

The Difficulty of the Text: The Poetics of Homosexuality
in José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*

A Senior Honors Thesis

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by

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

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Abstract

My senior honors thesis deals with a novel called *Paradiso* by Cuban poet José Lezama Lima, an eminent figure in twentieth-century literature. Lezama's novel *Paradiso* formed part of the Latin American Boom, a period of prolific literary production and innovation. Published in 1966, *Paradiso* was certainly innovative, but perhaps too much so. Lezama's novel is full of linguistic and cultural hurdles that make it so difficult that many give up reading it, and *Paradiso* has therefore enjoyed a smaller audience than other novels from the boom. On top of its difficulty, *Paradiso* handles the social taboo of homosexuality in ways that surprise, shock, and even horrify readers. In this paper, I analyze how the difficulty of *Paradiso*—Lezama's dense poetic prose and exhaustive literary, cultural, and religious references—interacts with the topic of homosexuality. I examine two chapters from the novel (eight and nine) that present homosexuality in two different ways. Chapter VIII narrates various 'deviant' sexual acts, that is, acts besides heterosexual intercourse. I analyze the images and implications of the pornographic nature of the chapter. The following chapter, IX, presents homosexuality not as action like the previous chapter, but rather as an intellectual debate between the novel's protagonist, José Cemí, and his two best friends, Fronesis and Foción. The friends debate the moral legitimacy of homosexuality and try to figure out the origins of homosexuality and other types of 'deviant' sexuality that seem to have no biological purpose (no possibility of reproduction). The connection that I see between chapters eight and nine is Lezama's use of the *imagen* (image), a metaphoric vehicle that links the mundane world of fears and doubts to a separate reality of poetic paradise. I argue that Lezama neither refutes nor accepts homosexuality, but rather uses homosexuality to form images that serve as a point of departure to a beautiful, but obscure and difficult world of poetry.

Technical Note

I wrote my thesis in English due to the nature of the oral examination process at Ohio State. However, many of my sources (including *Paradiso* itself) are originally written in Spanish. I did my best to provide adequate English translations by using either translated versions of my sources or translating myself. In most cases, if there was a translated version, I used it. I did the translation myself only when I could find no translation or if I did not agree with a given translation.

For readability's sake I decided to keep my text in English. In the footnotes, I first indicate the source of the translation and then quote the original Spanish source. Gregory Rabassa's magnificent translation makes *Paradiso* accessible to English speakers. In the footnotes, I quote *Paradiso* from a critical edition of the novel led by Cintio Vitier. This is the best edition that I have found of the novel and the page numbers are very close to Rabassa's, which makes going back and forth between the Spanish and English versions easier than with other editions.

Introduction:
José Lezama Lima's Poetic World

The novel *Paradiso* is the culmination of Cuban poet José Lezama Lima's career. Before the publication of *Paradiso* in 1966, Lezama had only written poetry and essays. Although the novel is written in prose, many argue that it is more of a poem than a novel because of the dense poetic language and metaphors that make it very difficult to read. In his essay *To Reach Lezama Lima*, Julio Cortázar, one of Latin America's most brilliant authors, wrote: "reading Lezama is one of the most arduous and at times frustrating tasks one can undertake."¹ In fact, the sheer difficulty of the novel frustrates many readers to the point where they give up trying to read it. This was my experience; I would become so frustrated with *Paradiso* that I would stop reading it for days or even weeks before I could bring myself to face it again. Cortázar said that the people who read authors as difficult as Lezama are part of a 'club' but that even this elite literary club has vacancies when it comes to Lezama. Even specialists who read difficult works by Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz refuse to read Lezama saying that at least Borges and Paz "possess perfectly composed styles and coherent organization of thought."² But, for me, as for many readers, there is something about *Paradiso* that brings me back to it despite its difficulty. Cortázar offers an answer for why some readers are so intrigued by Lezama: "You can see how difficult it is to join this club when so many obstacles stand in your way, except that the pleasures begin with those very difficulties..."³

Reading José Lezama Lima is challenging in itself. Writing about him is even more difficult since writing requires making something concrete and empirical out of a

¹ Cortázar 142.

² Cortázar 142.

³ Cortázar 143.

novel that is so difficult to decipher that it evades logical understanding. Julio Ortega, a writer and critic who Lezama deeply respected, writes in the introduction to an essay about *Paradiso*: “writing about *Paradiso* is an enterprise condemned to insufficiency from the very beginning because this enormous novel is practically irreducible to the image of a process or a structure that criticism presumes to reveal.”⁴ *Paradiso* is so complex because Lezama loved enigmas and sought to hide his dilemmas (homosexuality, his Catholic religion) behind literary and cultural references and poetic language. Writing about Lezama can only seek to connect and decipher his references and language in relation to the problems that he hides behind the screen of his prose.

Paradiso delineates the poetic development of protagonist José Cemí from early childhood through adolescence. The novel opens with a pathetic scene of a little boy covered with welts and struggling to breathe as he fights his severe asthma. As Cemí grows up, he is faced with many trials, including his frail condition, the death of his father, and his homosexuality. Although Cemí does not participate directly in any sexual acts in the novel, he does have daydreams of phallic symbols on several occasions, which suggests that he is in fact homosexual. Because of his frequent asthma attacks, young Cemí has a hard time maintaining a natural rhythm of breathing. As Cemí matures, he searches for a more tranquil rhythm. The spasmodic rhythm of an asthma attack is akin to the convulsive rhythm of the body in a sexual act. Although Cemí does not participate in sexual acts, his asthma serves as a metaphor that connects him to sexual bodily rhythm. Cemí cannot escape being tied to his body; even though he evades the rhythms of sexual passion, his mind and soul cannot control all of his corporal rhythms. Cemí spends his

⁴ Translation mine. Ortega 39. “Escribir sobre *Paradiso* es una empresa condenada de antemano a la insuficiencia porque esta enorme novela es prácticamente irreducible a la imagen de un proceso o una estructura que la crítica presume revelar en los textos.”

childhood and adolescence in search of a peaceful spiritual rhythm that transcends the problems of the body (asthma and desire). The last sentence of the novel is: “Once more he heard: rhythm of hesychasts, now we can begin.”⁵ The hesychasts, or quietists, were a sect of contemplative monks in the fourteenth century Byzantine Church. They believed in the eradication of the will and the bodily desires through contemplation and prayer. At the end of the novel, José Cemí finally reaches a spiritual and poetic rhythm that metaphorically wipes out his asthmatic breathing and his homosexual desires.

Lezama chose the title *Paradiso* in reference to Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*.⁶ In Dante’s work, after passing through hell and purgatory Dante (both author and protagonist) ascends to paradise. Cemí’s difficulties, including his sexual dilemma, could be said to be his hell and purgatory and his ultimate discovery of the hesychastic rhythm is his paradise. This very simplistic reading implies that Lezama rejects homosexuality altogether. However, the presentation of homosexuality in the novel extends far beyond José Cemí’s experience. Cemí is the central focus of the novel, and in many ways an autobiographical figure (of Lezama), *but* there are other voices that speak other ideas and there are entire scenes where Cemí is not present. These voices and scenes paint a broader picture of Lezama’s vision outside of the confines of one character.

My analysis focuses on Lezama’s presentation of homosexuality in chapters eight and nine of *Paradiso*. Many critics avoid discussing homosexuality and dismiss it as unimportant since the protagonist does not participate in any (directly) sexual activity. The fact that Cemí does not participate only makes the topic of homosexuality that much

⁵ Translation by Rabassa p. 466. “Volví a oír de nuevo: ritmo hesicástico, podemos empezar” (Vitier 459).

⁶ Pérez Firmat 247.

more important; despite the lack of involvement of the protagonist, a large portion of the novel is dedicated to describing sexual acts. Although most of the novel shows Cemí's development as a character, chapter eight takes place almost entirely outside the protagonist's view. Why then, include this chapter if it does not have to do with the protagonist? Lezama must have had a bigger picture in mind concerning sexuality.

Emilio Bejel sums up Lezama's presentation of homosexuality in *Paradiso*:

Homosexuality in *Paradiso* is...presented as an excess that, precisely because it goes beyond the permitted limits, announces the possibility of a creative surplus. It is in this sense that the erotic and the aesthetic in Lezama Lima find their greatest creative potential, suggesting that only what goes beyond the limits can lead to a penetration into the new and the unknown.⁷

In this paper, I hope to illuminate pornographic (in chapter eight) and intellectual (in chapter nine) aesthetics that make homosexuality (and other 'deviant' or 'abnormal' sexualities) beautiful and poetic despite troubling moral questions. Lezama wanted to ask questions more than he wanted to answer them. While it is important to look for conclusions and resolutions when examining a text, in Lezama mysteries are more important than answers. The unresolved and the unknown are points of departure for fear and questioning, but also for poetry. In his essay, *Confluences*, Lezama wrote:

To know that for a few moments something comes to complete us, and that by breathing more deeply we find a universal rhythm. A breathing in and breathing out that are a universal rhythm. Things hidden are things that complete us and make a plenitude in the length of their waves. The knowing that is not ours and the not knowing that is ours form for me true knowledge.⁸

In reading and writing Lezama, I have certainly realized that it is impossible to know and to understand his world, but I hope to have come a little closer to Lezama's

⁷ 122.

⁸ Translation by Ernesto Livon-Grosman 102. "Saber que por instantes algo viene para completarlos, y que ampliando la respiración se encuentra un ritmo universal. Inspiración y espiración que son un ritmo universal. Lo que se oculta es lo que nos completa y es la plenitud en la onda. El saber que no nos pertenece y el desconocimiento que nos pertenece forman para mí la verdadera sabiduría." (1210)

universal rhythm, to have contemplated these hidden things, and to have unearthed some of the beauty of his work.

Chapter I
Poetic Pornography: A Deviation from Classic and Romantic Decorum

The eighth chapter of *Paradiso* is the first chapter in the novel that is dedicated entirely to sexuality. This chapter functions as an interpolated story since most of it takes place outside of the view of the main characters. However, the chapter is extremely important to the novel since it narrates sexuality in a way that is rare (if not nonexistent) in canonical literature; sexuality is narrated *pornographically*. Since pornography is usually thought of in a context of images, it is helpful to define what types of images do and do not constitute pornography. Lacanian psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek outlines a ‘normal’ sex scene:

In a ‘normal,’ non-pornographic film, a love scene is always built around a certain insurmountable limit; ‘all cannot be shown’; at a certain point, the image blurs, the camera moves off, the scene is interrupted, we never see directly ‘that’ (the penetration of sexual organs, etc.)” (Williams 5)

A pornographic scene goes beyond these limits and focuses on the sex organs. The camera does not move or divert the spectator’s attention. The sexual act takes center stage and its completion trumps (or even totally negates) romantic affection between the actors. Lezama’s eighth chapter functions in exactly this manner. There is no romantic reason for any of the performances of the chapter’s ‘porn stars.’ The two adolescent boys, Farralunque and Leregas, who deviate from ‘proper’ sexual decorum, do so purely because they feel like it and because they are proud of the size of their genitals and the functions they are able to perform. Why such a raw, pornographic, carnal chapter in the middle of a cerebral novel? José Lezama Lima never gave an explanation for including this chapter in his novel. I believe that Lezama wrote this chapter to show that pornography (sexual images that are not ‘built around a limit’) can be poetry. In this chapter I analyze the

images that Lezama uses to narrate the events of the chapter. I argue that this part of the novel (chapter VIII) proves that Lezama does not reject sexuality, but rather uses it to build a poetics through pornographic images.

The unromantic eroticism in this chapter (public masturbation, anal penetration, promiscuity, etc.) presents a set of very strong and sometimes even disturbing images. Lezama unabashedly writes pornographic images, shocking and even offending many of his readers. The author is very similar to the characters that appear in this chapter who go past the limits imposed by their society to perform (in Lezama's case to write) sexual acts because they feel compelled by a force stronger than society that makes it possible, or even necessary, to break the rules. This force is a sexual drive that seeks affirmation of the masculine subject's creative power. The sexual drive, to Lezama, is essential to understand the world of poetry. Like poetry, it can break free of societal conventions and restrictions to reveal a limitless and boundless reality.

Sexuality is a part of self-discovery and therefore it makes sense to include it in a Bildungsroman like *Paradiso*. In Lezama's writing, sexuality (or at least the contemplation of sexuality, a passive sexuality) is a part of the formation of the poet. Lezama's protagonist, José Cemí, does not participate in any sexual act and is only present as a voyeur in a three of the nine sexual scenes in this chapter. Cemí witnesses three masturbation 'performances' and does not look away, nor does he seem upset by what he sees and perhaps even learns from contemplating the sexual performances. Lezama tells the reader that Cemí is present and is watching but we never learn Cemí's reaction to what he sees. Since most of Lezama's novel focuses on José Cemí, many critics to believe that *Paradiso* is a purely autobiographical account of Lezama's

childhood and adolescence. Although there are many undeniably biographical elements in the novel, this chapter serves to show that Lezama had more in mind for his novel than an autobiography. *Paradiso* is not just José Cemí's world and Lezama's universe comprises much more than Cemí's experience. *Paradiso* proposes a poetics of homosexuality. This poetry arises from different types of images; in this chapter the graphic, physical images are so direct that they are often shocking. In the next chapter, Lezama hides his message behind cultural images that are difficult to decipher. Sexuality in general, especially 'deviant' sexuality like homosexuality, presents serious moral problems that terrify many religious people. Few dare to write of this troubling desire. Lezama, a homosexual Catholic, shows us that poetry is the ultimate expression of what is frightening and of what we do not understand.

In the first chapter of *Paradiso*, Baldovina, a servant of the Cemí family, is caring for five-year-old José Cemí. Little Cemí is covered in welts and is struggling to breathe due to his severe asthma. Even his testicles are covered in welts, and he later urinates in his bed. Cemí's orange, bloody urine terrifies Baldovina; she is afraid that the water of his urine will carry the boy off, perhaps to his death. The beginning of the eighth chapter is reminiscent to the beginning of the first since it brings the focus back to urination and fear of death. The setting in the eighth chapter is a primary school where teachers have to let students leave the classroom whenever they need to urinate because of an incident in which a student died of peritonitis while trying to wait for lavatory recess. If a teacher does not let his students go to the bathroom, he or she is thought to be "demented satrap" guilty of "professional sadism" or "Ottoman cruelty."⁹ The students understand that they have power over the teachers because of the incident. This creates a fight for power

⁹ Rabassa 197. "sátrapo convulsionado" "sadismo profesoral" "crueldad otomana" (Vitier 199)

between the authority figures that try to contain and punish the natural urges of their students and the adolescents whose minds are often more focused on the urges of their bodies than on their lessons.

The urge to urinate presented in the exposition of this chapter sets the focus on the genitals and serves as a transition to the sexual urge of the young students. Two students masturbate while their peers, including José Cemí, look on. The first masturbator is a boy named Farraluque, who patrols the lavatory recess. As the students file past him to use the restrooms, they always see Farraluque's penis, which he always has outside of his pants when he monitors the bathroom break. When "a priapic demon took furious possession of him"¹⁰ Farraluque would dance and stroke his member to its enormous size. Farraluque is caught by a maid looking out her window from across the street and punished by being sent to study hall on Sundays when the rest of the students get to go home to visit their families.

Cemí's intellectual and emotional formations come from his own observation and reading—not from his formal academic setting. The teachers only bore the students and try to hold them back from their primal urges (urination/ejaculation); the students do not seem to benefit from the lecture on the Gulf Stream in this chapter. The lecture is monotonous and the students keep dozing off, unable to concentrate. After Farraluque is taken out of the spotlight at school, an older student gives Cemí "*an opportunity to witness another phallic ritual.*"¹¹ (emphasis mine) These opportunities for voyeurism are fundamental to young Cemí's education. In the next chapter, Cemí participates in a dialogue about (homo)sexuality, displaying his contemplation and observation of the

¹⁰ Rabassa 197. "un demonio priápico se posesionaba de él furiosamente" (Vitier 199)

¹¹ Rabassa 198, énfasis mío. "Después que Farraluque fue confinado a un destierro momentáneo de su burlesco poderío, José Cemí *tuvo oportunidad* de contemplar otro ritual fálico" (Vitier 200).

subject. During the long and dry lecture, Leregas, an older student, masturbates in front of his classmates. The students' enraptured silence delights the teacher, who does not notice that the students are not inspired by the lecture, but rather by the performance of their classmate.

Another day, Leregas stacks books on his erect penis to add sexual tension. This act "was the reproduction of the Hindu myth of the world."¹² The teacher notices him as the class is ending and slaps him on both cheeks as the other students file out of the room. Leregas is not at all troubled and dances about like a clown. He heads off to the study hall with his tongue hanging out as the teacher goes to the office to complain. Leregas is childlike and innocent. His sexual performance was not meant as a demonstration or protest; he masturbates only because he does not resist the urge to do so: "He had not meant it as a challenge, he simply had not made the slightest effort to avoid it."¹³

Leregas embodies Lezama's ideas about the beginning of the world. His penis holds books just as the turtle held the world in the Hindu creation story. Books are a symbol of learning and achievement; in this scene these symbols of learning are actually upheld by a phallus. In *Paradiso*, sexuality serves as a foundation for understanding and knowledge. The turtle that holds up the world is a penis that holds the world of knowledge. Leregas's erection reveals his scrotum, which is alluded to as "the two roes enmeshed in a toucan nest."¹⁴ The two eggs represent a duality and the birth of limitless possibilities. The 'psychic egg,' an image that Lezama uses frequently, symbolizes both heaven and earth, both good and evil, "as well as the laws of rebirth and fulfillment of

¹² Rabassa 199. "remedaba una fábula hindú sobre el origen de los mundos" (Vitier 201).

¹³Rabassa 200. "Su acto no había sido desafiante, sólo que no hacía el menor esfuerzo de la voluntad para evitarlo" (Vitier 202).

¹⁴ Rabassa 199. "las dos ovas enmarañadas en un nido de tucanes" (Vitier 201)

personality. The student feels shut in by his universe, the university, and longs to escape by breaking the shell: he must accept the challenge in order to live.”¹⁵ Cemí witnesses these eggs before the final celestial egg that he finds in the end of the novel in his meeting with Oppiano Licario, who helps Cemí discover his destiny to be a poet. Leregas’s eggs (metaphorical) hold the poetic understanding of creation and love. The phallus in this scene upholds knowledge and reveals the challenge of creation.

The illusion to the salience of eggs with sexual arousal and the description of Leregas’s tongue and mouth suggest a feminine counterpart within Leregas’s body. As Leregas dances off to the study hall with his tongue out, the text says that one can compare it to his tongue to his glans. Both his tongue and penis are the same color, but his tongue is wet like the female genitalia. The mouth is repetitively portrayed as female: “Leregas’s mouth was receptive, purely passive, and there saliva took the place of maternal water.” All of the students would remember Leregas’s display, but Cemí’s focus was on the mouth: “Cemí remembered better the wild provincial’s mouth, inside which a small octopus seemed to be stretching, disappearing into the cheeks like smoke, sliding down the channel of the tongue, falling to pieces on the ground like an ice flower with streaks of blood.”¹⁶ The octopus is a symbol for the monsters of the Underworld, or of hell itself. Perhaps Cemí sees the feminine part of Leregas as threatening or evil. The octopus falls out and is destroyed on the ground. He is expelled from school. Leregas can no longer perform at the school—his performances ends with the octopus. This death

¹⁵ Chevalier 340.

¹⁶ Rabassa 200. “Cemí recordaba con más precisión la boca del desaforado provinciano, donde un pequeño pulpo que parecía que se desperezaba, se deshacía en las mejillas como un humo, resbalaba por la canal de la lengua, rompiéndose en el suelo en una flor de hielo con hilachas de sangre” (Vitier 202).

symbolizes the end of his androgyny; his self-sufficient masturbatory sexuality will no longer be displayed.

(a) *Bisexuality: The Carnal Flower, a Fat Spider*

The narration returns to Farraluque who now begins “a prolonged sexual chain that touched on the prodigious”¹⁷. Farraluque is forced to stay on school grounds for three Sundays instead of visiting his family like the other students. In his boredom wandering in the courtyard, he encounters the maid who told the school authorities about his public masturbation. She asks him why he is not visiting his family and he answers that he is being punished and *does not know why*, again underlying his innocence in sexual matters. She asks him to help her paint her master’s house. Upon entering the house, Farraluque sees a plump young mulatto girl who is fast asleep. Her naked body is beautifully described, almost as if taken from the *Song of Songs*: “The neat outline of her back stretched down to the opening of her solid buttocks like a deep, dark river between two hills of caressing vegetation.”¹⁸ However, the encounter quickly becomes pornographic—the description focuses on the sex organs—but still retains its poetic quality.

Farraluque undresses and gets into bed with the girl, who does not wake up, but rolls over to offer the “normality of her body.”¹⁹ He penetrates her with his “large barb” and is not satiated after he orgasms. The mulatto still does not move and, frustrated, he scans his surroundings. He spots the Spanish maid who brought him to the house. She is asleep in the next room. Her body is thin and her breasts are “hard, like primal clay...her

¹⁷ Rabassa 200. “una prolongada cadeneta sexual, que tocaba en los prodigios” (Vitier 203)

¹⁸ Rabassa 201. “La nitidez de su espalda se prolongaba hasta la bahía de sus glúteos resistentes, como un río profundo y oscuro entre dos colinas de cariciosa vegetación” (Vitier 203).

¹⁹ Rabassa 201. “ofreciendo la normalidad de su cuerpo” (Vitier 204)

carnal flower a fat spider.”²⁰ She awakes and protects her virginity by rolling over to offer “her back and her Bay of Naples...her copper circle” and allows Farraluque to make “rotund attacks of the glans and the full accumulation of its blooded helmet.”²¹ The nature of the sexual act is not important to Farraluque—he is happy with any orifice, any method of penetration, and, as we shall see, any object (whether man or woman, old or young) as long as he can achieve orgasm, which he does easily in every encounter. In other words, Farraluque is not picky since he does not differentiate male from female or old from young. The only thing that is important to him is to achieve climax.

Farraluque finishes and begins anew, this time the copulation is described as between two serpents. The Spanish girl’s anus is the conquering serpent, and his penis is a momentarily dead and flaccid serpent. The anus resembles a “monstrous organism of Cenozoic times, in which digestion and reproduction formed a single function.”²² This implies that eating and fornicating are atavistically related as a single life force. The serpent also symbolizes androgyny, as it is both the phallus and the womb in many cultures.²³ Although Christianity has only retained negative associations with the serpent, its designation in other cultures is often a fundamental symbol of life. The serpent represents the most primitive form of life in that it is “cold-blooded, armless, hairless, [and] featherless”²⁴ but this primitive form of life exists in all of us, and perhaps controls the push towards more life (i.e. reproduction), the libido. The serpent is a symbol of

²⁰ Rabassa 202. “duros como la arcilla primigenia...su flor carnal era una araña gorda” (Vítier 204).

²¹ Rabassa 202. “la llanura de sus espaldas y su bahía napolitana...su círculo de cobre...las rotundas embestidas del glande en todas las acumulaciones de su casquete sanguíneo” (Vítier 204).

²² Rabassa 202. “monstruosos organismos que aún recordaban la indistinción de los comienzos del terciario, donde la digestión y la reproducción formaban una sola función” (Vítier 204).

²³ Chevalier 855.

²⁴ Chevalier 845.

creation and healing; Greek gods of poetry, music, divination, and healing were often accompanied by snakes (hence the caduceus, the symbol of medicine).

In this scene, the Spanish girl's anus has power over Farralunque's member—even though she is being penetrated, she is not passive. She divides Farralunque's penis into three parts that she allows to penetrate in different patterns for a more varied and pleasurable experience. Sex, although very graphically depicted, is highly refined. The girl's anus is a primitive Cenozoic serpent, but she uses it in a very specialized way in order to bring about pleasure: "The Spanish girl, with the tenacity of a classical potter opening the broad mouth of an amphora with only two fingers, managed to unite the two small fibers of the opposing parts and reconcile them in the darkness."²⁵ She is like an artist uniting two parts, two serpents, into the pleasurable whole of an artistic performance.

The Spanish girl, nearing the end of the encounter, asks Farralunque for a "permanent wave."²⁶ Farralunque is initially confused since the phrase usually refers to hair styling. He soon figures out that "the vital luxury of Spanish women often leads them to use a number of Cuban expressions outside their ordinary meaning"²⁷ and understands that she means that she wants him to beat on the base of his phallus while he is inside her. As he finishes, she experiences a wave of pleasure throughout her body from her anal orgasm that continues until she falls asleep.

The day after Farralunque's visit to the house, the mulatto cook recounts her story to a maid that lives across the street. The maid's forty-something mistress is sexually

²⁵ Rabassa 202. "una tenacidad de ceramista clásico" (Vitier 205)

²⁶ Rabassa 203. "la ondulación permanente" (Vitier 205)

²⁷ Rabassa 203. "Como es frecuente en las peninsulares, a las que su lujo vital las lleva a emplear gran número de expresiones criollas, pero fuera de su significado" (Vitier 205).

frustrated in her boring marriage. The mistress makes the maid repeat details of the story, especially those pertaining to the size of Farraluque's phallus. She is obviously excited by the pornographic nature of the story and demands more detail than the Spanish maid can possibly recount. The story of Farraluque's attribute leads to his encounters the following weekend. The large size of Farraluque's penis (Lerregas's as well when he appears in the beginning of the chapter) is mentioned many times throughout the chapter. Besides being a symbol of masculine power to dominate and/or satisfy, the size represents Farraluque's everlasting sexual appetite that propels him to go from room to room in search of sexual encounters. His incessant libido gives him creative (reproductive) power.

The next Sunday, the mulatto girl's brother goes to the school to find Farraluque and tells him that a woman across the street also wants his help to whitewash her house. When Farraluque arrives, he notices that the paintbrushes outside the house are dry; they are merely props. The door is partially open and inside Farraluque sees a forty-year-old woman feigning sleep. He first tries to tease the woman by making his presence known, undressing, and covering himself with his hands. She does not budge, but when he climbs into the bed she bends closer as if she wants to communicate with Farraluque's phallus. This is the second time that Farraluque encounters a woman who is feigning sleep. The contrast between the nearness of the physical body of these women with the "distance in sleep"²⁸ of their minds or wills presents an exciting challenge for Farraluque.

She begins to give him oral sex. In the future, Farraluque would think of this pleasure as a history lesson "where it was said that a Chinese emperor...caressed a piece

²⁸ Rabassa 201. "lejanía de la ensoñación" (Vitier 203)

of jade, polished with an almost insane craftsmanship.”²⁹ His penis is the jade (as it is often referred to as in the Tao³⁰) and the polishing is the woman’s tongue. She shows off her knowledge of the different stages of *Auparishtaka*, the sacred Indian texts of oral union. Farraluque this time enjoys the perfection of a person who is sexually experienced: “His previous two sexual encounters had been primitive; now he was entering a realm of subtlety and diabolic specialization.”³¹ This pornographic scene is unified with ancient texts and the highly skilled precision of a woman who understands an art form. As soon as the woman is going to insert Farraluque’s phallus into “the sinister grotto,” he grabs her hair and ejaculates in her face. In doing this, he turns the tables: she originally has power over him, resisting his teasing and then by controlling and creating the pleasure that she gives him during oral sex. In his frenzy, he takes control and denies her the pleasure of vaginal intercourse. Farraluque remembers the beginning of the encounter: “Many years later he would remember the beginning of that adventure, associating it with a history lesson...”³² Farraluque remembers not the end of his encounter (his orgasm in the woman’s face), but rather the beginning, where the woman brings culture and poetry to a pornographic scene.

Like the previous Sunday, Farraluque is quickly ready for a new partner. Pretending to sleep in the next room lays Adolfo, the mulatto cook’s brother who fetched Farraluque from the schoolyard. Farraluque is soon frustrated because Adolfo denies him entry to every orifice and seems to enjoy hiding possible places of entry.

²⁹ Rabassa 204. “donde se consignaba que un emperador chino, mientras desfilaban interminablemente sus tropas... acariciaba una pieza de jade pulimentada casi diríamos con enloquecida artesanía” (Vitier 207).

³⁰ See Works Cited. “The Taoist Body” by Kristopher Schipper

³¹ Rabassa 204. “Sus dos anteriores encuentros sexuales, habían sido bastos y naturalizados, ahora entraba en el reino de la sutileza y de la diabólica especialización” (Vitier 207).

³² Rabassa 204. “Muchos años más tarde él recordaría el comienzo de esa aventura, asociándola a una lección de historia...” (Vitier 207)

Farraluque could not even obtain “copulation *inter femora*, an encounter in which the two thighs provoke the spray.”³³ Farraluque ends up masturbating on the boy’s chest. The boy seems to be excited by not fulfilling a sexual act of contact between bodies. The hiding/denial of entry gives Adolfo power over Farraluque since the mulatto does not allow his body to be penetrated in any way.

On the third Sunday of Farraluque’s punishment at the school, Adolfo goes to talk to him. He tells him that *someone* is interested in his fine whitewashing capabilities. By now his painting ability is an obvious metaphor for his sexual faculty. Adolfo gives Farraluque a key and the address where he will find this someone. The white-washer finds the building and enters to find himself in a charcoal warehouse. He sees light shining from a small room. In the room he encounters a naked, masked man who appears to be about fifty years old. The man takes Farraluque and “like a priest of a springtime hierophancy, he began to undress the priapic one as if turning him on a lathe, caressing and greeting with a reverential sense all the erogenous zones, principally those that flashed their length.”³⁴ The old man assumes the action in the scene. Even though he plays the ‘passive’ sexual part (he is penetrated by Farraluque), he is the one in control. He plays the role of the authority: he is the ‘priest’ and the “all-powerful incorporator of the outside world.”³⁵ The man already has everything planned out and staged, the *mise-en-scène* was carefully planned to include a mask and a hellish coal warehouse.³⁶ As Farraluque penetrates the man, the man screams and holds on to the ropes on the bags of

³³ Rabassa 206. “la copula *inter femora*, el encuentro donde los muslos de las dos piernas provocan el chorro” (Vitier 208).

³⁴ Rabassa 207. “Como un sacerdote de una hierofanta primaveral, empezó a desnudar al priápico como si lo torneases, acariciando y saludando con un sentido reverencial todas las zonas erógenas, principalmente las de mayor longitud carnosa” (Vitier 210).

³⁵ Rabassa 207. “este tan poderoso incorporador del mundo exterior” (Vitier 210)

³⁶Idea from B. Sifuentes Jáuregui, see Works Cited.

charcoal, causing his hands to bleed. The man imagines Baphomet, a symbol of knowledge, evil, and androgyny.³⁷ In his vision of Baphomet, a serpent's drooping head covers Baphomet's (apparently lack of) genitals: "his [Baphomet's] waist encircled by a serpent that crosses over the site of his sex, inexorably empty, while the serpent shows its flaccid head in oscillating suspension."³⁸ The serpent is a symbol of duality; it represents both the libido and the soul, both the male (while stretched out) and the female (while curled up). Lezama often uses the symbol of the 'anal serpent,' suggesting that this libido can be found in a passive role. The masked man is impotent and small and only finds pleasure in being penetrated. The image of the serpent as the penis in this case is the failed, limp one that has no function. In being penetrated by another serpent, the masked man momentarily has a reproductive purpose, and therefore experiences erotic satisfaction: "The serpent was incorporated in a total, masterful way, and taking in the penetrating body, he turned red, as if, instead of receiving, he was about to give birth to some monstrous animal."³⁹

Farraluque laughs at the man's pathetic sexual apparatus, as Farraluque is confident enough of his member to show it to all of his classmates. Since Farraluque is not used to reaching orgasm in so much heat, he pulls his penis out and inserts it in a crack in the charcoal. He pulls the ropes, pounds on the sacks of coal with his fists, and kicks as he orgasms. His frantic display causes the coal to start falling and the room begins to fall in on Farraluque and the mysterious man, who grab their clothes and

³⁷ For more on Baphomet, consult Carlos Raposo's article, see Works Cited.

³⁸ Rabassa 207. "rodeada la cintura por una serpiente que se cruza en el sitio el sexo, inexorablemente vacío, mostrando su cabeza la serpiente, flácida, en oscilante suspensión" (Vitier 210).

³⁹ Rabassa 207. "La maestría en la incorporación de la serpiente era total, a medida que se dejaba ganar por el cuerpo penetrante, se ponía rojo, como si en vez de recibir fuese a parir un monstruoso animal" (Vitier 210)

escape. Running from the building onto the street, Farraluque encounters the boy who gave him the address and key to his last sexual experience of his three-week punishment. The boy grins and asks if Farraluque discovered the man behind the mask's identity. Farraluque just shrugs and says that he “‘didn't feel like taking off his mask.’”⁴⁰ Farraluque seems completely indifferent in regards to the identity of his sexual subject. The boy informs him that the man with the mask was the husband of the lady who gave him oral sex.

(b) Deviancy and the Law

B. Sifuentes Jáuregui⁴¹, in an essay about the eighth chapter of *Paradiso*, notes that each sexual encounter is staged. The first four take place on beds that are described as *cuadrados* or tableaux, upon which the scene is artfully depicted. After the first encounter, the others are expecting Farraluque's arrival and feign sleep—i.e. they are acting. This highlights the pornographic nature of the encounters.

Each character acts his or her sexuality within his or her framework of desire and of prohibition. The mulatto girl, who is lying on her stomach when Farraluque sees her, rolls over. For her, sex means vaginal intercourse. Her act of rolling over shows that she does not want anal sex. The next girl, the maid, guards her personal image of virginity—that of her vagina—and rolls over to offer her anus to Farraluque. She not only succeeds in guarding her 'virginity'—she also has a pleasurable anal orgasm. It was she who notified the school about Farraluque's behavior as restroom monitor and also the one who fetches him from his punishment to help 'white-wash' the house. In Lacanian terms, she functions as the Law, but then forms the Real; in bed, the maid takes him back to a place

⁴⁰ Rabassa 209. “No me interesó quitarle el antifaz” (Vitier 211).

⁴¹ See Works Cited.

before the Law, to a place of pleasure. The Law and the Real are much like Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex. Before the child realizes that his father has a right to enjoyment of the mother over the child's right, the child is in the Real—the total union with the mother. The child realizes his split when he is able to speak. The Law is what makes society work—it is what prohibits the subject from doing anything he wants (originally it prohibits incest). We seek the Real—the plentitude and fullness that we first felt with our mothers—in sex, the union with another body. The maid acts as the Law when she restricts Farraluque from continuing his performances at school, as masturbating in public is socially unacceptable. Her role is rather contradictory since she takes him out of his punishment and then enjoys an encounter with him. She finds what Lacan would call 'gaps and holes' in the framework of the Law in order to enjoy.⁴²

The second Sunday, Farraluque goes deeper into the sexual abyss with more complicated acts. As Jáuregui notes, the second Sunday's sexcapades do not involve penetration. Although Farraluque penetrates the personal space of the bedrooms, he does not sexually penetrate his two subjects on that Sunday. The first course of Farraluque's sexual meal is the housewife across the street that hears about Farraluque through the maid. He then has his first homosexual encounter with Adolfo. The last encounter, as Jáuregui points out, is complete sadomasochism. This can be further observed by looking at the position that the older man puts himself in (he is passive) despite his authority in the encounter. The man sets up the encounter and decides what will happen, purposely putting himself through pain, possibly to achieve the sexual satisfaction that he is unable to attain with his wife due to his small size, his impotence, and his boredom in marriage.

⁴² Salecl 108.

The chapter outlines a descent in terms of sexual morality: the first encounter is ‘normal’ heterosexual coitus in the missionary position, the second is heterosexual anal sex, the third is heterosexual oral sex, the fourth is homosexual masturbation, and the fifth is homosexual sadomasochism. Farralúque is not choosy when it comes to sex—he is willing to do anything as long as he can somehow reach climax. Sexual ‘deviation’ in this chapter builds through each encounter. The culmination of the idea of deviancy is realized in the intellectual discussion between José Cemí and his two best friends in the following chapter (which I will deal with in the next part of my paper). Each act of deviancy looks back at a primordial time, where the serpents of secret desires lurk. But it is precisely these times that make up Lezama’s ‘imaginary eras’⁴³—times of spiritual, sexual and poetic Oneness.

⁴³ Las eras imaginarias.

Chapter II:
Pornography, Philosophy, Sexuality: The Image as Origin of Poetics

In the previous chapter, Lezama wrote about sexuality as a series of acts which he described using pornographic, poetic images. In this chapter, sexuality is the topic of a philosophical debate amongst the novel's protagonist, José Cemí, and his two best friends, Ricardo Fronesis and Eugenio Foción. Cemí is now a university student (in the previous chapter he was in middle school), and his role in this chapter is not as a voyeur as it was in the previous chapter, but rather as a participant in a dialogue. The previous chapter (VIII) narrated physical interaction between minor characters. Chapter IX is not physical, but rather cerebral; the interaction in this chapter is verbal and intellectual rather than pornographic. Even though Lezama writes about sexuality in totally opposite ways in these two chapters, there is a very strong link between them: the image is the origin of poetry. The image is the root, the point of origin, of both physical and intellectual creation. In this chapter of my thesis I argue that each of the three friends speaks part of Lezama's unresolved vision of sexuality and that Lezama sought to create an obscure poetics through cultural images to show the complexity of the origins, justifications, and implications of homosexuality.

The image (*imagen*) was the driving force and building block in Lezama's life-long project to explain the world. The image is the essence of poetry—and Lezama believed that life itself was poetry. Lezama saw the image like scientists see organic molecules as the basis of our existence and a reference point to explain the worlds of cells, the universes of organisms, and the cosmos of interaction between humans. Much like a scientist, Lezama wanted to understand the universe and to systematize it. Unlike a scientist, he did not seek a simple, step-by-step, empirical system. The image is the

intangible thing that allows us to take one thing in the light of another (like a metaphor) and from there, leap into another world or another understanding of our world and ourselves. This chapter is a very cultured presentation of homosexuality described by a series of images from philosophy, religion, history, and literature. By putting together these images, the friends argue whether or not homosexuality is morally legitimate and try to understand why homosexuality exists.

The conversation/debate is sparked by the homosexual activity of Baena Albornoz, the virile head of the rowing team at Upsalón, the university where the boys study. Albornoz is known and idealized for his masculinity and strength—everyone at the school has heard the story about how he bit the out-of-bounds post after his team lost a soccer game, leaving his incisors imbedded in the post. Albornoz patrols the dormitory where the team sleeps to make sure that none of the boys is engaged in homosexual activity and is cruel to those that do. Leregas, the star actor from the previous chapter and a freshmen member of the rowing team, sleeps in the basement of the dormitory. On the way back from the bathroom late at night, one of the boys from rowing team sees Albornoz being anally penetrated by Leregas and calls his other teammates to watch. Albornoz does not notice that he has an audience; he is lost in pleasure, biting the bedpost—now a display of weakness and sexual deviation rather than of masculinity. When he realizes that he has been caught, Albornoz cries and then tries to commit suicide by getting in a boat and lighting it on fire but is saved by the sailors on guard. His teammates run to spread the news, as they had been “eager for proof of the humanity and even the carnality of that eternal Pythian victor.”⁴⁴ Albornoz’s ‘deviation’ (homosexual

⁴⁴ Translation by Rabassa 244. “Los remeros que habían descendido para comprobar la humanidad, y aun la carnalidad, de aquel eterno tiunfador pítico” (Vitier 246).

act) shows his ‘humanity’ and ‘carnality,’ staining or destroying his status as a perfect and invincible masculine figure.

(a) *Sexual Deviation/Atavistic Memory/Oneness*

José Cemí is sitting with the law students when the school erupts in gossip over the discovery of Baena Albornoz’s weakness. The conversation among the law students does not make sense to Cemí so he joins the Philosophy and Letters students. Cemí finds his friend Ricardo Fronesis speaking about “sexual deviation” as “a manifestation of atavistic memory.”⁴⁵ Fronesis says that the men from the ‘fabulous’ (or ‘imaginary’) eras reproduced in their sleep through the phallus that grew into a tree or a tree that grew out of the clavicle, which produced a child. A note in Cintio Vitier’s edition of *Paradiso* explains that this idea of asexual reproduction is from Edomite⁴⁶ mythology that Lezama explains in his essay *The Imaginary Eras*.⁴⁷ The Edomites were part of Lezama’s first imaginary era called the *filogeneratriz*⁴⁸—those that reproduced without intercourse. This is much like the creation of Eve where she is ‘born’ during Adam’s sleep. Eve is ‘conceived’ without sexual intercourse, so Adam (for the time being) remains innocent.

Fronesis explains that children, like Adam before the fall, do not “distinguish any dichotomy.”⁴⁹ Children are still One, they have not discovered divisions and boundaries, so they do not differentiate gender. Fronesis says that some people with this ‘ancestral memory’ (of Oneness, of reproduction without sex) do not lose their childhood

⁴⁵ Translation by Rabassa 245. “desvío sexual...una manifestación de la memoria ancestral” (Vitier 247).

⁴⁶ The Edomites (*idumeos*) were a Biblical people descended from Esau. See ‘edom’ in Works Cited.

⁴⁷ *Las eras imaginarias* was one of Lezama’s essays on his poetic system of the world. Published after *Paradiso* in 1971.

⁴⁸ A word that Lezama invented, but that probably comes from *phylogeny*. The American Heritage Dictionary has three definitions for this term; all could be possible inspirations of *filogeneratriz*. “1. The evolutionary development and history of a species or higher taxonomic grouping of organisms. 2. The evolutionary development of an organ or other part of an organism: *the phylogeny of the amphibian intestinal tract*. 3. The historical development of a tribe or racial group.”

⁴⁹ Translation mine. “distinguir cualquier dicotomía” (Vitier 247)

innocence. These child-like people discover the existences of other individuals outside themselves, but the individuals that they desire are of the same gender—they are part of this Oneness. Fronesis explains that all primitive men, homosexuals, and poets possess *paideuma*—a Greek word that means “infantile, magic, creative root of childhood...While one has *paideuma* one has the creative force.”⁵⁰

So far, Fronesis’s arguments present homosexuality in a positive light. Homosexuality stems from an ancient age of Oneness in which individuals were androgynous. Since sexual union did not exist, neither did sin—the great divide between man and God. Children who do not yet have sexual desires have the memory of androgyny and are therefore innocent. Individuals who keep this memory as they grow older are gay—they do not participate in dichotomy, but rather manifest their desires in other individuals like themselves. Fronesis equates being gay with being primitive (having this ancestral memory of androgyny) and being a poet. The poet, then, is he who creates, who reproduces (metaphorically, his children are his poems) innocently, like the Edomites. His children come from his *paideuma*, “the configurative substance that permits primitive man, the child, and the poet always to be creators.”⁵¹ The future is this innocent man (the homosexual), who creates not children, but poetry. Later in the dialogue, Eugenio Foción creates the term ‘hypertely of immortality’ to describe this new poetic man.

There is, however, a dark side to Fronesis’s discourse on the poet/primitive man/homosexual. Fronesis seems plagued whether or not homosexuality leads to eternal

⁵⁰ Translation mine. “raíz infantil, mágica, creadora, de la niñez. Mientras se tiene *paideuma* se tiene fuerza creadora” (Vitier footnote ‘r’ 247).

⁵¹ Trans. Rabassa 246. “esa sustancia configurativa que permite al primitivo, al niño, y al poeta ser siempre creadores” (Vitier 248)

condemnation. He says that Dante writes of these child-like men pacing incessantly in hell because they are looking what's 'outside' of themselves and locate it within the *paideuma* that they share with other poetic men (homosexuals). Fronesis claims:

nowadays a man who knows how to take advantage of lucidity to pursue that enemy and that finality, that is, a poet, feels innocent because he attracts punishment, he feels a creator because he can't domesticate what's around him, or at least domesticate it with any finality, and then it's not worth it⁵²

According to Fronesis, the homosexual should realize that although he has a creative power because of his sexuality, he has to come to terms with the 'evil' inherent in homosexuality. The innocence from the ancestral times cannot really exist anymore because the poet 'knows how to take advantage of lucidity to pursue that enemy' (i.e. Satan). Fronesis seems to be saying that the poet/homosexual has to resist the temptation of physical union, which is a trap set up by the devil. Fronesis adds that one only has to light a match in the dark and lift it to his face to bring about a second darkness of a 'beheaded gorgon' that "makes us tremble as if we were going to founder."⁵³ The gorgon is a symbol of the personal guilt due to "perversion of...social, sexual, and spiritual drives."⁵⁴ Fronesis believes that homosexuality is a trap set up by the devil to lead men to sin, even though it originates in times of innocence when there was no differentiation between the sexes.

After the disturbing image of the gorgon, Foción mockingly asks permission to interrupt, causing the spectators to laugh. He complains that Fronesis's idea of homosexuality is too surreal and that Fronesis seeks to hide what he really wants to say with metaphors. In his book *Gay Cuban Nation*, Emilio Bejel says that by surreal Foción

⁵² Trans. Rabassa 246. "hoy en día un hombre que sabe aprovechar su lucidez para perseguir ese enemigo y esa fatalidad, es decir, un poeta, se siente inocente porque atrae el castigo, se siente creador porque no puede domesticar el contorno, o lo domestica con demasiada finalidad y entonces no vale la pena

⁵³ Trans. Ibid. "para que tiemble como si fuese naufragar (248)."

⁵⁴ Chevalier 446.

means psychoanalytical or Freudian.⁵⁵ Cintio Vitier says that Lezama uses Foción to express what he and the other members felt about surrealism, which it usually ended up negating the very thing that one tried to prove.⁵⁶

Regardless of whether or not Foción is implying or speaking through Freud, he does later say angrily that Fronesis believes that “homosexuality is the exception, a vice brought on by boredom or by a curse from the gods.”⁵⁷ Although Foción often seems sarcastic, he is deeply bothered that Fronesis, the object of his lust or even love, believes that homosexuality is a something abnormal and sinful. Foción is against the notion that homosexuality can be justified or explained and says that if it were an abyss that could be avoided, no one would have homosexual desires. Foción, like Lezama himself, does not believe that everything is explainable. It angers Foción that Fronesis “always refused to recognize any problems concerning sex.”⁵⁸ Fronesis’ quest to justify and understand everything perturbs Foción who says: “friendship is a mystery and love is indeterminate,”⁵⁹ referring to Socrates’ conclusion in the *Lysis*, a discourse on friendship. To Foción, there is not justification or reason for homosexuality. For him, as it was for Lezama, being unable to understand things is precisely what is beautiful about human existence.

Foción says that homosexuals have assumed the Pauline phrase “in those who are pure, everything is pure” (which is from the gospels of Matthew and Mark) as a way to claim innocence. Fronesis insisted on the innocence of the child-like homosexual; Foción

⁵⁵ p. 122.

⁵⁶ Footnote ‘t’ p. 248.

⁵⁷ Trans. 247. “el homosexualismo es la excepción, un vicio traído por el cansancio, o una maldición de los dioses. (249)”

⁵⁸ Trans. 245 “siempre rehusaba todo problematismo sexual” (Vitier 247)

⁵⁹ Trans. 247. “la amistad es un misterio y el amor es indefinido” (Vitier 248)

does not believe that a person's sexuality makes him innocent or guilty of anything. He thinks that it is ridiculous to judge a person by his sexuality. He argues that a person's sexual orientation does not equate with moral purity, since the product of sexuality is "just a gloomy juice...[that] raises out of the depths of something that can't be justified, because it is deeper than justification."⁶⁰ The gloomy juice probably refers to sperm, which is the product of desire, which is not explainable—desire is too 'deep,' too essential and enrooted to be explained. He goes on to say that "all deep sowing...is in empty space...and all sowing makes us tremble...it's done in a space with no response...that at the end responds."⁶¹ 'It is possible to read 'sowing' as sexual penetration, since sowing usually refers to the penetration of the Earth (to plant seeds). This 'sowing' makes us tremble, and the space that is being penetrated only responds in the end (in orgasm). 'Sowing' can be read as a metaphor for assimilating what is unknown with what is known, with finding a response from the void that does not answer us. Foción gives the example of Electra who gives birth to a dragon and nurses it even though it draws blood with the milk; she knows that she has to feed it to keep it from starving and despite her fear she understands what she must do as a mother. Foción concludes: "the greatness of man consists in his ability to assimilate what's unknown to him. To assimilate in depth is to give an answer."⁶²

The conversation, or rather set of monologues, is a search for understanding and justification of homosexuality. Each of the three speakers (Fronesis, Foción, Cemí), even

⁶⁰ Trans. 247. "un jugo sombrío...trae desde la profundidad un hecho que no se puede justificar, porque es más profundo que toda justificación" (Vitier 249)

⁶¹ Translation mine. "Toda siembra profunda...es en el espacio vacío...y toda siembra nos hace temblar...se hace en el espacio sin respuesta, que al fin da una respuesta. (249)"

⁶² Trans. Rabassa 247. "la grandeza del hombre consiste en que puede asimilar lo que le es desconocido. Asimilar, en la profundidad, es dar respuesta. (249)"

though they argue against each other's views, really speaks not as an individual, but as part of a collective conflict. Lezama assigns different points of view to each character, but the characters really serve to define and debate the problems of homosexuality—they are three parts of one whole. Each character has a different reaction to homosexuality: Foción accepts it and has homosexual relations, Fronesis rejects it and attempts heterosexual relations, and Cemí rejects sexuality entirely. None of these reactions seems satisfactory and each character seems to struggle in some way or another. Assimilating, or pulling together many different views and images, is the only thing that the boys can do to make sense of their desire.

Foción argues that we should not try to justify or resolve problems, as justification (and therefore resolution) is impossible. Rather, we should *assimilate* (bring together) what we do know with our desire. Foción says that man has assimilated things that are alike and that are different through all of time. He gives the example of the Dioscuri from ancient Greek mythology. The Dioscuri were twin brothers, Caster and Pollux, who never fought and always loved each other. The Dioscuri implies homosexuality (assimilation of sameness) and deep friendship even though the brothers were opposites as Caster was mortal and Pollux immortal (assimilation of difference). Foción then says: “ever since the fifth century B.C., the most frequent Taoist themes were the mirror, the androgyne, the Great One, the sphere, the egg...” These symbols (images) present dualities assimilated as one.

(b) Man's Hope for Immortality: The Possession of Beauty Forever

In order to speak about physical, carnal, love versus spiritual, chaste love, Foción resorts to two of Plato's works, *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium*. Foción says that it is

strange that Socrates argued to justify homosexuality since homosexuality was not an exception in Greek society, nor was it looked down upon. Socrates himself was a homosexual that felt no guilt—Socrates did not feel that he was violating “any law of reminiscence or immortality.”⁶³ Later Foción says that Socrates’s position on the topic of homosexuality was neutral and intermediary, or ‘unresolved’ like the position of love itself, which, according to Socrates’s teacher Diotima, exists to form a link between the gods and mankind.

Foción is ambivalent in his interpretation of the dialogue about love between Socrates and Diotima that Socrates reenacts for his friends. He says that Socrates and Diotima ‘obviously’ have a mutual distrust. This implies that Socrates advocated physical love, or at least he did not accept Diotima’s claim that the love of one form (a specific person) should develop into the appreciation of the “sea of beauty.”⁶⁴ Foción says that Diotima “thinks that the body of a handsome young man must be transcended into the science of the beautiful.”⁶⁵ He says that Socrates, in evoking Diotima in for his speech on love at the dinner with his friends in *The Symposium*, said that it is “through the body that Eros produces the beautiful, the good, and immortality.”⁶⁶ A reading of *Symposium* reveals that Socrates was not necessarily advocating physical love (contrary to what Foción implies), which is further exemplified by his rejection of Alcibiades’s attempts to seduce him. Foción questions whether Socrates was serious in his presentation of Diotima’s speech to his friends; perhaps Socrates was making fun of them (perhaps for their overtly physical love relationships or simply their ignorance of love).

⁶³ Trans. Rabassa 248. “ninguna ley de la reminiscencia o de la inmortalidad (249)”

⁶⁴ Plato 102.

⁶⁵ Trans. Rabassa 248. “Diotima cree que el cuerpo del joven hermoso debe trascenderse en la ciencia de lo bello (Vitier 250).”

⁶⁶ Trans. Ibid. “a través de los cuerpos el Eros produce lo bello, lo bueno, y la inmortalidad (Vitier 250).”

Diotima and Socrates's dialogue about love in Plato's *The Symposium* brings up several points that are central to understanding the heart of what *Paradiso* says about immortality as a central drive of human existence. Diotima says that love works as a daemon, an intermediary spirit between God and man. When man loves the beautiful, Socrates says, he wants to possess it (and possession implies sexual union). Diotima explains that there is a human desire for creation of beauty that often manifests itself in a reproductive desire. Eros, the desire of love, exists because of man's hope of immortality—to possess the beautiful forever. This Eros, for homosexuals, has to be different since homosexuals cannot have children to make them immortal (to make their lineage continue to exist on the Earth). They possess the beautiful, i.e. men, but their desire for immortality is only satisfied poetically. Their sexuality does not produce offspring, but it gives them a different form of creativity. Love, the spirit or daemon that links God and man still acts between homosexuals and God. This link, for homosexuals, allows them to create intellectually, allows them to be prophets of artistic beauty. They have a destiny and a drive to create, to write, to leave something of themselves in the world that they cannot leave through having children. Lezama felt destined to be a poet and to write, leaving his legacy as the only male child in his family through his writing since he would not have children.

Eros, according to the dialogue between Agathon and Socrates in the *The Symposium*, means that love desires, that it recognizes its own lack. This desire to fill the lack brings up a question very central to *Paradiso*: how should passion/love/desire be manifested? The swelling and desire to impregnate that Diotima references in her teachings is a force of creation that has other outlets besides sexual encounters—namely

poetry. The poet employs his passion intellectually instead of physically. The poet manifests his love in poetry and creates a space that endures throughout time; he does not need human reproduction to be immortal. But does this poet require human love or should he be chaste? Foción speaks of Socrates, known for being a homosexual (carnal love) but also for his intellectual creation ('spiritual' or at least non-sexual love/creation) and says: "He [Socrates] is abandoned as always to his daemon in matters of Eros; his position is resolved like those same daemons, between the celestial and the earthly. But that seems to tie it to what is also an enigma in the Catholic world: is love *caritas*?"⁶⁷ Socrates is, like the daemons, between the heavenly and the earthly, he participates in both heavenly and earthly love. Heavenly love is the spiritual, chaste side of love—*charitas* in the Catholic imaginary and the Venus Urania for the Greeks⁶⁸. Earthly love is the other side of love, the physical side, which is neglected or even distained in Catholicism. The Greeks had two Aphrodites that together formed the concept of Love. The Venus Urania represents the spiritual side of love while the Venus Poularia is the carnal side. If Socrates, a man of great creation, a model for poets, lived resolved between the two, why should love be just *charitas*, why not believe that carnal love has equal importance as spiritual love? To the Greeks, the two loves formed one whole and each was necessary for the other.

This, of course, is Foción's argument, as the friend who acts on his carnal (homosexual) desires. However, his voice is valid as one of Lezama's voices as he brings

⁶⁷ Trans. Rabassa, except for the word 'daimon' which Rabassa translates as 'demon', which to me has a negative connotation that daemon, a Greek word for an intermediary spirit, does not. Had Lezama meant to say 'demon' he would have used the word 'demonio' as he does frequently in other passages. "Abandonado como siempre a su daimon en materia del Eros, su posición se resuelve como esos mismos daimones, entre lo estelar y lo terrestre. Pero eso parece unirlo a lo que es también un enigma del mundo católico: el amor es *charitas*? (Vitier 250)"

⁶⁸ There are two Aphrodites that form the concept of Love. The Venus Urania is the spiritual side of love while the Venus Poularia is the carnal side.

Catholicism up for comparison with other beliefs. Lezama uses Greek imagery constantly throughout the novel—he values Greek ideals. The dichotomy that forms into a whole is another constant theme in Lezama. The difference between these two loves (spiritual vs. physical) seems to trouble him. The homosexual cannot create offspring with his physical love—it therefore seems to have no purpose in a homosexual’s life. Foción highlights the Greek conception of two opposites as a complimentary whole to defend sexuality as something essential for the understanding love and beauty.

(c) Hypertely: Evolution toward a New Species

After setting up this framework for defining love, Foción launches the theme of sexuality directly. He argues against the “error that custom has made acceptable,” which is sexual relations with women. He opens his case with a passage from Ecclesiastes: “There is a way that to man seems straight; yet its end is the way of death.”⁶⁹ He says that this phrase should be posted “over the entranceway to any meditation on sexual matters.”⁷⁰ Mankind can ‘change directions’, i.e. become homosexuals, at any point in the future since many theories of fertilization uphold that it is possible to reproduce without heterosexual union. Foción enumerates many such ‘theories,’ which deny any necessity of heterosexual union. He mentions that the female only needs a certain temperature to conceive a child and that children can grow from the trees that sprout from men. This former androgynous state of man must be true, he argues, because women did not appear in the creation story in the Bible until the seventh day. Man existed on the fifth day—

⁶⁹ Trans. Rabassa 248. “Hay camino que al hombre parece derecho; empero su fin son caminos de muerte.” From Proverbs 16:25.

⁷⁰ Trans Ibid. “a la entrada sobre cualquier meditaci3n sobre lo sexual (Vitier 250)”

“what if woman hadn’t risen up? ...everything that we consider sexual deviation today rises up in a reminiscence, or in something...I call hypertely of immortality.”⁷¹

The concept of hypertely of immortality is vital to Lezama’s writing on homosexuality. Foción coins the phrase in this passage and the friends use it frequently afterwards. *Hypertelia* has to do with the resurrection of Christ in the Apostles’ Creed⁷²: or simply a state of fullness or an unending finality (death in the world but immortality beyond it). Foción defines it as “a search for creation, for a succession of the creature beyond all causality of blood and even spirit, the creation of something made by man as yet completely unknown to the species. The new species would be the justification for the hypertely of immortality.”⁷³ The evolutionary (scientific) definition of hypertely is “a state in which an organism’s body size or body structure becomes over-specialized such that it becomes a disadvantage...many traits which arise from sex selection tend to be disadvantageous overall to the organism (in terms of survival) but advantageous when the organism wants to attract a mate.”⁷⁴ Lezama’s use of the term does not imply a disadvantage but does imply an evolution toward a new species. This ‘species’, in part, is Cemí, who evolves throughout the novel and establishes his immortality through his calling to write and his developed poetic sensibility.

Lezama’s ‘hypertely of immortality’ could be read as a religious term describing celibate poeticism. Actually, the entire novel can be read as Cemí’s journey to understand his special ability to create poetry, to leave his past (the story of his family) through

⁷¹ Trans 249. “Y si no hubiera surgido la mujer? ...Todo lo que hoy nos parece desvío sexual, surge en una reminiscencia, o en algo [que yo llamo]...una hipertelia de la inmortalidad.”

⁷² Pellón 26.

⁷³ Trans. 250. “una busca de la creación, de la sucesión de la criatura, más allá de toda causalidad de la sangre y aun del espíritu, la creación de algo hecho por el hombre, totalmente desconocido aún por la especie. La nueva especie justificaría toda hipertelia de la inmortalidad. (Vitier 251)”

⁷⁴ On-line Medical Dictionary.

writing instead of through sexual reproduction (having children to continue the family). However, the extensive pornographic descriptions and contemplations of sexuality in *Paradiso* leave the reader with a feeling that Lezama intended more than just the story of a celibate poet. Even though Cemí does not directly participate in any sexual activity that the reader ‘sees,’ he is a part, or at least a voyeur, of overtly sexual and poeticized acts. The contemplation of these acts is important in his poetic formation, even though he seems to reject or even be above sexuality.

If ‘hypertely of immortality’ is equivalent to poetic celibacy and spiritual love, then it is strange that it is Foción, the ‘deviant’ character, who comes up with the term. Right after Foción proposes the concept of ‘hypertely of immortality,’ Fronesis interrupts and asks if it is the same as the Venus Urania (spiritual love). Foción answers by describing sexual relations with women (but not with men) as immoral. Due to his conception of homosexual relations as immoral, Fronesis does not understand that Foción is alluding to offspring of the mind conceived by the poeticism of homosexual love. Foción goes on to the “undefined dyad” which he describes as a Greek conception of sexuality that did not have to have “finality in its meaning.” He also brings up the Hindus who at certain times considered contact with women to be sinful.

Foción frequently scoffs at the idea of defined sexual organs as the only points for sexuality as proposed by Freud and most modern Western philosophies. He gives the example of Barba Jacob to explain the ‘hypertely of immortality.’ Jacob was a heretic put to death for his homosexual activity and his belief that copulation with Eve, and not eating the apple, was the fall to sin. Foción says that what he wants to show is that what is today called “the exception, the deviation, the sickness, the clandestine, criminal

infrasexuality, or whatever you want to call it, was predominant.”⁷⁵ In other words, throughout human history, homosexuality and other types of sexuality that ‘deviate’ from heterosexual intercourse have been the norm and it is only recently that society has thought of alternative sexualities as sick and wrong. He enumerates many societies where homosexuality was normal or even noble.

Foción seems to be arguing that the new ‘species’ created by the hypertely of immortality cannot be obtained with sexual relations with women, since they represent the fragmentation, the difference of the sexes, of the poetic Oneness broken by heterosexual copulation. Perhaps this new immortal man would come from the two sides of Greek love: the Venus Poularia, carnal love, and the Venus Urania, spiritual love. That is, the Venus Poularia as a homosexual union reminiscent of the times before the division of the sexes combined with the spiritual love of poetry, the Venus Urania evoked from the images of unity, of Oneness before the fall. Attaining an immortal species that excludes women requires that the offspring of the boys be conceived from intellectual and poetic means. The ‘sexual problem’ can be solved by a ‘reminiscence’ or return to innocence and homosexual sex.

Foción brings up a German doctor who spread propaganda advocating the spread of homosexuality and says that propaganda always “injures at the root the slow emanation of everything true.”⁷⁶ Trying to win people over through propaganda just leads them to take the opposite viewpoint. He gives the example of professors trying to spread Attic simplicity (the elegant and concise style of Athenians) but the result of their effort

⁷⁵Trans. Rabassa 253. “esa excepción, ese desvío, esa enfermedad, esa infrasexualidad clandestine delincencial, o como se quiera llamar, ha predominado (Vitier 253)”

⁷⁶ Trans. Rabassa 251. “daña en su raíz la lenta evaporación de todo lo verdadero (Vitier 253).”

was “a revival of Góngora and the baroque.”⁷⁷ This theory might explain Foción’s subtlety in his pursuit of Fronesis; a more overt effort or confrontation might end in complete rejection. Also, Lezama’s display of homosexuality, although obviously present, is difficult to decode its message in its obscurity. Lezama’s argument, if he is indeed arguing to promote homosexuality like the German doctor, must be subtle, must be obscure and difficult to decode—otherwise people will simply take the opposite side.

The comparison to the professors who try to spread Attic simplicity but end up evoking a revival of the baroque is particularly relevant for Lezama’s novel. His characters (like Fronesis earlier) claim to be arguing their points with the clarity of the Greeks, but the images and metaphors are very ornate and obscure. They hide their arguments with so many literary, religious, and cultural references that virtually any reader gets lost. But if they did not, it would prevent this ‘slow emanation of everything true,’ not to mention create even more controversy and censorship of the novel.

Foción compares two figures of the baroque, Shakespeare and Bach, and highlights what he considers to be the main difference between them. He says that the comparison is valid since Shakespeare has a “mysterious fullness” and Bach has a “harmonious fullness.”⁷⁸ Bach was visible in his home, performing, giving lessons. Shakespeare, on the other hand, mingled with the people at The Globe anonymously to see what they would say about his plays. Bach had a perfect understanding of sound, but “Shakespeare’s baroque depends on going into the inner ear, which crackles and elevates the spark of his metaphors.”⁷⁹ This metaphor is like an antler of a deer, and when he

⁷⁷ Trans. Rabassa 252. “es la vuelta a Góngora y al barroco (Vitier 253).”

⁷⁸ Trans. Ibid. “plentitud misteriosa... plentitud armoniosa (Vitier 253).”

⁷⁹ Trans. Ibid. “el barroquismo de Shakespeare depende de un internamento en el caracol que cruje y levanta el chisporroteo de sus metáforas (Vitier 254).”

sleeps little birds gather on the antlers. Shakespeare seems to be to Foción like the ancient androgynous that could give birth through their creation, through nonsexual means. It is important to note that Shakespeare had homosexual tendencies whereas Bach was deeply religious and followed Protestant doctrine. Foción ends his discussion of the two: “Shakespeare has the same fullness as Bach, but I’m not convinced he would have got married twice and fathered fourteen children.”⁸⁰ In other words, fullness or completeness does not come from societal expectations of sexual and social behavior and the deviation from the norm adds an enriching aspect of mysteriousness to one’s poetic sensibility.

Foción ends his argument with the tale of the Count of Villamediana, a poet and friend of Luis de Góngora’s. Francisco de Quevedo, an enemy of the two, claimed that Villamediana’s death was greeted with ‘more applause than pity.’ After his death, Villamediana was tried for sodomy and one of his servants was put to death for the crime. Foción puts the money-squandering, scandalous, sly man into a Christ-like position; he says that he was laid out with his arms open, like a cross. A chapter note in Cintio Vitier’s edition of *Paradiso* says of Foción’s allusion to Villamediana: “his apology for his demonism and his final image ‘laid out before the people of God, with his arms open in a cross,’ constitute, in our [Vitier’s and his collaborators’ of the edition] opinion, the most powerful moment in Foción’s tormented arguments.”⁸¹ Foción and Villamediana are both “poets of verbal rebellion”—and Lezama himself is ensconced in the discussion as a troubled homosexual.

(d) A Philomath: Someone Excessively Given to Study

⁸⁰ Trans. 252. “Shakespeare tiene la misma plentitud de Bach, aunque no estoy seguro que se haya casado dos veces y engendrado catorce hijos (Vitier 254).”

⁸¹ Trans. Mine. “la apología de su demonismo y su imagen final ‘tendido ante el pueblo de Dios, con los brazos abiertos en cruz,’ constituyen a nuestro juicio el momento más alto en las tortuosas argumentaciones de Foción (Vitier 495).”

When Foción ends his speech, his face is red since he is not used to speaking for long periods of time in front of more than one person. He then smiles with “voluptuousness, irony, malice, provocation, [and] arrogance.”⁸² It is obvious that he has spoken to provoke Fronesis to speak. Fronesis begins by addressing his awareness and annoyance of Foción’s intentions. Fronesis says that Foción was snidely calling him a ‘philomath,’ or someone “excessively given to studying.”⁸³ Foción, in response says: “You know...that you’re my closest friend and that I haven’t wanted to displease you. It’s just that you’re rather timid and you almost always hide the essence of what you’re thinking.” Fronesis responds that this is the only thing that could possibly be offensive since he aims to be as clear as possible, like the Greeks.

Ironically, Fronesis brings little classical clarity to his discourse. He says that the only thing that “brings him to silence” is when he has the “sensation of death.”⁸⁴ Fronesis later fights his homosexuality by having sex with his girlfriend Lucía, which he accomplishes by cutting a hole out of his shirt to hide her genitals. It must be this sexual psychosis that brings the clarity that Fronesis adores into darkness. The topic of sexuality silences him since he feels an impending death. The argument between Foción and Fronesis continues; Fronesis accuses Foción of contriving his argument and drawing conclusions by relating things that have no relationship. Foción’s rebuttal to Fronesis’s mocking is: “but at least my deliriums aren’t derivative and we wait anxiously for you to show us your real deliriums.”⁸⁵ Foción means to say that Fronesis hides behind obscure references (religious, literary, etc.) without any empirical observation. Fronesis begins his

⁸² Trans 254. “voluptuosidad, ironía, malicia, provocación, arrogancia alegre (Vitier 255).”

⁸³ Footnote from Vitier. Trans. mine. “excesivamente dado al estudio. (255)”

⁸⁴ Trans. 254. “[le] lleva al silencio...la sensación de la muerte (256)”

⁸⁵ Trans. 255. “Pero al menos mis delirios no son derivados, ansiosamente esperamos que nos muestres tus verdaderos delirios. (Vitier 256)”

rebuttal: “From what I’ve seen and heard, so that no one will follow Foción in believing that my deliriums are derivative, I’m going to extract some malignant examples.”⁸⁶

Before he gives his ‘malignant examples,’ Fronesis comments that dialogues about homosexuality are difficult because they end up being overgeneralizations or they barely skim the surface of the problem. All of Fronesis’s ‘malignant examples’ of ‘deviant’ sexuality are “distinguished men, with the gruff voice of a Sioux war drum.”⁸⁷

These men are much like Fronesis himself, (and like the rowing captain Baena Albornoz from the beginning of the chapter) who is a respected archetypal university student who is attractive, athletic, and virile on the outside but who fights a ‘deviant’ sexuality behind the scenes in his personal life. Fronesis is respected by his peers as a masculine figure, but later in the novel, he fails in his attempt to have intercourse with his girlfriend because he is not attracted to her. The descriptions of these deviant acts are beautiful and display Fronesis’s empathy towards them. One ‘robust Spaniard’ puts his foot in the ocean and “he tingles with a voluptuous delight, his body seems to have been traversed by a cramp that clears the channels of his veins, and he lets out an ‘Ah!’ in which all his virility collapses.”⁸⁸ Another is a good father who can only “release his happy liquid”⁸⁹ when tied up by a whore. He also says that a professor who had visited the university wore women’s underwear to excite him before the sexual act. Fronesis claims that all of these deviations come from a “reminiscence of the reduction of sexuality”⁹⁰ and that these men were and were not homosexuals. Homosexuality, to Fronesis, is a matter of

⁸⁶ Trans. 255. “De lo que he visto y oído, para que no se crea con Foción que mis delirios son derivados, voy a extraer algunos ejemplos malignos” (Vitier 257).

⁸⁷ Trans. 256. “todos eran ínclitos varones, con la voz ronca como un parche sioux (Vitier 257).”

⁸⁸ Trans. 255. “Cruje por la delicia voluptuosa, su cuerpo parece recorrido por un calambre que aclara los canales venosos, y nos da un ‘¡ay!’ por donde se le ha derrumbado toda la virilidad (Vitier 257).”

⁸⁹ Trans. 256. “expresar su líquido feliz (Vitier 257).”

⁹⁰ Trans. 256. “la reminiscencia de un menoscabo de la sexualidad (Vitier 257).”

deviation and can be categorized with other deviations from normal sexuality. Cemí's discussion later in the text of St. Thomas of Aquinas touches on this idea of a natural sexuality that serves as the sole source of "moral" sexuality in the Catholic doctrine. Fronesis struggles with the moral implications a deviant sexuality so much that he tries to refute his deviance by attempting heterosexual intercourse. However, his poetic descriptions of deviant practices show that he sees beauty in them and that he does not condemn these practices as wrong.

Fronesis then cites examples of famous people who revered homosexuality and contradicted those who sought to deride it. Caesar was often told that he was more of a queen than a king and he was not offended since he knew that "his decisions would be those of a god, descended, paradoxically, from the goddess Venus."⁹¹ Benvenuto Cellini, when accused of being a sodomite for having a mistress, replies that he is too lowly a man to perform such great deeds of which only kings and gods are capable. Fronesis says that homosexuality is just a mask, or a generalization for a whole range of deviations:

So extensive are the sensations that they hide behind the mask of the word 'homosexual,' which includes everyone, from those great warriors who were troubled by undeniable sexual deviation, to men who cling to a halfway normal sexuality but who tingle and twist when their skin savors the insinuation of the marine algae, receiving with the splash of the waters the investiture of their maternal spirit.

When these men indulge their 'deviant' desire, they feel the 'maternal spirit.' This maternal spirit is the latent feminine side reminiscent of androgyny. The 'abnormal' sexualities of these men are due to a special sensitivity to the androgynous roots that we all have, according to Lezama's theory that Fronesis began arguing in the very beginning of the dialogue. This special sensitivity allows these men to be poets because they perceive the harmony and unity of the primordial androgynous man.

⁹¹ Trans. 256. "sabiendo que sus decisions...serían las de un dios que descendía, paradójicamente, de la diosa Venus."

Fronesis goes on to say that sexuality is something intangible in the body that the Greeks expressed through what they called *dromenon*, the “realized fact.”⁹² This concept is linked to the idea of the body as the manifestation of the image; the body is “the permanence of an endless wave, the form of memory, that is, of an image.”⁹³ Fronesis says that every man has a measure of intangibility and in which lies his sexuality. Again, Fronesis is presenting the illusive nature of sexuality which comes from a remembrance of times when sexuality was more fluid (such as before Eve or the androgynous myths) and finds its way through mutations of this image. He says:

it is impossible for me to speak of any form of sexuality, because to speak of something that can exist in its communicative appearance but not in its essence, that can also exist in its communicative essence but not in its appearance, is like speaking of some formal attribute that can be in its body but not in its shadow, or in its shadow and not in its body. And since the body is the image of God and the shadow is the image of the devil, it's talking about something that can be both a creator in God and a creator in the devil.⁹⁴

To Fronesis, appearance is the body and its ‘natural’ sexuality for reproduction whereas essence is the shadow of the body where its reminiscent reality and true sexuality resides. The communicative appearance is the body and the expectation of heterosexual intercourse for which it is designed and its essence is the actual sexual feelings of the individual, often riddled with deviations. The communicative essence is the interaction of the essence through a desired (often deviant) sexual act and its appearance remains much like its communicative appearance, in that the body still looks like it was made for a more ‘correct’ sexuality. The problem that plagues Fronesis is that

⁹² Trans. 247. “el hecho realizado” (Vitier 258)

⁹³ Trans. 257. “la permanencia de un oleaje innumerable, la forma de un recuerdo, es decir una imagen” (Vitier 259).

⁹⁴ Trans. 257-258. “es para mí casi imposible hablar de cualquier forma de sexualidad, pues algo que puede existir en su apariencia comunicante y no en su esencia, como puede existir también en su esencia comunicada y no en su apariencia, es como si hablásemos de algún atributo formal que puede estar en su cuerpo pero no en su sombra, o en su sombra pero no en su cuerpo. Y como el cuerpo es imagen de Dios y la sombra imagen del diablo, es hablar de algo que lo mismo puede ser creador en Dios, como puede ser creador en el diablo (Vitier 259).”

this gives the darkness but as much creative power and importance as the light. The darkness is the shadow (the ‘essence’), which represents both the reminiscent past of beautiful androgynous times before sin and the presence of the devil. The light then, is the appearance, the male body in its present state, made in the image of God to reproduce heterosexually. To Fronesis, it is the devil that meddles with God’s plan for human sexuality and one must therefore avoid deviant sexuality, as it is not only a manifestation of memory, but of the devil himself. Fronesis accuses Foción of “finding the same qualities in God and the devil.”⁹⁵

Foción shouts his response to Fronesis’s accusation. He says that Fronesis knows that the Gospel of St. Matthew affirms that eunuchs can enter into heaven. Vitier notes that Foción is mistaken on two points: first, Foción is arguing that eunuchs are homosexuals, rather than people who are celibate; second, he is incorrect in asserting that they will go to heaven, as Christ does not guarantee this even to those that are physically sound and choose celibacy for spiritual reasons.⁹⁶ Fronesis first refuses to answer someone who yells at him and then mocks Foción’s reference as a poor and malevolent attempt to support his thesis. Noticing Foción’s anger, Fronesis pats his shoulder and then moves his hand to his neck and he notes that Foción is sweating profusely. He declares that it is the moment to announce that Foción is his best friend—but also his “closest intangible, and the more you [Foción] unmask yourself, it seems as if you’re intangibly going along picking up all those masks that you abandon.”⁹⁷ Here, Fronesis’s complaint mirrors Foción’s earlier complaint that Fronesis covers up the real meaning of what he is

⁹⁵ Trans. 258. “[Foción] puede encontrar la misma cualificación [sic] en Dios y en el diablo (Vitier 259).”

⁹⁶ See Vitier 496, note 41.

⁹⁷ Trans. 258. “mejor inasible y cuanto más te desenmascaras parece que tu inasible va recogiendo todas esas máscaras que vas abandonando (Vitier 260).”

saying. Both friends express frustration in understanding each other, perhaps due to their opposite viewpoints regarding homosexuality: Foción accepts and acts upon his desires while Fronesis fights them. However, it is also highly possible that the two are acting; the narrator says that Foción does not respond to Fronesis's compliments because the two know that they have a firm friendship that will not be disturbed by petty disagreement. It is "pure theater" and the two "underneath it all, took it as a joke, especially amusing because only he [Foción] and Fronesis shared the secret."⁹⁸

(f) The Universal Pneuma and Androgynous Myth

Fronesis continues his thoughts with the universal *pneuma*, which literally means 'breath.' *Pneuma* refers to the religious philosophy of the Stoics regarding the substance that makes and separates beings (like the modern conception of atoms), is responsible for the senses, and makes up the soul and the "commanding faculty (*hêgemonikon*)"⁹⁹ in animals capable of reason. According to the Stoics, a person with well-disciplined reason will not commit wrong acts:

Though a person may have no choice about whether she has a particular rational impression, there is another power of the commanding faculty which the Stoics call 'assent' and whether one assents to a rational impression is a matter of volition. ...all desires are not only (at least potentially) *under the control* of reason, they *are* acts of reason.¹⁰⁰

Fronesis discusses the *pneuma* as something that "allowed an interior space to exist in bodies." The inside of the body is the only space that allows us to feel what fills it. Our soul, reason, and our physical existence itself are made of *pneuma*, this life-giving force that creates and fills the "corporeal labyrinth."¹⁰¹ Fronesis says that the permanence

⁹⁸ Trans. 259. "en el fondo lo tomaba como una broma, que se le hacía agradable, pues sólo participaban Fronesis y él en el espíritu secreto de esas alusiones (Vitier 260)."

⁹⁹ Baltzly,

¹⁰⁰ Baltzly. See Works Cited.

¹⁰¹ Trans. 259. "laberinto corporal (Vitier 260)."

of the body is surprising due to the fact that “from instant to instant it is made and unmade with a disgust so great that one marvels that man is not yet an extinct species.”¹⁰² Fronesis is disgusted by all sexuality: homosexual sex abhors him since he considers it an evil temptation, but heterosexual, ‘normal’ sexuality is also disgusting to him, as (in an episode following the dialogue) Fronesis cannot have sex with his girlfriend without hiding her genitals with his shirt. Fronesis adheres to a Stoic view of the world and tries to use his ability to reason to fight deviant sexuality. The problem is that he still desires men, which according to Stoic thought is an act of reason. Each of the three boys is very educated and values his ability to think and argue; Fronesis’s inability to reconcile his reasoning and his desires create his inner turmoil and disgust.

Androgynous myths form the next part of Fronesis’s monologue. A Mayan creation story depicts two humans that look to be androgynous and support a large *pneuma* between their mouths. Fronesis comments that it is odd how much the pineal gland atrophies over time. One interpretation of this atrophying is that the human sexual function decreases or at least changes with time. The pineal gland, as perhaps Lezama knew, is responsible for the melatonin production that controls sexual functions. Children produce more melatonin than adults and it is thought that melatonin inhibits sexual development. “Just before puberty the levels decline and there appears to be a strong correlation with the onset of sexual maturity. With advancing age, MLT [melatonin] secretion is reduced, sometimes to undetectable levels.”¹⁰³ The atrophying of the pineal gland that Lezama refers to could refer to this medical explanation for the transition from childhood to adolescence and sexual desires. However, this is a very modern discovery.

¹⁰² Trans. 259. “se hace y deshace por instantes, con un disgusto tan grande que lo maravilla es que no sea ya una especie extinguida (Vitier 260).”

¹⁰³ Jan et al. See Works Cited.

The Greek medical philosopher, Galen (ca. 130-ca. 210 AD) believed that the brain was “filled with ‘psychic pneuma,’ a fine, volatile, airy or vaporous substance which he described as ‘the first instrument of the soul.’¹⁰⁴ Most people in Galen’s time believed that the pineal gland served to regulate the flow of the soul in the body. In his *Treatise of Man* in 1640 René Descartes explained his reasoning for believing that the soul resides in the pineal gland:

My view is that this gland is the principal seat of the soul, and the place in which all our thoughts are formed. The reason I believe this is that I cannot find any part of the brain, except this, which is not double. Since we see only one thing with two eyes, and hear only one voice with two ears, and in short have never more than one thought at a time, it must necessarily be the case that the impressions which enter by the two eyes or by the two ears, and so on, unite with each other in some part of the body before being considered by the soul. Now it is impossible to find any such place in the whole head except this gland; moreover it is situated in the most suitable possible place for this purpose, in the middle of all the concavities; and it is supported and surrounded by the little branches of the carotid arteries which bring the spirits into the brain.¹⁰⁵

Descartes’ theory is relevant in terms of Lezama because it suggests a unity of two parts (of two eyes, two ears, etc.). It is also interesting that this little part of the brain is both the ‘seat of the soul’ and the ‘place where our thoughts are formed.’ The soul and the faculty of reason are part two parts of one whole. Perhaps it is because of the unity that Descartes suggests can be found in the pineal gland that Fronesis (speaking for Lezama) says: “Could it [the pineal gland] be like a mirror coming from the sheath formed by the cerebral cortex, to be fogged over at gathering up that breath and carrying it as far as the hole in the nape of the neck, from which the new creature would spring forth?”¹⁰⁶ In the unity of the dualities of the body and of the soul and reason, a child could be born. In the androgynous times, before the atrophy of the gland that caused the duality of the sexes and the sexual drive, a child could be born without intercourse.

¹⁰⁴ Lockhorst. See Works Cited.

¹⁰⁵ Lokhorst. (Quoted from Descartes) See Works Cited.

¹⁰⁶ Trans. 259. “¿Sería como un espejo, venido de la lámina que forma la corteza cerebral, para empañarse al recoger ese hálito y llevarlo hasta el agujero de la nuca, donde brotaría la nueva criatura? (Vitier 260)”

Fronesis calls the idea of reproduction without intercourse ‘poetic delirium,’ but cites Lezama’s beloved Tertullian phrase: ‘It is certain because it is impossible.’

Fronesis abandons ‘poetic delirium’ for the ‘scientific delirium’ of the sensory organs. The Hindu Code of Manu lists eleven such organs, which include the “inner orifice of the intestinal tube.”¹⁰⁷ Fronesis adds that this Hindu Code also includes prayers in the morning for the forgiveness of sins that may have been committed unawares during the night and evening prayers for unintentional sins committed during the day. He does not explain the connection between the eleven sensory organs and the prayers, but by putting the two together, Fronesis implies the sinfulness of any sexual contact (whether hetero or homosexual).

In examining homosexuality from a “scientific” perspective, Fronesis insists that it is more important to examine evolution in terms of respiration and digestion than in terms of reproduction since life has to first be able to sustain itself (i.e. breathe and digest) before reproducing. Fronesis speaks of certain species of fish, amphibians, and snakes to explore respiration and digestion. Fronesis’s descriptions of respiration and digestion are very sexual. The first fish that he mentions is the lungfish, a real species of fish that can breathe on land. Speaking of this fish, Fronesis says: “Both lungs and gills dilate in search of the upper layers of air, in the naturalists’ term a ‘labyrinthine respiration,’ by which the intestinal serpent...breathes when the lungfish crawls all the way up to the leaves of a palm tree.” This ‘labyrinthine respiration’ is a metaphor for anal sex. The lungfish dilates, and when it reaches the palm leaves, the ‘intestinal serpent’ breathes (i.e. it is opened by penetration). Respiration and digestion are united in a sexual act. Palm leaves were already a symbol of “victory, ascension, regeneration, and

¹⁰⁷ Trans. 259. “el orificio interior del tubo intestinal (Vitier 261).”

immortality” in ancient Greek, Chinese, and Japanese cultures before the modern Christian symbol with the same meaning.¹⁰⁸ The image of the lungfish and the ‘intestinal snake’ that ‘breathes’ when the lungfish reaches the leaves of a palm tree suggests that homosexual union allows breath, life, regeneration, and even immortality. Fronesis goes on to another example, similar to the first. He describes the Indian climbing fish that locks its mouth with others of its species as if kissing. Naturalists say that this behavior is to remove algae from its mouth. Fronesis says: “It’s ingenious, the act of rubbing is inseparable from the pleasing sensation. But what has some value for us is the fact that the fish is already on land, on his way to the palm tree.” The Indian climbing fish unite their mouths, parts of their anatomy usually used only for digestion, and seem to find pleasure on the way to the palm tree, the symbol of their regeneration. After the fish comes the salamander, which needs only its skin and intestines to breathe. Evolution continues:

As we ascend the scale of the vertebrates, the method of breathing becomes more standardized, but the reminiscence of those primordial labyrinths cannot be lost, those infinite varieties among the species wandering between water and earth, between earth and infinity.¹⁰⁹

In his introduction to his biological discourse, Fronesis stated: “sexual matters have to come after respiration and digestion.”¹¹⁰ However, there are sexual undertones in these more ‘basic’ functions of breathing and eating. These animals had to first breathe and eat before they could reproduce. Before heterosexual reproduction, while these animals were still developing more elemental functions of existence, there was homosexual union. These animals represent a more rudimentary sexuality: erotic

¹⁰⁸ Chevalier 734.

¹⁰⁹ Trans. 261. “A medida que ascendemos en la escala de los vertebrados la respiración se va haciendo más uniforme, pero tiene que quedar la reminiscencia de aquellos laberintos, de aquellas infinitas diversidades, originadas por esas especies errantes entre el agua y la tierra, entre la tierra y la infinitud (Vitier 262).”

¹¹⁰ Translation mine. “lo sexual hay que verlo después de la respiración y la digestión” (Vitier 261).”

breathing (the lungfish and the serpent) and erotic digestion (the climbing fish kissing). These fish did not differentiate gender; their erotic acts were part of functions common to both males and females (respiration and digestion), and are therefore representative of homosexual sex. This makes homosexual sex biologically explainable and explains the ‘reminiscence’ that homosexuals feel in their sexuality that feels as natural as breathing and digesting.

Fronesis is cut short when he sees Lucía, a girl he is dating, who is impatient to drag him away from his friends. The narrator’s description of her is poetic and beautiful but also casts her as evil. Her hand around Fronesis’s is “a small yellow falcon...never letting go of the trapped dove.”¹¹¹ She is a serpent, a siren eel, and Fronesis jokingly refers to her as Circe. The couple walks away and Foción begs Cemí to share his thoughts on homosexuality and promises to tell Fronesis what he says.

(g) José Cemí Speaks Resurrection

Cemí begins with Aristotle’s concept ‘of being’ which he says is much like Platonic remembrance. Plato’s idea is that we know everything (who we are, the past and future) before we are born, but that upon birth, we forget everything. Remembrance is the process of learning, that is, of recuperating the knowledge that we lose at our birth.¹¹² Cemí says that Aristotle’s theory is: “ ‘the substance of being consists in being what it was,’ which means presence in permanence...”¹¹³ According to Aristotle’s theory, our being is what it was; our bodies remember the androgynous times and these memories lead to sexual deviancy.

¹¹¹ Trans. 262. “un pequeño halcón amarillo que se desprendía desde las alturas sin soltar el palomo atrapado (Vitier 263).”

¹¹² In Plato’s *Phaedo*. See Works Cited.

¹¹³ Trans. 263. “ ‘la sustancia de un ser consiste en ser lo que era,’ lo cual quiere decir la presencia en la permanencia...” (Vitier 264)

After his obscure reference to the Aristotelian metaphysics, Cemí begins an analysis of the Christian conception of being. A note in Vitier's edition of *Paradiso* claims that Lezama used the Greek idea of being as a "dialectical role to be confronted...with the Augustinian conception of Christian love as a force capable of breaking the permanence or identity of the being for the sake of a new birth, of a new creature."¹¹⁴ Cemí now challenges the idea of reminiscence to the androgynous times that the boys have all been speaking of throughout the dialogue by questioning: did the birth of Christ create a new being, a new species of man without an androgynous past? Cemí says that St. Augustine believed "that love is a seed that can also be sown in death...[and] inside the same perfected species another new species will arise."¹¹⁵ Although Cemí never directly mentions him, I believe that the love sown in death speaks of Jesus Christ. Cemí presents St. Augustine as an extreme example of the belief that in dying, Christ gave birth (metaphorically) to a new man, a new species. Love wipes out 'what we have been.' Cemí defines 'what we have been' as: "the substance that remembers, the myths before the dualism of the sexes."¹¹⁶ After Christ's death, there should be no memory of the androgynous myths, since the human race has a new beginning, a new root of existence.

Cemí blames the 'sin of the fall,' the sin in the Garden of Eden, for the creation of desire. Because of this desire, man began to reproduce sexually (with women). Cemí says that after the first sin of copulation, the devil set the trap of homosexual union: "he [the

¹¹⁴ Translation mine. "un papel dialéctico al ser confrontada...con la concepción agustiniana del amor cristiano como una fuerza capaz de quebrar la permanencia o identidad del ser en aras de un nuevo nacimiento, de una nueva criatura." (Vitier 498, note 47)

¹¹⁵ Trans. 264. "que el amor es un germen que se siembra también en la muerte...[y] que dentro de la misma especie perfeccionada surja otra nueva especie" (Vitier 264).

¹¹⁶ Trans. 264. "la sustancia que recuerda, los mitos previos al dualismo de los sexos" (Vitier 264)

devil] created another fall within the fall.”¹¹⁷ The second sin occurs when “man returns to man led by false innocence: man, the shadow that the devil gives man as a bodily companion, by the breathing intestinal labyrinth...”¹¹⁸ Homosexual sex is just the devil’s trick to make a man feel connected to his androgynous past, which is invalid after the death of Christ. St. Augustine’s conclusion is that both heterosexuality and homosexuality are sinful.

‘Of all sins, the worst is the one against nature,’ was a philosophy held by St. Augustine and quoted and questioned by St. Thomas of Aquinas, who Cemí discusses next. Cemí says that St. Thomas emphasized the importance of the senses, that man could reach glory through his senses. St. Thomas said that ‘possession or fruition’ leads to ecstasy, “and the ecstasy he [St. Thomas] points to is the vision of glory.”¹¹⁹ Cemí seems to be suggesting here that Aquinas did not believe that sexual love was sinful. This vision is very different from the Augustinian conception of sexuality.

Cemí says that Aquinas believed that there were two sins against the Holy Spirit: “envy of fraternal grace and an intemperate fear of death.”¹²⁰ I believe that ‘death,’ in this context, refers to sexual activity. Georges Bataille, in his work *Death and Sensuality* in 1957, theorizes that sexual acts are akin to death and also to poetry.¹²¹ Even if Lezama was unaware of Bataille’s theory, the French term ‘le petit mort’ for the orgasm is very well known. I read ‘fraternal grace’ as homosexuality since Aquinas says that it will be envied, hated, and strongly fought. The two sins against the Holy Spirit, then, (‘envy of

¹¹⁷ Trans. 264. “creó [el diablo] dentro de la caída otra caída” (Vitier 265)

¹¹⁸ Trans. 264. “el hombre vuelve al hombre por falsa inocencia, por la sombra que el demonio le regala como compañía de su cuerpo, por laberinto intestinal respirante (Vitier 265).”

¹¹⁹ Trans. 265. “Y ése éxtasis que él señala, es el de la visión de la gloria” (Vitier 265).

¹²⁰ Trans. 265. “la gracia fraterna y el temor desordenado de la muerte” (Vitier 265)

¹²¹ From Bataille’s introduction to *Death and Sensuality*: “Poetry leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism — to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity. Poetry is eternity; the sun matched with the sea.”

fraternal grace and an intemperate fear of death’) are envy of homosexuality and fear of sexual activity. Cemí explains that in specifying ‘intemperate fear of death,’ St. Thomas wanted to imply that there also exists an “intemperate love of death” and a “well-tempered fear of death,” both of which are “tolerable.”¹²² Cemí says that Aquinas was fascinated by the intemperate love of death (that is, the intemperate love of sex), which often came with those that desired fraternal grace (homosexuality) and “an appetite for fruition that excludes participation in the mystery of the Supreme Form.”¹²³ Men with this ‘appetite’ for homosexual sex are at first denied access to Christian love, but by passing through this ‘darkness’ they later can see the ‘light.’ These men “go through darkness to be able to participate in form, in light...”¹²⁴ This indicates that homosexuality, as a deviation, does not deny entrance into the light, but actually facilitates it. Cemí says that those that are always in the light cannot see the “creative placenta of the night.”¹²⁵ Being homosexual gives the individual a creative advantage.

Cemí recounts the part of the *Odyssey* where Circe brings Odysseus down to Hades to see his mother. His mother does not want him to gaze into the darkness of the black pool of blood where he can see her and tells him to go back to the light as soon as possible. In recounting this story of maternal love, Cemí remembers his mother’s words: “Live in danger of obtaining the most difficult.”¹²⁶ Perhaps Cemí’s mother meant that he should risk anything for poetry—even if it meant descending into the ‘hell’ of homosexuality to later be resurrected as a poet.

¹²² Trans. 265. “amor desordenado de la muerte”, “temor ordenado de la muerte”, “tolerables” (Vitier 265)

¹²³ Trans. mine. The use of ‘temperance’ for ‘ordenado’ is Rabassa’s (265). “un apetito frutivo que excluye la participación en el misterio de la Suprema Forma... (Vitier 266)”

¹²⁴ Trans. Rabassa 265. “van por la oscuridad a participar en la forma, en la luz... (Vitier 266)”

¹²⁵ Trans. 265. “la placenta creadora de la noche (Vitier 266)”

¹²⁶ Trans 266. “ ‘Vive en el peligro de obtener lo más difícil (Vitier 266).”

Cemí continues to speak about motherhood. St. Augustine, at one point in his life turned to the religious teachings of Manichaeism despite his Catholic upbringing by his mother, St. Monica. The mother's incessant tears for the spiritual death of her son eventually bring about her son's religious conversion. Cemí concludes the story of St. Monica and St. Augustine by saying that no region of evil exists and that nothing is "destined to Satan." Cemí says: "the devil may not inhabit the shadow of the fig tree in the desert for more than one night."¹²⁷ The allusion to the fig tree could be the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden; since Adam and Eve covered themselves in fig leaves, the tree might have been a fig tree as opposed to an apple tree. There are also some New Testament mentions of fig trees, both of which do not bear fruit. Jesus curses the fruitless tree saying: 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' (Matthew 21:19). The tree withers at once. One of Jesus' parables told in Luke is of a man who tells his gardener to cut down a fig tree that is not bearing fruit. The gardener answers that he should leave the tree for another year and fertilize it and that if it still does not bear fruit it will be cut down. (13:6-9) Cemí may be saying that the devil does not remain in infertile deviance—a metaphor that upholds homosexual practices.

Cemí comments that St. Augustine's hatred for the 'sin against nature' is odd because he was "overly vehement in his friendship in his youth,"¹²⁸ suggesting that he had homosexual leanings. St. Thomas, Cemí reiterates, did not find homosexuality as sinful as St. Augustine did, but Aquinas had the blessing of chastity without temptation. St. Thomas argues that no one is harmed in the 'sin against nature.' He says that it is not

¹²⁷ Trans. 267. "Luego el diablo no puede habitar más de una noche la sombra del higueral en el desierto (Vitier 268)."

¹²⁸ Trans. 267. "demasiado vehemente en la amistad, durante los años de su juventud (Vitier 268)."

a sin “classified under malice but under bestiality.”¹²⁹ Foción, whose hands are shaking due to his strenuous attention to Cemí’s words, interrupts. He says that beasts cannot sin, and therefore: “The homosexual may be a beast but not a sinner.”¹³⁰ Cemí answers him, saying that according to Aquinas it does not really matter since beasts, like sinners, will not be resurrected. Cemí claims that Aquinas said that he was not capable of looking into the mystery of the eunuchs in Paradise.¹³¹ Cemí feels that God touches and repairs all matter to restore it to perfection to enter the heavens. The eunuchs will be restored to corporeal integrity but will not fornicate with women since there is no fornication in heaven. Cemí’s last statement is that “perhaps the resurrection of bodies is the true name of what Fronesis called the hypertely of immortality...”¹³² He is cut off by the sound of gunshots and the two friends part. The Christian resurrection of bodies, that is, the afterlife where there is no sexual contact, is the true perfection of mankind. Cemí’s conclusion of the resurrection of the eunuchs suggests that those that are imperfect in some way can be restored to glory.

Conclusions

When I began this project, my goal in analyzing these two chapters of *Paradiso* was to deduce whether or not Lezama supported or rejected homosexuality. Most critics conclude that Lezama rejects homosexuality because of José Cemí’s abstinence and his discovery of the hesychastic rhythm at the end of the novel. I find this reading far too simplistic since it ignores the presentations of homosexuality in chapters eight and nine

¹²⁹ Trans. 268. “no se contiene bajo la malicia, sino bajo la bestialidad (Vitier 268).”

¹³⁰ Trans. 268. “Es una bestia el homosexual, pero no un picador (Vitier 268).”

¹³¹ Vitier found nothing that referenced this, see 499 note 52

¹³² Trans. 269. “Quizá la resurrección de los cuerpos esa el verdadero nombre de lo que Fronesis llamó la hipertelia de la inmortalidad...(Vitier 269)”

of the novel. I argue that Lezama did not seek to make conclusions about homosexuality, but rather to present questions and write about sexuality in new ways.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I analyzed what I consider to be poetic pornography in chapter VIII of *Paradiso*. The fact that this chapter takes place almost entirely outside of Cemí's view supports my argument that Lezama's presentation (and his acceptance or rejection) of homosexuality extends beyond the experiences of his protagonist. The graphic, pornographic images create a new poetry where any sort of sexuality is acceptable and even beautiful. In chapter eight, Lezama does not try to draw any conclusions, but rather displays the poetry inherent in 'deviant' sexuality.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I analyzed Lezama's intellectual presentation of sexuality in chapter nine of *Paradiso*. Although each of the three friends discuss the viability of homosexuality, none of them is very clear in their arguments about whether they accept or reject homosexuality. I argue that Lezama speaks through all three of the characters and that the debate between the friends serves more to bring up questions and confusion than to resolve the moral question that homosexuality presents. In the difficulty of this chapter lies its poetry. Fronesis exposes the era of androgynous reproduction and the impact of this innocence in later generations. The individuals with the memory of this imaginary era where men reproduce without women are prophets of its images—poets and homosexuals. Fronesis also exposes the debilitating guilt brought about by his homosexuality, something that Lezama was plagued by as a homosexual Catholic. Foción sees beauty in the mystery of homosexual desires since homosexuality does not have any natural explanation (it does not lead to reproduction). Cemí represents an almost mythical, perfected character that manages to resolve his sexual dilemma with a mystical

revelation at the end of the novel. Cemí emphasizes the love and salvation of God and the importance of resurrection in Christian terms.

In this chapter, Lezama immerses his reader in a series of images: gorgons, fish, serpents, darkness, light, children sprouting from phallus trees, Eve born of Adam in his sleep, eunuchs, Electra nursing her dragon child, the Venus Urania, the pineal gland, etc. Lezama's characters bring up theories like Aristotelian metaphysics and the evolution of sexuality biologically (from the lungfish, serpents) and sexuality from the split brought by sin. This dialogue posits ancient Greek and Christian viewpoints of human existence and sexuality. The Greek view is more open and accepting of homosexuality while the Christian view sees it as sinful. Even though Lezama was a Catholic, he had many other ideas about sexuality from other cultures. The images that the characters in this chapter use to express their ideas argue different solutions to the homosexual's dilemma.

Fronesis, Foción, and Cemí each struggle with division and yearn to find unity. The divisions of the celestial from the earthly and of man from woman trouble the three homosexual adolescents who feel a reminiscence of the past unity and a hope for a future understanding of their desires. Lezama shows the creative power of the desire to assimilate; he brings together images and ideas from centuries of human thought to search for an answer to questions about the origins and morality of homosexuality.

However, Lezama's readers are left frustrated by the baroque nature of his novel, and of this chapter in particular. So many opposite theories and images cancel each other out, to obscuring any possible conclusion about homosexuality. But this obscurity is precisely what Lezama sought to write because this juxtaposition of images enables his readers to jump into the poetic world of the unknown.

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