to a candidate. For ritual purposes, who wins matters far less than that every citizen expresses worshipful fidelity. The devotional character of the act informs the belief that every vote counts. Following this consummatory exchange, the victorious candidate, to whom the electorate is now wedded, is both the embodied totem god and the promised child. Election is a successful coupling, a fertility rite, a bringing to birth of a newly incarnated totem. It is a vow of fidelity in return for a sacrificial promise.

The narrative drama of election is disorder redeemed by sacrifice. The narrative drama of inauguration is the totem's gift of itself to those who have pledged themselves. Consumed and discarded, the loser is the immediate sacrifice. The outgoing incumbent, whether or not he has been a candidate, must be a willing sacrifice in the peaceable transfer of power that defines democratic procedure. The victor, who pledges to devote his future to the people, is the deferred or promised

sacrifice.³ This is the purpose for which he has been regenerated as leader.⁴ Deferred sacrifice guarantees the future of the group. The election ritual is complete.

As in all established rituals, there is a well-known pattern. Certain outcomes are expected by all participants and engineered to that end. With a sufficient expenditure of energy and treasure, a totem will always be re-created. Some enactments of the ritual are more successful at re-creation and renewal than others. On this score much public care, observation, and comment accompany the unfolding of the ritual. Predictions are made about the skills of its performers. Comparisons with previous rituals abound. If the election is a properly conducted ritual-and sometimes it is not--it will end in a unified nation. Division is not the intended outcome, but unity and hope, the word of pregnant promise and reproductive outcome, the word of the future. Uttered as a political refrain during the 1992 campaign, this word more than any other signified the readiness of the candidate and the people to connect in a political mating dance.

Bodies Classical and Grotesque

As in other things regenerative, elections have a bodily focus. A basic narrative of totem-creation transforms the profligate, accessible, disordered body of the candidate into the high, remote, consecrated body of the newly incarnated totem. The body of the people conceived as the popular grotesque, in contrast to the classical body of the distant, inaccessible totem, is a central piece of the election structure. For the duration of the campaign, the candidate is the symbolic double of the grotesque body that feeds on him, the body of the electorate. This notion of the grotesque body as orificed and transgressible comes from Bakhtin (1968). Permeable and undifferentiated, the low grotesque body stands in sharp contrast to the high classical body, smooth and unorificed. The grotesque body is violable and communicating, fertile and capable of impregnation.

The grotesque body inhabits the fair and the marketplace, places of crossroads and extremes, disorder and creativity. Stallybrass and White (1986) describe the fair and the marketplace as the exaggerated, unbounded mass, the undifferentiated substratum of society. A *Village Voice* reporter described Clinton's grotesque appearance in a Milwaukee hotel, ritually descending from his suite to the lobby where "lunching grandmas yank throwaway cameras from their purses" to consume the candidate with their eyes. As he reached the people's level, this was the description: "As the glass capsule glides to eye level, we get a crotch-up view of the Comeback Kid. From that angle, Clinton looks like a grinning balloon, his cheeks enormous, his trademark hair a brillowy nimbus around a florid face" (Goldstein, 1992, p. 30). The *New York Times* editorialized about Clinton: "He had hardly presented his fresh face to New Hampshire primary voters before it was defaced with one mud pie after another--accusations of adultery, ducking the draft, fudging about marijuana, improving on the truth" ("Can Bill Clinton," 1992, p. A24). The candidate's profane and grotesque nature must be sanctified by sacrifice. By being symbolically consumed, he will nourish and renew the body of society.

Totem Talk

If these are the elements and the meanings of election ritual, do the people know it? Yes, and through two different ritual modes. One consists of formal, performative structures that mediate and frame the process of totem regeneration. These first-order modes are constituted in recombinatory exchanges of treasure and energy between the electorate and the candidates or their surrogates. They include campaigns, primaries, conventions, a general election, and inauguration. Second-order modes

are conversations, images, and mass media content that frame and re-present first-order meanings. First-and second-order modes disseminate the election to citizens.

The language and images of second-order ritual modes filter the election through metaphors of fertility and sacrifice called *totem talk*. The cry by press, public, and candidates for a substantive discussion of the issues keeps the collective focus away from totem talk about the election, talk that relates it to deeper themes of sacrifice, creation, and renewal.

In contemporary campaigning, totem talk is plentiful, but it is not so much unconscious as off-focus. It is familiar and informative about ritual aspects of the campaign, but we are distracted from its religious implications by the belief, which is part of the talk, that it is beside the point. Repeated metaphors of sacrifice, generation, and renewal are represented as tangential to the issues that are the meat and potatoes of political discussion. Totem talk of fertility and sacrifice tells participants the ritual significance of the events in which they are engaged, even as these meanings are willfully expelled from consciousness and set aside with useful fictions. One of the most enduring is that an election shaped by totem talk is a moral and political failure.

Totem talk is generally seen as disruptive or superfluous, as descriptive decoration, but never as constitutive. It is most prevalent at moments of greatest uncertainty, when ritual suspense is highest. These include periods when the leading candidates have not yet emerged, just before the election; and in the buildup to the inauguration. During the 1992 campaign, when a journalist characterized the indecision of the American people as "the-night-before-the-wedding" jitters, his compatriots on the television program "Washington Week" (1992) laughed appreciatively to distance this fertility talk from the serious issues of the election and to move the discussion to safer ground, the volatility of the late polls. Joking is a strategy for dealing with taboos. The comic facade of jokes, Freud (1905/1960) wrote, conceals "the fact that they have something-forbidden-to say" (p. 106). On Election Day, anticipating the evening's celebrations, etiquette doyenne Judith Martin cautioned against inviting guests from rival political persuasions to the same party. "This is a little like asking all the jilted people to the wedding" ("Morning Edition," 1992). An Election Day essay in the New York Times developed the metaphor of the candidates as suitors:

The American people: so fickle and unimpressed. What do they want? As I watched them being courted these many months, it occurred to me that the three candidates really were suitors They were trying to get a date-Nov. 3-with the American people (Moore, 1992, p. A19).

The Dirty Campaign

The narrative of a campaign is a movement from disorder to regenerated order. In recent presidential elections, observers from all sides have expressed concern about the impact of the dirty campaign and its surrounding carnival on the health of the community and the democratic process. Press, populace, and candidates decry the campaign process which fans the flames of community tensions. Fears by the community for its own cohesion are a part of election ritual. Only if the integrity and unity of the community are placed seriously in doubt in the minds of the participants can the ritual of reunification have the necessary effect.

The 1992 primary season produced large doses of disorder and chaos and chronicled the brutal flailing of the candidates. Fear of a ritually ungovernable polity was a constant media theme, a threat

not only to politicians who might be consumed in the popular maw searching for a defining sacrifice, but to the polity itself. "People talk as though our political system had been taken over by alien beings," observed a Kettering Foundation report ("Giving Up Something," 1992, p. A24). Garry Wills (1992) wrote, "The crazies are in charge. The fringe has taken over" (p. 17). Voters were described as angry. The New York Times observed the "volcanic nature" of a political season in which "ethnic and cultural passions [were] boiling," of "a year when politics trembles with rage and dislocation, when the campaign trail has become the wild earth" (Dowd & Friedman, 1992, p. 1). The nation was in the mood for a sacrifice. Perhaps it came in three days of rioting in Los Angeles late in April, 1991, a prologue to the sacrifice of a sitting president. As one voter put it, "Bush can't be the only one who can do this job. We need some fresh blood" (Applebome, 1992b, p. 14).

Was the public perception of the 1992 campaign as dirty and disorderly a deceiving one? In Philadelphia, an erstwhile mayoral candidate and member of many municipal administrations, an experienced political veteran of more than half a century, was asked to reflect on the 1992 election. His response suggested the systemic character of the dirty campaign:

Somewhere during every campaign that I've been a part of or observed over the years, they always end up by being called dirty. Each side calls the other one dirty. I find them all pretty much the same. Makes 'em interesting. ("Channel 10 News," 1992)

The Feast

The domain of the popular grotesque surfaces in campaign metaphors of the electorate as an angry, devouring monster, of electioneering as contaminated and profane, of candidates as possessing grotesque bodies, and of group feasting. The election is an indulgence for insatiable appetites. This diet may be excessive in a manner described by network news anchorman Dan Rather: "Some of this stuff would've gagged a buzzard" ("Campaign 92," 1992c). The campaign regenerates by cannibalizing the candidate for the nourishment of the people. "This is a party hungry for victory," explained NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw as Clinton wound up his quest for the Democratic nomination ("Democratic National Convention," 1992). The grotesque body of the totem challenger was closely tied to the food feast.

At best, political campaigns are diet disasters, with spreads of nibbles at almost every stop. Within weeks of hitting the 1992 campaign trail, Mr. Clinton ballooned well beyond 200 pounds and his suits began to bulge noticeably in the shoulders and waist. (Ayres, 1992, p. All)

It was as though the candidate were being plumped up for sacrifice. "Once you're running," observed talk show host Larry King about voter anger, "you're public meat" (Tierney, 1992, p. All). Texas Gov. Ann Richards made the metaphor more pointed after Bush's weak performance in the first presidential debate: "He's done, and stuff a fork in him" ("MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour," 1992). Lore from the Clinton campaign included an account of an Election Day feast in a body shop in Maryland, whose Greek owner displayed a picture of Clinton aide George Stephanopoulos, as "two lambs, one named George Bush, the other Ross Perot, roasted outside" ("To Greek-Americans," 1992, p. B7). Clinton came in for similar fantasies of alimentary violence. "Joan Didion has a word for the liquid center that oozes

out of Clinton whenever you bite down: *personalismo*," wrote Richard Goldstein (1992, p. 30). In the wake of George Bush's defeat, the head writer for "The Tonight Show" reflected on the reasons:

Dear President Bush,

On the eve of your leave-taking, you should finally be told the truth about why you lost the election. You were too skinny. Presidents can't be thin. Presidents are supposed to be round and kind and *fatherly*. ... We want public figures. Like Tip O'Neill and Ted Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson-people who eat too much and get us into trouble and embarrass us. (Bradford, 1992, p. A21)

Bradford spoke under taboo cover of humor, advising that lunch was a family value. He concluded:

George, you can make a comeback in four years. Here's the plan: any chance you get-grab a sandwich. Have a malted. Carry cheese balls in your jacket. 'Tomorrow, call a breakfast meeting; have the breakfast, skip the meeting.

Pudge up. Call yourself "Georgie-Porgie," and live up to it. Your overriding political rule has always been, "I will do anything to be elected." From now on make it, "I will eat anything to be elected (Bradford, 1992, p. A21)."

The Carnival of Disorder

Campaign combat takes place before a bloodthirsty crowd. One commentator described a "vicious cycle" in which media coverage is issue-oriented "before the public begins to focus." Once the public pays attention, "the horse race and the scandals," chronicles of the fair and the grotesque body, move to center stage. When the public finally concentrates, voters "see the slash and burn and nothing else" (Kolbert, 1992, p. A18). The analysis portrayed a riotous, consumptive public bringing its monstrous bulk into "focus" to lay waste whatever it touched.

The incumbent totem tried to portray himself as a classic body and to refrain from touching the dirty campaign. "I have to do certain things that the attackers don't have to do," George Bush explained. "One of them is be President" (Wines, 1992, p. 20). Challenger Perot described the presidency as "equivalent to getting up every morning, climbing in a barrel and having everyone in the world beat on the barrel with a stick" ("World News Sunday," 1993).

'Totem operatives sought to deflect the Perot threat by portraying him as the order-threatening, profane animal of Western culture. Bush's press secretary called Perot a "a pig in the poke and a dangerous and destructive personality" (Raum, 1992, p. A4). In Perot, the presidential campaign was said to be facing an "untested wild man" (Applebome, 1992a, p. 8). Perot countered by urging supporters, "If you've got the stomach for it, let's do it" (Raum, 1992, p. A4).

Republican campaign officials responded to an early threat from challenger Pat Buchanan by "running around like chickens with their head cut off" (Dowd & Friedman, 1992, p. 14). The president was said to be upset with Republican voters who had "turned on him, when he was expecting a coronation, not a crucifixion." Attacks on the president were "tarring him." "No wonder," said

anchorman Rather on election night, "H. L. Mencken said, 'Covering a presidential campaign is better than the best circus there ever was' " ("Campaign 92," 1992c).

Clinton came in for his own status reversal early in the campaign. "I didn't inhale," he insisted, defending his grotesque, orificed body as a classical one, when detractors painted him as polluted by marijuana (Ifill, 1992a, p. A15). Whether his body had also engaged in illicit sexual congress with Gennifer Flowers and other women, and whether he had shielded his body from the purifying sacrifice of combat in Vietnam, were all questions meant to hurt the candidate by metaphorizing his body as tainted and imperfect. Clinton commented on this process during the campaign:

He has openly philosophized that political life can be unfair and denuding, and that running for public office is a trade-off in which enduring low blows and pitiless scrutiny must be endured in order to have an opportunity to lead and change. (Ayres, 1992, p. A11)

Previous commentators have analyzed campaigning as a status degradation ritual designed to test the mettle of candidates (Barber, 1974; Bennett, 1983). The response of the candidate to the ordeal of status reversal is important and may even be crucial in determining the selection of one candidate over another. But this implies that everything hangs on the candidate's response; not everything does. Ritual is a group process constructed to work not only with but in spite of individual acts, including those of totem leaders. Rituals channel and interpret behavior as much as they create opportunities for it. Nor does this analysis explain why status reversal is the specific means chosen by the group over other alternatives to elicit the display of leaderly skills.

Status degradation is a symbolic sacrifice that sanctifies the candidate offering in order to raise him up. It creates the most dramatic contrast possible between the unsanctified candidate in a disordered community threatened with dissolution and the status-elevated totem, reincarnated as the leader of a group newly unified in harmony and peace (at least through the inauguration). Status degradation in the dirty campaign works on two levels. It establishes the candidate as a willing sacrifice who pledges his life and substance to the future of the group, and renders him transformed by virtue of having been consumed by the people over the course of the campaign.

Threats to Ritual Purity

The greatest challenge to the 1992 campaign ritual was an exogamous irregularity: the entrance, withdrawal, and reentrance of independent candidate Ross Perot. Media and public reaction to Perot's temporary withdrawal from the down and dirty campaign exposed its ritually contrived character. The first phase of Perot's candidacy was widely declared to have been derailed by the noncandidate's unwillingness to subject himself to the ordeal of status reversal. Perot himself said he was unwilling to disrupt the orderly election with an inopportune third-party challenge, given the revival of the Democratic party, one of the proper members of the mating pair. Early analyses blamed the fury and disorder of the campaign process:

There is just so much of the process that is wretched and onerous and appalling, and what happens is that this causes an exclusionary effect, a sort of natural selection process, so that there are only a very few people-Bill Clinton, for example-who are prepared to go through this. (Kelly, 1992c, p. 11)

Later analyses accepted Perot's refusal to play the status reversal game as the reason for his withdrawal, but assigned less fault to the process-recently and ritually decried by candidates and pundits as unbearably chaotic and flawed-and more fault to Perot for his lack of ritual strength. Only candidates with grotesque body, willing to fight, need apply. "All those people who thought Ross Perot had guts-and he don't-must go back to the obvious choice, who has guts," offered a Perot organizer in New York State following his candidate's precipitous departure (Ifill, 1992c, p. 9). Other comments pointed to the goal of the ritual played out as a fertility rite. Crushed supporters charged betrayal in losing their betrothed for the fertility dance. "It's like the end of a love affair," said one. "I feel deserted-like a bride at the altar," said another ("CBS Evening News," 1992a).

A number of commentators argued explicitly that an upside down world had returned to its proper mating categories. Whereas Perot's candidacy had "turned the race, and the campaign calendar, on its head" (Berke, 1992, p. 1), his withdrawal wiped out any idea that the changes he or his followers "craved could come outside the turf of the two political parties," that is, through irregular mating procedures (Rosenthal, 1992a, p. A27).⁵ Perot's quixotic candidacy had given the public more "respect" for the party regulars. He had made the parties understand they "had to pull themselves together," an ambiguous phrase that described mating as well as ordering. Columnist A. M. Rosenthal (1992b, p. A19) combined the dual metaphors of sacrificial consumption and fertile regeneration to describe the 1992 campaign. Whereas strings of cliches and epithets "strung together like sausages" in other campaigns had provided only "bellyache, the 1992 campaign gave us some nutrition-insights into our national self," he wrote on Election Day. "The old lumbering American political system that we are instructed so often to despise [had] produced exactly the right Republican and Democrat to face each other this year" (p. A19).

There were other expressions of concern that the campaign might fail to produce proper mating pairs. A variation on the theme that politics was a messy and dirty domain upon which exogamous order should be imposed was that voters could not distinguish between the two major parties. If they were not properly defined, the oppositional, exogamic structure necessary for regeneration was missing. Rep. Charles B. Rangel of Harlem voiced this concern:

I told Governor Clinton the rough thing about this campaign is, when you turn on the television set and you see these massive rallies and all of these wonderful white faces with the little American flags, you really don't know right away whether it's a Bush rally, a Clinton rally, or a Perot rally. And America is not like that, and I hope, and I trust, and I'm confident that before Governor Clinton leaves New York he's got to say something that's tantamount [to] I love ya, and I don't want to be President withoutcha. ("Nightline," 1992)

There were indications that each party represented a different gender in the symbolic mating pair. The Republicans were seen as the male defenders of group borders, out of a job at the end of the Cold War. The Democrats were the female element of the 1992 pair, soft on border control, strong on domestic concerns. An observer described the official poster of the Republican convention, in which a star-spangled cowboy rode a huge bucking bull, as "blatantly phallic. The positioning of the cowboy's left

arm holding the reins can leave no doubt of the intention. It seems the Republicans equate vitality with masculine virility, expressed in purely sexual terms" appropriate to a mating ceremony (Gilbert, 1992, p. 4).

This is the party making "family values" the centerpiece of the Presidential campaign. But a brash and adventurous heterosexual male gets the Republican Party's blessing as he struts around town, and any woman who takes him up on his offer is immoral.

The Conventions

A political convention blows in and out like a 90-mile gale.

-James Farley

The Democrats held their convention at Madison Square Garden. "Not politics-as-theater so much as politics-as-half-time-show, as pep rally, singalong, circus," wrote Stanley Elkin (1992, p. 17). "Certainly not politics-as-theater. Because you're not supposed to know how a play turns out till it ends. Less suspense at the convention than at a wedding, a baptism, a bar mitzvah." The right comparison, exactly. It may be no accident that the two major political groups are called "parties," and that media lead-ins emphasized the festive character of the proceedings. "Good evening from inside the biggest show on or off Broadway tonight, the Democratic National Convention here is in beautiful, but jammed-to-the-rafters, Madison Square Garden," said CBS's Dan Rather, introducing the event as a "dance of democracy" ("Campaign 92," 1992a).

News organizations, frustrated by the scarcity of "issues" at an orchestrated convention where the nominee was a foregone conclusion, wondered whether conventions were a thing of the past. Asked this question, Texas Gov. Ann Richards answered with the certainty of a participant who knows a fertility rite when she sees one:

Dan Rather: Are you presiding over the last real Democratic convention?

Ann Richards: I don't think so. I think this is a rite of passage. It's one of those wonderful kinda ceremonial things. It's like christening your baby. It's one of those things that you really need to do because it's a tradition. It's American. It's the way we choose and announce and communicate with the public. ("Campaign 92," 1992a)

Natalism comes after sacrifice. A campaign of family values was the predictable epilogue to the Persian Gulf War. Having witnessed the election sacrifice of five of the previous six Democratic presidential candidates, and casting the recessionary lot of the people as a sacrifice on the altar of Republican economic policy, the Democratic party used the concerns of women, a vocal and favored element of its constituency in 1992, to build themes of natalism.

Although two white males had been chosen to bear the party standard, a woman chaired the convention, women's rights were among its foci, and women played an important part as rhetorical objects of concern and caring. The chair's opening remarks struck additional natalistic themes by celebrating the promise of America for her 5-year-old granddaughter:

Lily is a conscience for me. And those of you have held that first grandbaby know what I mean. You get that feeling of continuity of your actions being tied to the future in a way that you never ever felt before, and you understand how important it is to do right now so that that grandbaby, that grandchild is going to do better later. ("Campaign 92," 1992a)

And then the mating call: "Just imagine what we could do for Lily and for all our children if the people of this country and their government actually work together." ("Campaign 92," 1992a).

The party's favorite orator, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, proclaimed Clinton's mating potential in his nominating speech by celebrating the candidate's recombinatory powers:

He does not believe in the cynical political arithmetic that says you can add by subtracting, or multiply by dividing; but instead, he will work to make the whole nation stronger by bringing people together, showing us our commonality, teaching us cooperation, making us not a collection of competing special interests, but one great, special family—the family of America! ("Campaign 92," 1992b)

This was not the scripted high point of the convention. That was supposed to be the candidate's acceptance of the sacrificial role proffered him. It was the emotional high point, nevertheless. Reporter Cokie Roberts characterized the delegates' reactions to speeches by erstwhile candidates Jerry Brown, Ted Kennedy, Paul Tsongas, and Mario Cuomo in nuptial terms:

You have a party that's about to walk down the aisle with the man that mama and daddy have said is going to make the best husband for you, but they are having a last minute romance with the boys they're really in love with, Mario Cuomo, Teddy Kennedy at the top of their list, and it's always hard to say goodbye to those people, but they know it's not really a good marriage. ("Democratic National Convention: The '92 Vote," 1992)

State delegations cast their votes, engineered so the first were cast by Clinton's own mother for Arkansas's "favorite son, and my son." When the final vote was announced, Bill and Hillary Clinton danced. The delegates danced, too, bobbing their delegation signs and waving flags while balloons rained from the ceiling like a gift from the gods. The embodied totem-to-be and his running mate made their own offerings the next night in speeches that leaned heavily on personal sacrifice stories as evidence of their worthiness to take up the people's burdens.

When they finished, the dancing began in earnest. Signs, pennants, and American flags swayed rhythmically as delegates clapped to renditions of Democratic tunes. The 1992 nominees stood in fertile pairings: presidential and vice presidential nominee, each with his wife and children.⁶ The wives of the two candidates embraced and danced an impromptu jig. The generative message was picked up in the observation that they "hopped up and down like pep squad leaders whose team had just won the game" (Dugger, 1992, p. 9). It seemed to work. "I feel he's going to bring the country together," said one citizen. "They seemed more unified. There isn't all the bickering," applauded another (Wilkerson, 1992, p. 8). "I like the vision they have," chimed in a third (Ifill, 1992b, p. A15). What did voters remember best when it was over? Not the cognitive content of the speeches, but the fertility jig on the victory podium (Jamieson, 1993). At its ritual level the message had gotten across.

The conventions were intended to focus and clarify exogamic party differences so that the ritual would work properly. "The goal of the [Republican] platform was to draw distinctions between Republicans and Democrats," explained Sen. Dan Nickles of Oklahoma (Rosenbaum, 1992, p. A16). Media pundits were busy setting up a new drama of dissolution that the Republican convention would be obliged to order. The *New York Times* articulated the elements of this drama the day before the convention:

The same George Bush again trails his opponent, again a Democratic governor, this time by a wider margin. His record is mixed, his message unclear, his party divided. The economy is shaky,

the public restless Can the President, starting with another knockout acceptance speech, do it again? Many Republicans seem convinced that their convention, which opens tomorrow, is make-or-break time. ("Campaign Mode," 1992 p. 16)

Fertility metaphors were everywhere. "The Republicans have called a love fest in Houston," wrote Garry Wills (1992, p. 17). "Already there is sort of a rarefied air about it, like Christmas or New Year's," said a chef assigned to host some of the party's most important supporters, comparing the convention to other rites of natalistic renewal (Suro, 1992, p. 28).

The Late Campaign

That the purpose of elections is to renew a totem for future sacrifice was expressed in ritual terms by Democratic vice presidential candidate Al Gore, reflecting on an incident in which the presidential and vice-presidential entourages had clumsily bumped into each other at a campaign stop:

"Did you ever see that Woody Allen movie where there are these six guys dressed in black coming down a street and they're carrying this guy on a cross, and they're looking for a parking space? Then, just as they're backing into a space, these six other guys in black carrying a guy on a cross come in from behind and take the space. You remember that scene?

"That's what this is like for me sometimes," Mr. Gore said. (Kelly, 1992b,p.8)

The Gore remarks were featured in the *New York Times* below a photograph of Clinton addressing a night rally, his body reflecting the light, his arms outstretched in an unmistakably messianic posture (Estrin, 1992, p. 8).

The presidential debates launched the last phase of the campaign, the time when voters began to ask seriously, according to political consultant Ed Rollins, "Do I really want to marry this guy?" (Kelly, 1992a, p. 4). The Bush campaign made its final appeal on the issue of trust, a concern of lovers and comrades. It was too late, since, as Joe Klein of *Newsweek* observed, "People all year said that they believed that George Bush just didn't care about them very much, and in our exit polling, that shows as one of the major reasons why people voted for Bill Clinton" ("Campaign 92," 1992c). Clinton had the fertility symbolism wrapped up. The sobriquets "Sweet William" (described as "a wildflower favored for its vivid, fragrant blossoms") and "Slick Willie" suggested womanizing. Reporters called the photo opportunities in which the candidate hugged women, "clutch shots." "I like strong women," said Clinton, the candidate close to his mother. "Clinton puts all of us in touch with our sexuality," wrote a *Village Voice* reporter. Norman Mailer observed that he had "the capacity to warm the country up." A poll by *Spy* magazine showed that 70% of readers thought Clinton would make a better lover, while only 6% chose Bush. (Goldstein, 1992, pp. 31-32)

Consummation: Election Night

With little more than a week to go before the election, polls showed Clinton with 45% of the vote, well ahead of Bush. He was said to have the power to fertilize other Democratic candidates. Expressing her willingness to unite with the candidate in an act of political reproduction, California Senate candidate Barbara Boxer declared, "If he has coattails, I'll take them, and if I have skirt tails, he can have them" ("CBS Evening News," 1992b).

Anticipating victory on election night, Democratic National Committee chair Ron Brown sounded the code words of electoral fertility:

One of the reasons why Bill Clinton's message has resonated so strongly around America is it's a message of unity, of bringing our people together, of making us one nation, of forgetting about these so-called wedge issues that Republicans love to identify that splinter and tear us apart, but rather to build bridges so that we look to the future with hope and optimism. ("Campaign 92," 1992c)

To cries of "We love you, Bill," from 40,000 supporters in front of the governor's mansion in Little Rock, the new president-elect proclaimed the devotion of his supporters and their hopes for a fertile ritual outcome: "In massive numbers the American people have voted to make a new beginning." His reciprocating thank yous raised up images of mating pairs: himself and his wife, himself and his daughter (whom he thanked "for reminding us what this election is really all about"), himself and his running mate ("I want to tell you that Al and Tipper, Hillary and I have become friends"), himself and his staff, himself and the outgoing president, who in a sporting phone call had offered to work with Clinton in effecting a smooth transition. Clinton welcomed "the new blood" in Congress. He appealed to those who had voted for the opposition to mate with his administration. "I know you love your country . . . I ask you to join with us in creating a re-United States." Chris Bury, the NBC reporter on the scene, described supporters shouting and hugging one another. "There's a great sense of bonding, and a great sense of continuity here." The *New York Times* described the "kissing couples and the conga lines on the lawn of the Old State House" in Arkansas following the main event (Kelly, 1992d, p. B3).

For Ross Perot, with 19% of the vote, higher than the polls had indicated, the night was also cast in terms of victory. Perot, the suitor, urged his supporters on with promises of sacrifice and mating:

I want you to know that our love for you and my love for you is permanent, and I will carry the memory of these past few months with me the rest of my life, and I am available to you any time, any place, anywhere, so long as I am around. ("Campaign 92," 1992c)

For children, election narratives often have fertility overtones. "The last time I remember such tension, I was a kid," said a voter, describing the special excitement he felt about the 1992 election. "When I went to bed, Nixon was ahead and when I woke up Kennedy had won. It felt like magic" (Winerip, 1992, p. 49). Children sense the electricity in the air, the sexual tension around the anticipated mating ceremony. Something happens at night when the children are asleep in their beds. When morning comes, there is a new reproductive outcome.

A similar narrative is enacted in Christmas ritual. The holy couple comes to the inn on Christmas Eve, and on Christmas Day, a feast day, the promised child-savior appears. The ritual significance of the event was captured in metalanguage and jokes, as in comedian David Letterman's complaint about the onslaught of TV ads toward the end of the campaign, "Election Day has gotten to be so commercialized that people forget it's about Jesus" (Logan, 1992, pp. 78-79).

Inaugural Fertility

At these times Washington is like an old courtesan taking a new lover.

-Russell Baker

The inauguration is the christening of the chosen son, the ceremonial dedication of a promised child conceived in the fertility rite of the election.⁷ The new president is also a delectable dish who will be

feasted upon when the time is right. Essential to this process is the willing sacrifice of the outgoing president, a renunciation to prepare the ground for what Clinton called the "forced spring" in his inaugural rendering of the vision accorded him as totem.

The inaugural festivities repeated themes from the election period. The newly incarnated totem was not the avenging son, but the childson, for whom traditional "patriotic flagwavers" had been recast as "lullabies," according to a critic's description of the songs aired during the inaugural eve gala for the president-elect (Pareles, 1993, p. C15). The prevailing media theme was that Clinton was a little boy, his campaign a children's crusade ("ABC News Special," 1992). Inaugural officials let it be known that the new president would take the oath of office on a childhood Bible. Clinton's victory was celebrated in T-shirt souvenirs of "Bill and Al's Excellent Adventure," a reference to a popular comedy team portraying immature adolescents. "Infant Administration Tackles Full-Grown Workload," was a headlined news story the day after the inauguration (Ifill, 1993, p. All). Commenting on Bill Clinton's relationship to Hillary, Washington observer Sally Quinn used the image of mother and child. "Clearly he is very dependent on her in a lot of ways" ("CBS News," 1993).

Some observers felt that the launching of a full-scale celebration before the official end of the Bush era was a ritual violation. It was like the "bride dancing at the wedding reception before the ceremony has been held," said PBS commentator Mark Shields. That the Democrats were starved and ready to gorge was offered as an excuse for ignoring good table manners. "As the Democrats know better than anybody, there's no sauce in the world like hunger," wrote the *New York Times* (Dowd & Rich, 1993, p. A13).

At the grotesque carnival of pre-inaugural receptions, the White House was offered as an edible to partygoers who "braved traffic jams, interminable airport taxi lines and other inaugural hazing rituals, all the while clutching their white chocolate White Houses and other party favors" (Brown, 1993a, p. A15). Citizens came from around the country for "a bite and a hug" at a luncheon with the president-elect the day before the inauguration (Goodman, 1993, p. C20).⁸ A new Washington restaurant, Slick Willie's, featured Big Willieburgers, Arkansas Chicken, and Sloppy Al's ("The Clinton Inaugural," 1993).

The new President was repeatedly described as a junk food addict, a clear grotesque body. He was said to have reformed with the election, a grotesque body no more. The morning of the inauguration Ronald Reagan's former press secretary was quoted as saying that Clinton would have "a full plate, as George has" (Brown, 1993b, p. A15). "Mr. Clinton and those who work with him are about, in a way, to get fried in history's frying pan," warned Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan ("MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour," 1993).

The climax of CBS's "An American Reunion" (1993), billed as the inaugural eve gala, came when pop diva Barbra Streisand offered "grace" for the repast America was about to enjoy. The metaphorical dishes over which she licked her lips were the president and vice president:

I know that grace is something said before a meal. But I feel that America has a great feast before it. And so perhaps a grace of sorts is appropriate. I'm thankful . . . especially for the new leadership that will take us forward to a time of hope and healing.

The "grace" her remarks introduced, a feast song in this context, was "God Bless America." Said Streisand in an interview at the inaugural balls, "We elected this man. He is of the people. We chose him." She was echoed by Lauren Bacall, representing the pantheon of American fertility goddesses: "I'm so thrilled to see two young guys. I think it's exciting. I have tremendous hope, I haven't been this excited in years" (ABC News, 1993).

What range of roles may a re-embodied totem have? The entire holy totem family is available.⁹ Roles attach themselves in characteristic clusters shaped to the opportunities of specific historical and personal circumstances from election to election. Because of Clinton's youthful age and appearance, his

lack of military experience, his visible attachment to a strong mother and wife, the absence of his real father, and the nurturing themes of his campaign platform, Clinton moved easily back and forth among the roles of bridegroom, infant, and boy savior. At other moments he played the totem father or avenging totem son for John F. Kennedy, the sacrificial father. Clinton and Gore were "the political offspring of John F. Kennedy and the spirit of the New Frontier," said Tom Brokaw ("The Clinton Inaugural," 1993).

The symbolic attachment to Kennedy was peculiar to the Clinton inauguration. The symbolic importance of Kennedy, the dead totem, was his role as the sacrificial lamb for the generation Clinton represented, and as the questing son whose administration had launched a new generation of leadership, a powerful symbol of rebirth. The *New York Times* remodeled the Kennedy inauguration in memory:

For many Americans the inauguration of a new President calls to mind the flickering, black-and-white images of that bitterly cold day in 1961 when John F. Kennedy took the oath of office and Robert Frost recited a poem [Michael] Blimes, who was a sixth grader in Ridgecrest, Calif., when Kennedy was inaugurated, said he remembers a time when people believed "all things were possible." (Johnson, 1993, p.A 13)

Fertility and reproductive imagery were readily apparent. Promising never to "betray" his supporters, Clinton presented himself as a suitor whose bride was the people. " 'Embracing' was a theme of his inaugural speech, as it has been, both physically and metaphorically, of this whole day," observed editor Hendrik Hertzberg. "There isn't anybody on the platform who hasn't gotten a Presidential hug, it looks like" ("The Presidential Inauguration," 1993).

Poetess Maya Angelou, invited to speak at the inaugural ceremony, spoke of feeling like "a seed rolling around in somebody's hand" (Brown, 1993b, p. A15). In morning services at the Metropolitan American Methodist Episcopal Church the president-elect was told, "You have invited all who will to be partners in forming a more perfect union We can, we must, and we will say, 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' " Fertile pairings were everywhere: the new president and his wife, the president and the people, the president and the vice president, the new president and the congressional leadership. Even the new and the departing president formed a fertile pair to produce "a peaceful transfer of presidential power from one man to another." ("The Clinton Inaugural," 1993)

The main events of the inauguration ceremony were the ascension of the newly embodied totem in the presence of the witnessing nation and the sharing of the totem vision. If the purpose of the inaugural was to heal divisions in the electorate and to unify the president and the people, there was some evidence that it was effective. Consider the demonstration of pious observance and religious ecstasy in this testimony by a pilgrim waiting for the postinaugural parade to begin:

Margaret Larson: Cathy was a Bush supporter, and has changed her mind, and what is the reason for that?

Cathy: I'm excited. I like what he has to say, the unity, I feel it with the people. I'm out here today. I've been here since 8:30 this morning, and I'm really excited". ("The Clinton Inaugural," 1993).

The combination of electoral mating and totem sacrifice surfaced readily. "It's like we're all putting this weight on his shoulders," offered a citizen in Denver (Johnson, 1993, p. A13). In Jimmy Carter's words, "He owes us a lot, and we should pledge ourselves to support him in every possible way ... I would say the inauguration moment itself is the ultimate in mutual commitment between our people and our government." ("The Presidential Inauguration With Walter Cronkite," 1993)

After the inauguration the old president flew off, and the new president went to the signing room to begin his duties. As CBS commentators reviewed the recent trend of one-term presidents, anchorman Charles Kuralt remarked, "We are pretty hard on our presidents ... and this one, who is now performing his first duties of office in the Capitol building may as well know that we're going to be hard on him" ("CBS News," 1993). "Welcome to power, Mr. Clinton," said Tom Brokaw. "The honeymoon is over" ("The Clinton Inaugural," 1993). The transition having been made, the sacrifice had begun.

Four months into his presidency, when Clinton had a 48% disapproval and 41% approval rating, a reporter wrote:

Part of Bill Clinton's problem is that the citizens of the United States are . . . well, to say they are vicious, backbiting cretins might be too strong. They can be selfish and whiny and supremely ungrateful, and right now they've had it up to *here* with these bozo politicians. Bill Clinton would never subscribe to this unsanguine view of the public, but the fact remains that if he gets on people's wrong side they'll kick him in the ribs until they see blood on his lips. (Achenbach, 1993, p. D4)

According to Gordon Hoxie, head of the Center for the Study of the Presidency, "The people have been in a nasty mood. What was aimed at Bush is now aimed at the present President" (Achenbach, 1993, p. D4). Media analysis seemed to bear this out. Hugh Sidey's (1992) description of the Bush presidency in August, 1992, could have applied as easily to Clinton shortly after his election: "What have we done to our Presidents? ... We have ... invested the poor fellow with godly power-then raised our expectations accordingly and vented almost every human frustration and anger at him" (p. 43).

Following his first sacrificial offering, a deficit reduction package of higher taxes and spending cuts, and a call to take responsibility for its success on himself and his party, President Clinton was regarded with some skepticism by the electorate that had "married" him ("Did the nation still respect him in the morning?" asked the *Philadelphia Inquirer*) expecting him to fulfill his "promises" at any cost. "He's taking on a job that will make everybody want to kill him," explained a voter (King, 1993, p. A1).

Disemboweling the Totem

The sovereign ... exists only for his subjects; his life is only valuable so long as he discharges the duties of his position by ordering the course of nature for his people's benefit. So soon as he fails to do so, the care, the devotion, the religious homage which they had hitherto lavished on him cease and are changed into hatred and contempt; he is dismissed ignominiously, and may be thankful if he escapes with his life. Worshipped as a god one day, he is killed as a criminal the next.

—Sir James Frazer

An important theme of the inauguration was the suffering and symbolic death of the outgoing president. Until a more dramatic sacrifice comes along, the symbolic bloody spectacle of the painfully visible abdication of the leader restores the community. In a conversation among NBC news anchors Bryant Gumbel, Tom Brokaw, and John Chancellor, in which it was observed that there had not been so many living ex-presidents at one inauguration in many years, Chancellor recalled *Louisville Courier-Journal* editor Henry Watterson's recommendation about what to do with ex-presidents: "Take them out and shoot them" (Wall, 1956, p. 254). Presented with this taboo, the group laughed uproariously. Theirs was at once the joyful, celebratory dance of a community unified by an aggressive act against the body of the deposed king, and a denial that any such sacrifice was permitted.

Because ex-presidents are not shot (and in reality are well cared for at public expense), the media must work to establish that the surrender of power is wrenching, and that a price is being paid. It does not count unless it is a real sacrifice. Ritual efficacy increases with the measure of sacrifice offered. Much was invested in tokens of the suffering George Bush. A guest at a small dinner in the family dining room on George Bush's last night in the White House had called it a "kind of a last supper, I guess" (Apple, 1993, p. A1). *Life* magazine described the Bushes receiving the consoling cheers of the White House staff. "The camera caught them standing like figures in a wax museum, arrested in a frieze of defeat ... George Bush waving numbly, like a man recovering from electroshock therapy, Barbara Bush grim, a face at a funeral." ("Outward Bound," 1993, p. 10.)

Television commentators speculated about the dilemma facing a rejected suitor of the nation:

Consider George Bush, who has just lost an entire country. At sixty-eight, George Bush is experiencing what is difficult to endure at any age: a broken heart at the hands of people who he had reason to believe loved him as much as he loved the post they had elected him to fill There is something cruel about a ceremony that compels the loser, like a discarded spouse, to watch the remarriage of his partner to another. ("MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour," 1993)

Other legendary totem endings were remembered. "When Lyndon Johnson left at the end of his term and flew to Texas in Air Force Two," recalled David Brinkley, "They took his baggage off the plane, set it down on the ground and flew away. He was infuriated! Because prior to that they'd had limousines and people to move his baggage, and so on. They put his bags on the ground and left!" ("ABC News," 1993). The story depicted the literal, even spatial degradation of a totem leader. The depth of his descent was symbolized in the physical distance between the heaven-bound plane and the earthbound ex-president, an unimaginably impotent totem whose wrath until that moment had commanded legions.

A *Newsweek* reporter recalled a "feeding frenzy" by a dozen hand-picked reporters and photographers who rode on Air Force One with the departing Gerald Ford to Monterey, California ("Morning Edition," 1993). The reporters had looted notepads, matchbooks, menus, cigarettes, pillows, blankets, silverware, napkins, candy dishes, a set of tumblers bearing the presidential seal, even the fruit basket. In ritual terms it was a symbolic cannibalizing of the deposed president.

Conclusion

A primary season, a nominating convention, an election, an inauguration: All are set pieces, contrived dramas of sex and death, symbolic disruptions of the family healed, exposed once more to disintegration and healed again, at least for the "honeymoon" following a successful electoral mating. All must be done through the combination of appropriate symbolic elements. The flexible reach of the totem myth extends to a nearly limitless variety of circumstances, because few events and personalities cannot be reconstructed to reflect fundamental totem themes. In this way every election is a critical election, one that defines the country.

The rituals described here are culturally and historically specific to American society in 1992. They are repetitive, standardized, and in earnest because they convey information the group cannot afford to forget, and because they do things the group must do to survive as a group. To that end, the election brings the newly embodied totem to life in three clearly marked rites. The first, the selection of a symbolic mating pair of candidates, establishes the conditions of fertility for reproducing a ritual king. The second is the ceremony of voting in which the people offer vows of fidelity to the totem. The third

rite is the totem's reciprocal gift in return for the fidelity of his people. This is the inaugural dedication of a promised child, embodied and partly divine, the deferred sacrifice who will pay the blood debt that guarantees the future of the group.

In addition to these distinctly marked rites of life, there is everywhere present in the election their shadowed and inadmissible opposite. As insubstantial as an ancestral ghost, this atmosphere of talk and metaphor pervades every structured element. It is talk, as regular as a drumbeat, of sacrificial death and carnage, conveying the deep knowledge that the renewal of the community depends on the death of the king. It shows up in talk about ripping the candidate to bloody shreds and feasting on him, in talk about the destruction of the losing candidate, in talk about the symbolic death of the departing incumbent. Death fills the spaces in the hopeful, shining latticework of fertility rites. Sacrifice holds the election together, provides the connection among its distinctly marked parts, and guarantees the life of the group.

Notes

1. The author expresses profound gratitude to David Ingle for provocative contributions to the shaping of this article, to Brigitte Rouson for assistance in preparing the manuscript, and to three anonymous reviewers for valuable criticisms of an original draft.
2. A fuller analysis is in progress. See Marvin (in press).
3. John F. Kennedy's first statement upon winning the 1960 presidential election perfectly combines the metaphors of creation and sacrifice: "Every degree of mind and spirit that I possess will be devoted to the long-range interests of the United States and the cause of freedom around the world. So now my wife and I prepare for a new administration and for a new baby" (Deane, 1992).
4. The two candidates resemble the goats of the sacrificial ritual described in Leviticus, from which our notion of the scapegoat comes. Two goats are offered on behalf of the group. The loser is selected for immediate killing. The winner takes upon himself the sins of the people and goes into the wilderness.
5. Clinton campaign strategist James Carville's description of Perot's withdrawal as "the most stupid single act of masturbation in the history of American political campaigns" (Rozen, 1993) points to the ritual goal of election as a mating between the hopeful candidate and his supporters, and to the Perot campaign as a failed ritual act.
6. These were the "flash-lit minutes in which ... scores of folks from Kankakee stand roaring like seals during the mating season," reads a description of convention delegates responding to the appearance of the Democratic nominee in 1968 (O'Neil, 1968).
7. Throughout we use masculine terms for candidates and feminine terms for the electorate because their symbolic roles play out this sexual division of labor.
8. The contradictory desire of the electorate to mate with and devour its candidates is expressed in a comment *Nashville Tennessean* editor John Siegenthaler once made about Democrat Gene McCarthy's supporters in 1968: "Many people in the liberal community had both arms and both legs around Gene McCarthy, and were kissing him on the neck and biting him on the ear" (Deane, 1992).
9. The Christian cast of election symbolism reflects the nation's historical majority, and provides a familiar model for the civil religion of politics. Of course, the themes of sacrifice and regeneration are present in other traditions as well.

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